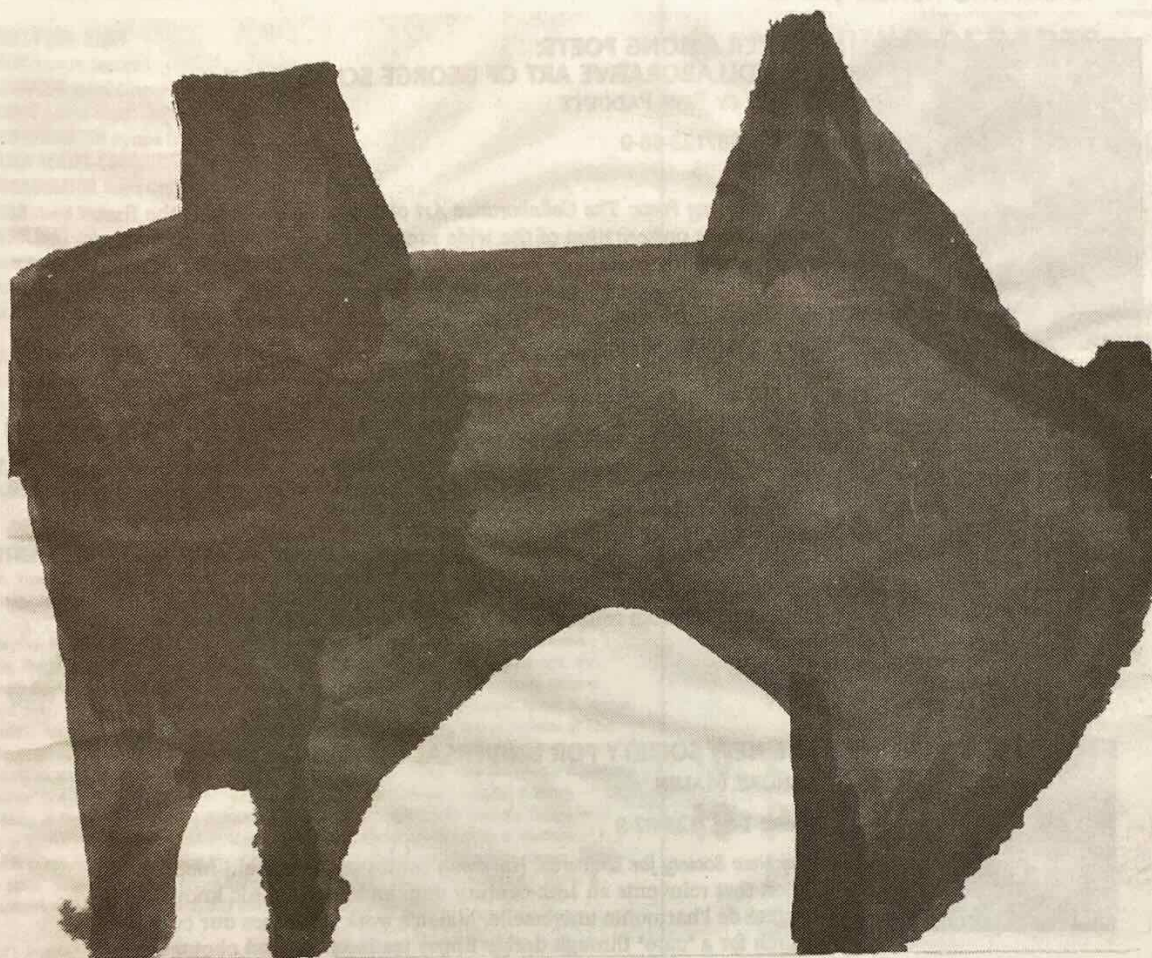


THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE NUMBER 198 FEBRUARY/MARCH 2004



EDWIN TORRES

I Am My Own Me

LISA ROBERTSON

Sounding Lorine Niedecker



AARON KUNIN

The Shame Tree

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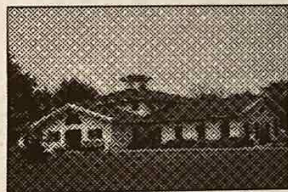
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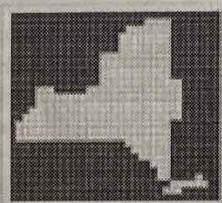
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

For the first time in many years, the National Endowment for the Arts will not be funding the Poetry Project for the 2004-05 season. While our funding from the NEA has declined over the years, it nevertheless represented a significant portion of the Project's annual income (approximately 10 to 12 percent). Our programming will NOT be diminished next season, but we will need to make up that income, and it will not be easy. We will work hard in the office to raise funds in various ways, but we must also appeal to *Poetry Project Newsletter* readers: if you are not already a member of the Project, or a subscriber to the *Newsletter*, please consider becoming a member or taking out a subscription. The monies we take in through membership and admissions are crucial to maintaining our programs, and every \$25 subscription and \$50 membership helps a great deal. To those of you who have supported the Poetry Project over the years, you have our grateful thanks.

Yours,

Anselm Berrigan

PEDRO PIETRI FUND

News has spread quickly through the New York poetry communities that the Reverend Pedro Pietri, the great Nuyoric poet and author of *Puerto Rican Obituary*, has inoperable stomach cancer. A fundraising campaign has started to help Pedro be treated at a renowned cancer clinic abroad. The cost of treatment at minimum is about \$30,000, and as we go to press in early January, between five and 10 thousand has been raised. Checks can be made out to the Nuyoric Poets Café, Inc., and sent to Pedro Pietri Health Benefit Fund c/o Nuyoric Poets Café; P.O. Box 20794; New York, New York 10009. Checks can also be dropped off at the Poetry Project office, to be delivered to the Nuyoric Poets Café.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editors:

I have to take issue with Bill Luoma's use of the word "genocide" in his description of the International Writer's Colony in Serbia. He and Juliana Spahr were the two Americans invited, during which Serb poets and journalists repeatedly pressed them for their opinion of the NATO bombings of their country. Interestingly, Luoma never discloses how they answered, and his referring to himself and

Spahr as "the Americans," has the effect of making him seem evasive rather than objective, making me curious as to what they actually replied to such direct questions as "Have you seen the broken bridges?"

But no matter. The problem for me comes later in the piece, when Luoma says, "Why did the Americans accept an invitation to this place, which Ron Silliman refused to visit in 1992 because its government was committing genocide? One response would be that [sic] because the American government is currently supporting genocide in Palestine..." It is not clear whether Luoma thinks Silliman's position has validity, but nevertheless he makes the rather tortuous point that, even if the Serbian government *were* guilty, he would be excused from appearing to support genocide retrospectively because of our own country's present-day guilt in such matters. The need for this self-justification would seem slight, but provides an opportunity for gratuitous Israel bashing through suggesting an ill-defined parallel with Serbian genocide that he himself has never admitted to be a fact. Also, is this Israeli genocide even Luoma's opinion, or is he merely passing on the received wisdom espoused by some "intellectual" circles?

In any event, there is definitely an analogy between the NATO/Milosevic scenario and the Israeli/Palestinian quagmire, but not the one Luoma is implying. NATO's attempts at stopping Milosevic's ultra-nationalistic adventure in Kosovo, through the limited objective of bombing selected targets, was definitely not genocide—the deliberate and systematic extermination of a definable group of people—though many aggrieved Serbs would no doubt disagree. In fact, NATO even stopped the bombing before the objective was achieved.

However, what the Serbs were trying to do to the Kosovans and, more spectacularly, a few years before to the Bosnians, exemplified the concept of genocide quite well. The world watched while the Serbs tried their utmost to kill as many Bosnian men, women and children in Sarajevo as they possibly could. Had they had NATO's resources, they would have finished off every last one.

Israel is analogous to NATO here, not Milosevic's regime. Their response to the provocation of angry mobs and terrorism has certainly been *limited*—shooting rubber bullets from rifles (when metal bullets from machine guns would be so much more genocidally effective), attempting to pinpoint one suspected terrorist in a populated area (instead of bombing entire towns into obliv-

ion)—results in relatively few Palestinian deaths, compared to the wholesale casualties Israeli forces *could* be causing, and simply is not *genocide*—so it's ludicrous to say that that's what the American government is "supporting." Compare Israeli reprisals, for example, to what the *Wehrmacht* did to the populations of villages in Yugoslavian Serbia in World War II, if a German soldier happened to be picked off by partisans.

On the other hand, one should keep in mind that what the Israelis are reacting to at this stage is an ongoing series of Palestinian *mini-genocides*, carried out in the name of God on *random* civilians, and which makes going to school or to a mall or to a restaurant a statistical crapshoot. In fact, Israeli retaliations have been restrained, compared to the provocation. We have only had *one* genocidal suicide attack, and though admittedly it was far more *dramatic* and involved a larger number of victims than the usual Israeli targets, it has resulted in our occupation of two countries, and whether our troops are "carelessly" employed (Luoma's word) or not, is incidental here.

The genocidal aspect of the Palestinian terror campaign against Israeli citizens is not generally acknowledged as such partly because of anti-Israeli propaganda but also because of its *scale*. But the intent is there. If those "religious" handlers—who send out young Palestinians to blow themselves up and thus achieve paradise while taking a mere dozen or so Israelis with them—found a way to up the ante, to commit a genocide worthy of the name, by eliminating, say, the entire population of Tel Aviv or Haifa, they would do so quicker than you could spell Holocaust, and they would feel damn proud of themselves, too.

Sincerely,

Tony Towle

Bill Luoma responds: Thanks for your response, Tony. The only real evidence I see for taking sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based on a crude economic observation. The Palestinians appear to fight with rocks, a few guns, and handmade explosives, the Israelis with a potent national military and a crack intelligence service largely a result of U.S. tax dollars. How the former could commit genocide, or "mini-genocides" as you say, against the latter is beyond me. I really don't want to demonize a people (Israelis or Americans) for the actions of "their" state apparatuses. Yet, your response suggests that you are willing to do as much to the Serbs.

P.S. If you want to read a full account of my trip and see pictures of the south Slavic poets, please visit <http://jeferson.village.virginia.edu/~luoma/srbski.html>.

To the Editor:

In her essay on Xul Solar (Dec/Jan issue), Cecilia Vicuña says that the language Xul invented, *portuñol*, is a fusion of Portuguese and Spanish. But since Xul himself was a *porteño*, a native of the port city of Buenos Aires, wouldn't it be logical to assume that *portuñol* is a mixture of *porteño* slang and Spanish? The reason I'm asking is because all young people in Buenos Aires nowadays speak an invented language called *falurdo*, which is based on exactly the kind of orthographic/semantic inversions Xul used in forming his name. Might Xul be a missing link in the early history of *falurdo* as a kind of nationalist counter-discourse?

Best,

Cole Heinowitz

Cecilia Vicuña responds: Thanks for inquiring! First, a few clarifications are in order. Please read carefully. Xul did not "invent" portuñol, he invented two other languages: pan criollo and pan lengua, which may be regarded as brotherly anticipations of portuñol, widely spoken today in everyday life by all frontier people, who continue to travel and conduct business between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking places in the Southern Cone (the southern tip of South America). As an intermediate tongue, it may have been in formation since the very early days of conquest, but has become widespread with the

increasing migrations and communications of the last century. (It is becoming a language for poetry too—see the work of Wilson Bueno.)

As for falurdo, you probably mean lunfardo, or lunfa as we call it for short, and that is an entirely different matter. Lunfardo is a way of speaking Spanish, a slang that evolved in Buenos Aires at the end of the 19th century. It grew out of the misunderstandings, mispronunciations, and conflicts between the large numbers of mostly European immigrants arriving at the time. (The word lunfardo is probably a corruption of lombardo, which in turn means "robber.") Lunfardo is so widely spoken in the city (and not just by young people) that if you don't grasp it, you cannot make sense of regular life, or Argentinian literature, for that matter. Lunfa and its wild semantic inventions percolate into every expression, and has been at the core of literary creation in Argentina since the 1920s. You are right in that it is a counter-discourse, created as a playful/rebellious way to differentiate the speech of the people from the stiff/hypocritical speech of the ruling classes. Lunfa is so crucial to the culture that there is a huge bibliography on it. I know of at least three lunfardo dictionaries, (the primary one by José Gobello) and, of course, there is the Academia Porteña del Lunfardo!

All best,

Cecilia Vicuña

Dear Friends,

I am one of the 400 people currently being

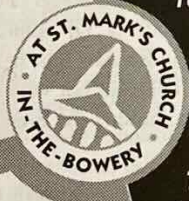
sued by the Recording Industry of America for downloading music from the Internet. However complex this legal and ethical issue is, I am caught in the crossfire and in the hole for around \$10,000. I am a poet and artist and part-time lecturer on photography, with not much money. If you'd like to donate to my legal defense please go to <http://www.davistim.com/donations/donations.html> and follow the Paypal links.

Tim Davis

JUNIPER SUMMER WRITING INSTITUTE

The University of Massachusetts MFA Program invites people to six days of writing workshops, readings, and manuscript consultation, from June 13-18. The faculty and writers in residence include Peter Gizzi, Grace Paley, James Tate, Dara Wier, and Matthew Zapruder, along with presenters from the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. Each day offers a forum on aspects of craft and publishing and each evening features readings of new work by faculty and writers-in-residence. Applications are accepted from January 1-April 30, 2004. Scholarships are also available. For more information, to request a brochure or to apply, visit www.umass.edu/juniperinstitute or email juniperinstitute@hfa.umass.edu.

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WRITING WORKSHOPS

ON THE CITY - BRENDA COULTAS

TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 17TH

Coultas writes, "For this workshop our topic is the city. The class will survey poems and prose written on, in, or about cities and cityscapes, and develop investigative methods and other media as models. Students need to bring a copy of William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* to class." Brenda Coultas' books include *A Handmade Museum*, *The Bowery Project*, *Early Films*, and *A Summer Newsreel*. Her work has also appeared in *Conjunctions*, *Fence*, and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

TO POETRY: A DEDICATION WORKSHOP - BRENDAN LORBER

FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 20TH

Lorber writes, "When you dedicate a poem you convert it to a gift, conscript the poem into the service of something beyond yourself. This workshop will explore techniques and implications of writing for, to, about, after, with, even as other people; examine and experiment with such connective forms as the ode, love poem, eulogy, elegy, epithalamion, encomium, canso, the dozens, poetry portrait, collaboration & non-poetry forms such as advertising, threatening letters, fan mail, & subpoenas. This is NOT a workshop in the poetry of sentimentality. To shove us in more interesting directions, we'll draw from traditions including 7th century Arab and Persian poetries, European courtly love, Beat, NY School, Language and some contemporary poets you might run into on the subway." Brendan Lorber is the editor of *LUNGFULL!* magazine and author of *The Address Book* and *DASH*.

POETRY FOR THE PAGE, STAGE, & COMPUTER SCREEN - TOM SAVAGE

SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 21ST

Savage writes, "This workshop will present readings, inspirations, and influences from the past fifty years of American poetry in the Beat, New York School, Language, Spoken Word, and Digital "traditions" as they have made themselves manifest. Poets whose work seems important in this regard include Ginsberg, Berrigan, O'Hara, Ashbery, Levertov, Duncan, Mac Low, Koch, Surrealist Plays, Olson, Creeley, Kushner, Torres, Elmslie, Nottley, Mayer, Cage, Szyborska, Neruda and others." Tom Savage is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Brain Surgery Poems*, *Political Conditions/Physical States*, and *From Heart to Balkh and Back Again*.

READING REPORTS

BENEFIT FOR TODD COLBY

On November 19, Todd Colby, Elizabeth Zechel, and Melissa Piechucki's house in Greenpoint burnt down, along with several others on the same block, leaving them homeless with most of their books, papers, and other possessions destroyed. In what was just as much a display of community support as an effort to raise money, on Sunday, December 14, the Bowery Poetry Club hosted a benefit of music and readings of Todd's poems. For Rich and I, seeing people like Jordan Trachtenberg, Anne Elliot, Rebecca Moore, John S. Hall, Alice B. Talkless, Hal Sirowitz, Gordon Gano, and Michael Portnoy (i.e., "the Soy-Bomb Guy"), along with the more immediately familiar (to us, anyhow) faces of Brendan Lorber, David Cameron, Brenda Coultas, Edwin Torres, and Liz Castagna, was a trip back to the early '90s, when Rich and I lived in a huge ramshackle loft in Carroll Gardens (\$900 a month—can you believe it?) with several other friends of Todd's, mostly hailing from his home state of Iowa. Almost every day, there would be a message on the answering machine from Todd about how he was being eaten by sharks or something like that. Anyhow, during that time, a sort of group project came about titled *Monster Trucks*, a silkscreened art-and-poetry publication that included Todd's poem "Love Batch." So, in order to demonstrate that I "knew Todd when," as Rich so charmingly put it, I carefully wrapped *Monster Trucks* in a plastic baggie to protect it against the torrential rain-sleet-snow outside to bring it to the benefit. Once there, the body heat generated by the big, friendly crowd, who had no hesitation in fully heckling each performer, dried us off pretty quickly. Everyone bought a bunch of raffle tickets for various donated items and Bob Holman led an mondo-extendo auction for a baggie containing a lock of Todd's hair from November 19, 1994, nine years to the day before the fire. It eventually went for \$200. It was interesting to watch each performer decide how to deliver each poem—some tried to duplicate Todd's high-volume deliveries; others gave more sombre renditions (although not too many—nobody wanted to be maudlin). I decided to read "Love Batch" straight until the very last word, "creepy." A word like that, you don't just leave to its own devices. I then gave *Monster Trucks* to Todd, as it was one of the books he had lost to the fire. The only part of the evening that wasn't funny was Todd's thank-you speech at the end, where he described how incredibly moved he was by the overwhelming show of support from the poetry community. Just to prove the power of the love that night, a check from Regie Cabico to Todd fell out of Bob's pocket and was actually *given back* to him.

Send a card, a book, a donation, or a lock of your hair to:
Todd Colby and Elizabeth Zechel
129 Baltic Street, Apt. 6-B
Brooklyn, NY 11201

—Marcella Durand

FIRST NIGHT AT THE POETRY PROJECT TALK SERIES

On October 27, I went to Major Jackson's talk on Sun Ra at The Poetry Project, the first event in a new talk series that the Poetry Project has inaugurated this year. It was intriguing, with lots of insight into Jackson's own work and its connection to the famed "alien" who just happened to be a priceless jazz composer and performance person. The audience was smallish, but super-knowledgeable about Ra and other Black avant-gardists. Christopher Stackhouse and Ammiel Alcalay commented on Jackson's discussion of Sun Ra's musical and verbal language—his cosmic caprice, as well as the desire to both use and leave race behind. They mentioned other African American avant-garde musical and visual artists who used "space" as their metaphor. There was also a brief back-

and-forth on Sun Ra's movie that had been made for about \$25 back in the late '60s/early '70s in Oakland, CA. Jackson noted that several key musicians had worked exclusively with Sun Ra for many years, and that the music kept them away from drugs, but also that Ra did not want to talk about drugs and music since that is often a cliché about the jazz life. Wherein I said that those men (all men mind you) were seekers of beauty, and that Ra's music and lifestyle allowed them to carry out that search in the music. Jackson also talked about Ra's position in the Philadelphia art scene, especially his connection to the African American arts and music scene. I still think that it's odd that no one talks about the homoerotic content of Sun Ra's performance style, but that was not the point of Jackson's talk, so it will have to be done by someone else.

—Patricia Spears Jones

MOSCOW: CITY OF POETS

As we approach the city, we notice banners flying over Tverskaya, near Mayakovsky's statue. Moscow: City of Poets, they proclaim. This week, October 21 to the 25, Moscow will host an international poetry festival, the Poets Biennale.

The festival's opening is followed by a fancy reception, where we down shots of "Inspirational"—a vodka specially distilled for the festival, bearing the same origami-Pegasus logo that appears on the banners. Throughout the festival, receptions are similarly lavish and the venues are classier than the places we poets usually frequent back home. Russia, it turns out, is fighting to reestablish poetry as an elite and valuable pursuit—occasionally overshooting its mark, as we will find out.

Genya Turovskaya, Eugene Ostashevsky, and myself from New York City, and Edik Shenderovich from San Francisco, are here to do a reading under the heading "Bilingual Poets" at Project-OGI, a 24-hour literary and music venue. This Moscow "club" was opened in 1998 by the publishing venture O.G.I., and has since grown into a small chain. Our reading draws a crowd of about 50 people—not bad, considering the language barrier. I read first, switching from English to translations (by New York poets Igor Satanovsky and Sergei Levchin). Eugene performs his new verse play, "The Bride of DJ Spinoza," belting the text in English and stage directions in Russian. The next reader is Genya, who, like Eugene and myself, is bilingual but writes exclusively in English. Edik, who writes in Russian, finishes the evening with his more traditional, black-humored verse.

The festival has invited two warring schools of poetry from Uzbekistan, as well as poets from Riga (writing in Russian and Latvian), and from many provincial Russian cities. The Petersburg contingent, including Arkadii Dragomoschenko, is noticeably absent, perhaps due to the age-old rivalry between the two poetry capitals. A number of Europeans and one Chinese poet are in attendance. From America, Ed Foster is here, celebrating the release of his Russian book, as is Andrei Gritsman, who runs the Russian-American series at Cornelia Street Café, also with a new book in tow. Several old-guard émigré poets, like Dmitri Bobyshev and Bakhyt Kinzheev, put in rare motherland appearances. Kinzheev, who lives in Canada, reads 45 minutes of longwinded meditations on death and isolation to a thirsty crowd, then announces that he'll return with another 40 minutes. Die-hard fans of his Brodsky-esque verse stay on, cheering, but we duck out.

On the last day, a roundtable discussion led by *The New Literary Review's* editor, Irina Prokhorova, focuses on the reception of current poetry in the New Russia. A sociologist's recent study shows that most young Russians have no experience with newer poetry, and that all think it dif-

ficult. In fact, the young generation of Moscow poets is traditionalist, even if they season modern-day content with slam-ish sentiments. The presentation of the popular web and print journal, *Vavilon*, in the ancient catacombs of PirOGI (the newest, hippest "club") is so crowded with this new generation of poets that you can barely stick an ear in. *Vavilon's* editor, Dmitri Kuzmin, is enthusiastic, but can't say where the new poetry is actually heading, wondering if it is headed nowhere.

At the roundtable, Petersburg poet and critic Alexander Skidan says "Poetry is addressed to the future ... to a future audience that does not exist in the present, a non-existent people, culture, and world." Unfortunately, Skidan's entreaty sails over the heads of most gathered here to celebrate an all-too-present poetry still bridled to the past, when the word "poet" was spoken with unquestioning reverence.

—Matvei Yankelevich with Anna Moschovakis

AN EYEFUL AT JUSKA

The first literary event of the season at Priska C. Juska in Williamsburg included writers Justin Edward Sirois, Corina Copp, and Anselm Berrigan, and was coordinated by Ryan Schneider, who also read his work. Being discontented in/about this art, at this time and place, I usually want to take the decorous approach of saving complaint for the often expositional course of verse, "experimental" writing in prose fiction, non-fiction, combinations therein. In order to undermine this tendency toward some conditional distance, let me be candid.

Arriving late, I was presented with an eyeful—a drunk tossed out to the street on his ass. A toasted fuck, a rabble-rouser, an instigator perhaps, a sloppy self-made provocateur of sorts, he had raised a bit of hell. In the middle of Sirois's reading, he stood up, headed over to the trash barrel of ice, fashionably filled with PBR, and attempted, double-fisting no less, to return to his seat. Well, his navigation being somewhat "bent," he missed his seat and fell (on his ass). Hence, his being asked to vacate. Enters the reviewer. That moment provided more unexpected entertainment. "You're gonna put me out and let that nigger in!?" Such a surprising turn of phrase warranted heightened curiosity. A case of originality so striking, it supplanted, temporarily, my interest in the poets I had come to hear, Copp and Berrigan. That night they deserved better company.

Berrigan's work is relatively well known. On the other hand, Copp is just getting out there. A radical formalist, as I've read and heard, steeped in the 20th-century modernist tradition, she invigorates a longish, metrical line with a contemporary cynicism and wit that makes you smile. Schneider, a visual artist turning to poetry, could learn something from her. Copp challenges what being female means in the (her) world, without overstating her case; one has to listen particularly close to hear the range of her issue. In her poems, she is a poet first, and subsequently a woman. Schneider is the opposite—all boy, amazed by the depth of a girl's asshole he's just learned to prod, so he told us that night over and over again. Scatology is cool, but it is merely vengeer. He too employs

lengthier line units, the reward for which occasions a clever something. One wanted to relish his slummin' it, hipster charm but what does the current (and seemingly perennial) grungy-chic mode (amidst many other forged modes) happening in the arty 'hood have to do with lasting craft? Nothing, really, which might well be the point. Image is great fun, but thoughtfulness, being a better apparatus, prods a little deeper.

—Christopher Stackhouse

CARL RAKOSI 100TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

A packed auditorium inside the main branch of San Francisco's Public Library had the exquisite pleasure of a nearly four-hour, high-quality reading in celebration of Carl Rakosi's 100th birthday on November 8. The ineffably high-spirited Rakosi began his own set of poems by gleefully remarking, "It's a dubious achievement ... poets are supposed to die young," before laying down 10 minutes worth of work devoted to family, humor, and mindful observation.

It's hard to describe how inspiring it is to see a person who has lived for a century get up in front of hundreds of people and not only read, but read new work and really deliver the goods. The event, put together by The Poetry Center and hosted by Steve Dickson, began with remarks by then-SF-mayoral candidate Matt Gonzales and moved fluidly through a roster of Rakosi's friends and colleagues; Bill Berkson, Daisy Zamora, Anselm Hollo, Thom Gunn, Lyn Hejinian, Michael Palmer, George Evans, and about a dozen others, read—at Rakosi's request—their work rather than his.

I once heard Rakosi, giving a talk at the tender age of 95, tell a Naropa student who had asked him if he thought young people nowadays were too cynical that, "cynicism is useful—it keeps you from being tricked." Rakosi has maintained this remarkable ability to be both blunt and charming, allowing someone like me to believe that wit, in its most caring form, is an extension of truth rather than mere ego. I left this celebration and ran out into a thunderstorm, energized to write a million poems.

—Anselm Berrigan

THE 30TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON READING

While it feels painfully soon to attempt anything remotely resembling a balanced appraisal, it can safely be stated that this year's Marathon Reading not only went smoothly, but was, at times, kinda fun. Proceedings were kicked off by Elinor Nauen, who read a poem comprised of lines taken from other poems read throughout the day. While your jaded correspondent wasn't able to hear all 130 readers, she would have to include the following in her list of personal highlights: Charles Bernstein, Erica Hunt, Aaron Kunin, Edwin Torres, Rodrigo Toscano, Jacqueline Waters, and Mac Wellman. As always, the musicians and dancers lent flavor to the event, among them Yoshiko Chuma, Philip Glass, Rebecca Moore, and Marc Ribot. Attendance was, happily, up, and much-needed funds were raised for the Project's '04-'05 season. A heartfelt thank you, as always, to the many volunteers and vendors who made this year's Marathon possible, with a special mention for the tireless Douglas Rothschild. And thanks too, this year, to those who donated books for the event: Christopher Arigo, Black Square Editions, *Chain*, William I. Elliot, Erato Press, Maggie Estep, Greg Fuchs & Open 24 Hours Press, Granary Books, Hanging Loose Press, Susan Mills, Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, *Publishers Weekly*, Nathaniel Siegel, Steven Spicehandler, Ugly Duckling Presse, United Artists Books, and Anne Waldman. Here's (ulp) to 2005!

—Go-Go Nesbitt

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NELSON AND SMITH AT BAR REIS

The following derives from casual e-mail "reports" by Allison Cobb and David Perry written in response to a listserv request from the ever-inquisitive Jordan Davis about Maggie Nelson and Rod Smith's reading on November 11 at Bar Reis.

AC: About nine people were there. We formed an intimate little group in the upstairs loft area at Bar Reis. I just got off the phone with Rod and heard that David and Rod closed the bar.

DP: Because of the unexpected closing of the usual basement reading space, we ended up sitting in a circle in low light. Pleasantly goofy and campfire cozy. Readers read sans microphone (after someone broke it), doing admirable jobs of overcoming outbursts from the drunk guy with a heavy Flemish accent hitting on women at the bar below ("Ear Inn conditions," *pace* Rod).

AC: Actually, the drunk provided some great background lines to go with the poems. "I don't want to express our love this way!" was one favorite.

DP: Maggie read new work, recent enough to include the lunar eclipse. She read some from "Canal Diary," a serial written over the summer on the banks of the Gowanus, which flows by her building. Loose lyrical riffing on the state of being there, observing the industrial detritus flowing by in Brooklyn's mucky supergutter, with some astute reflections of what it all—or at least some of it—might mean ("It has to do," Maggie says, "with desire, heartbreak, garbage, and water."). Characters: a Man in Black (not Johnny Cash) and others who frequent the canal banks or happened to have passed by. Crazy canal waterfowl. Beautiful in many places.

AC: Maggie also read what she called her "New Yorker poem"—a

"bad" poem sent to a conservative journal to see if they would take it. They did. She didn't divulge the magazine's name. It was a poem about her father, so if you see that one in print, you'll know.

DP: Rod read a bit of "Homage to Homage to Creeley," a number of great Spider poems that didn't make it into *New Mannerist Tricycle*, and some "Snips" before his notebook self-destructed. Poems: Funny/dark/bemused/light/dark/sharp/bemusing/smartsmartsmarts.... Much along the lines of: "I'm living in the society of the Spectacle and I can't even get decent reception...."

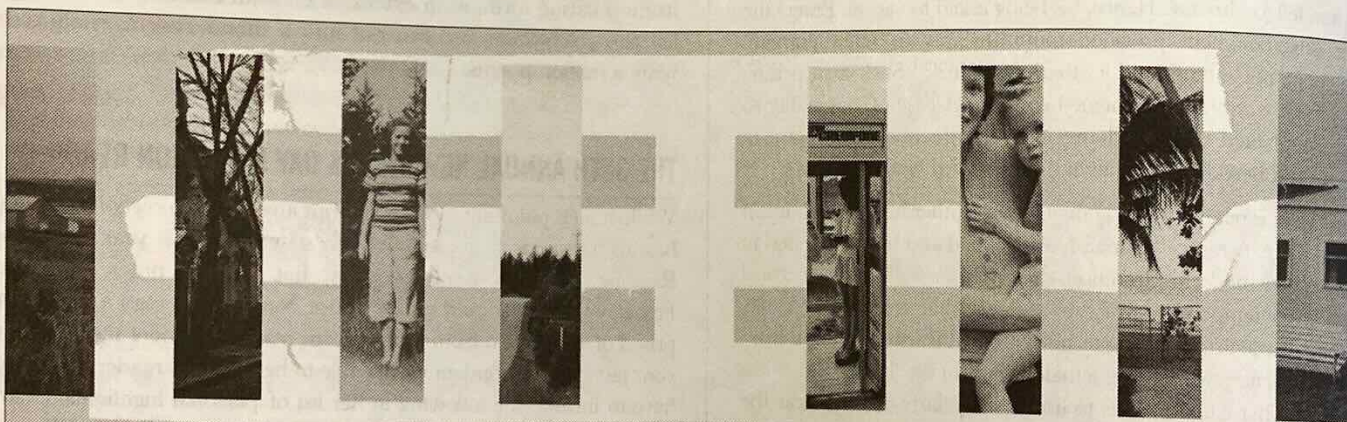
CHORUS: Smith's "Snips" reference Steve Lacy's solo alto sax piece of the same name. Lacy rhythmically snipped scissors in performing the piece at a 1976 downtown loft show. Rod's "Snips" touch on Lacy's in any number of ways, as when he echoed Lacy's '76 declaration-of-independence loft-show hooky shout of "Don't go to school! Don't go to school!"

AC: Rod opened with a great story about Creeley reading a poem before a class of undergraduates, trying to get the rhythm right, and distractedly removing his glass eye and dropping it in a glass of water. The "Snips" were funny, with some pure jokes and some surprisingly dense moments.

DP: Taut phrasing, quick syntactic and semantic shifts occasionally flashing into stunning, brief, lyrical passages. And then there were drinks, and then Rod and I had a lovely Wednesday noon breakfast of huevos rancheros at Tacos Nuevo Mexico on 5th Avenue. Didn't make it to school.

CHORUS: Africa Wayne's BBR Reading Series takes place at Bar Reis, 375 5th Avenue, the second Tuesday of every month.

—Allison Cobb and David Perry



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AARON KUNIN

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exposed wrist (try to
hide that) you like it
between the sleeve (and

the glove) only the
glove did not have its
own sleeve (you'll see it

terminate almost
successfully) in
flesh (process laid bare

the shirt of purple
wool and bodysuit)
exposing only

the feet and the tips
of the fingers the
neck and the head and

with zippers (closures)
you can't deny that
(with each viewing the

face dies one last time)
you like it between
grief (act absent) source

GRIEF ACT ABSENT SOURCE

after three hours (one
can only smile when
one looks at this) this

morning in front of
the mirror (pulling
off the glove finger

by finger) you're two
hours late and the sweep
of (violent rain

had denuded the
trees) your corduroy
placed between (grief act

absent source) the thick
cords and the lining
(and the creases are

my unspeakable
lips wrapping this
body in a sheet

of kisses) from which
you're almost success-
fully divided

Aaron Kunin's chapbook, *The Sore Throat*, is forthcoming from Germ Folios.

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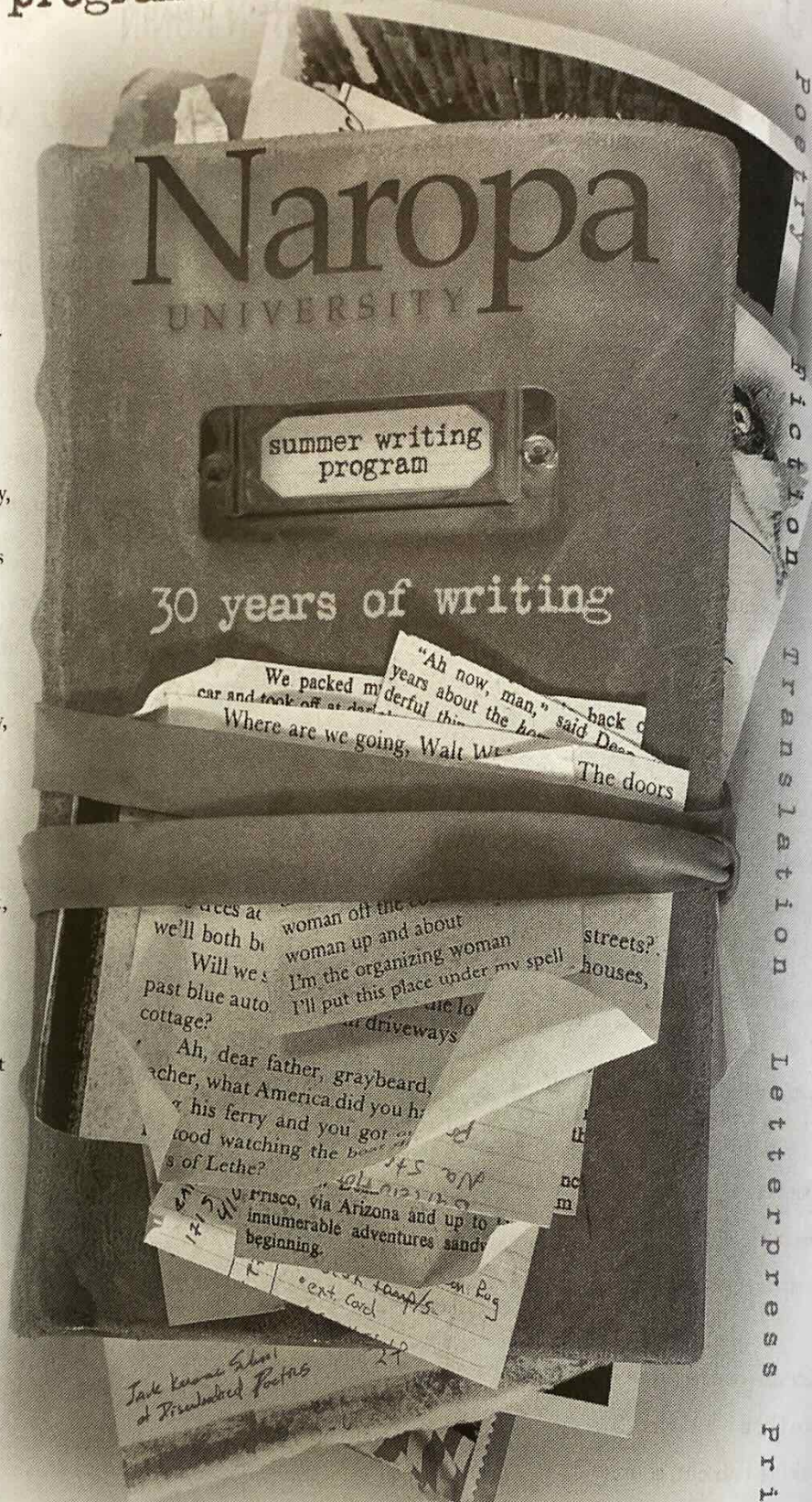


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“IN PHONOGRAPHIC DEEP SONG”: SOUNDING NIEDECKER

by Lisa Robertson

I will begin by proposing a decorative chronology, a frieze of quotation.

“If perceptive organs vary, objects of perception seem to vary”
—Blake, *Jerusalem*

“The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present”
—Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 1844

“In 1874, Alexander Graham Bell and Clarence Blake constructed a most curious machine. A direct ancestor of the telephone and phonograph, it consisted of an excised human ear attached by thumbscrews to a wooden chassis. The ear /phonograph produced tracings of sound on a sheet of smoked glass when sound entered the mouthpiece. One at a time, users would speak into the mouthpiece. The mouthpiece would channel the vibrations of the voices through the ear, and the ear would vibrate a small stylus. After speaking, users would immediately afterward see the tracings of their speech on the smoked glass. This machine ... used the human ear as a mechanism to *transduce* sound: it turned audible vibrations into ... a set of tracings.”¹

“In 1888 Heinrich Hertz, professor of experimental physics ... generated a string of sparks across the secondary winding of a transformer, radiated the resulting electromagnetic waves from an antennae, reflected them from a metal sheet suspended at the far end of his laboratory, and measured the distance between the crests with a simple receiver composed of a loop of wire, with a small gap across which sparks were visible. By doing so, Hertz became the first to measure the velocity of a radio wave, confirming in the process the predictions of James Clerk Maxwell’s theory of electromagnetic radiation.”²

“In the early part of 1894, Marconi was holidaying in the Italian Alps and chanced to read an obituary and tribute to the German scientist Hertz. As he read the description of the experiments Hertz had conducted, Marconi was gripped with an insight which was to become his abiding passion for the next 40 or more years: perhaps the electromagnetic radiation that Hertz had demonstrated could be used as a means of achieving communication without wires. At that instant was born what we now call radio.”³

In 1897, Oliver Lodge developed and patented the concept of syntony. The principal underlying the patent was this: “the antennae systems of both transmitter and receiver [were] made sharply resonant at the intended frequency. The two antennae had to form a syntonic system. Energy would be coupled into the antennae circuit in the case of the transmitter, and out of it in the case of the receiver, in such a way as to disturb its natural resonance as little as possible.”⁴ In brief, syntony was a constructed, resonant compatibility within a sending and receiving circuit.

In 1919, Rilke wrote of his childhood experience of the early phonograph: “when someone spoke or sang into the funnel, the needle in the parchment transferred the sound waves unto the impressionable surface slowly turning beneath it, and then, when the zealous pointer was allowed to retrace its own path—trembling, wavering out of the paper cone, the sound that was just a moment ago still ours, unsteady now, indescribably soft and timid and at times fading out altogether, came back to us. This always had a most powerful effect. Our class wasn’t exactly disciplined, and there couldn’t have been many moments when

it attained such a degree of silence ... We children stood, as it were, opposite a new, infinitely sensitive place in reality, from which we were addressed by something that far surpassed us, yet that was, in some unsayable way, still a beginner and in need of our help.”⁵

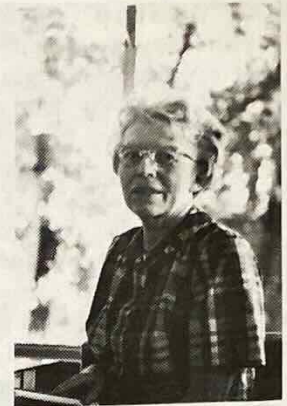
Lorine Niedecker was born in 1903, the year after the first flat 78 rpm phonograph record was produced. In 1942, she briefly worked at the Madison radio station WHA, where she wrote scripts for a programme of her own.⁶ In her work, sound is not autonomous from its electronic reproduction. Listening’s resonance is in every particular “false,” as she says of “the contemporary” in her 1933 poem “Progression,” “but no less admirable for that.”⁷ There is no autonomous or pure sound after the phonograph—only mutual systems of syntony. This is a rich and excellent fact. Voice is loosened from source and its various eschatological anxieties. Voice is the resonant and productive compatibility or slippage among systems.

Perhaps “ravenous for the sound”⁸ as she has Darwin say it, Niedecker mourned her mother “not hearing canvasbacks/... not hearing,”⁹ and wrote “the emotion of fall has its seat in the acoustic gland,”¹⁰ and also “I suppose man is, in the most sensitive physical part of him, an electrical apparatus, switches, wires, etc. . .”¹¹ Perhaps the acoustic gland is sometimes outside the body, like the seductive technologies of radio, or phonograph. I’m not referring to the feminized lure of the consumption of popular culture that finds its place in early modernist poems—in “The Wasteland,” for example, Eliot offers a clichéd image of the dumbed-down boredom of women’s use of the new acoustic technology:

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.¹²

For Eliot, woman and gramophone, in their mindless and attractive reproductive automaticity, are paired emblems floated on the field of modern vanity and ennui. They are each alienated in their repetitive inauthenticity. But I’d like to ask—how does lovely woman listen? And specifically, how does the listening device of the gramophone shape and reshape her listening?

I’m interested in the presence of listening in Niedecker’s work, listening as a shaped, material practice of reception. Specifically, I’d like to consider listening not as a mode of consumption, but as a compositional practice—the listener devises tactics of receiving in order to turn sound towards shapeliness. My understanding of listening as composition has been shaped by the electro-acoustic composer Pauline Oliveros, who teaches listening techniques as responsive followings outward of sound—whether vocal, environmental, or electronically reproduced—by the attending subject. That is, the listener, in internal alertness, waits for sonic information from the world, then



PHOTOGRAPH OF LORINE NIEDECKER WITH PERMISSION OF THE ROUB NIEDECKER COLLECTION, HOARD MUSEUM, FORT ATKINSON.

attentively follows a perceived line of sound in its environmental movement, greeting or responding with a performed or imagined reciprocal sonic movement, turning to a slightly altered performative trajectory as each perceived sound ceases or dwindles and a new one arises. The information Oliveros gives about how to compose is not metaphorical, but technical. Each compositional gesture places itself in moving, improvised relation to existing frequencies. But in imagining how to discuss such listening techniques in relation to Niedecker's poems, I ran into some trouble. That is, I can't speak for her subjectivity and its process. The performative interiority of process seems to remain private.

So I'm placing her writing in the context of a speculative description of the new sound technologies of the early 20th century. I'm specifically not trying to prove a quantifiable influence of radio or phonograph or stenography on certain poems or periods of her writing. I'm posing the material history of sound reproduction technology as a frame for considering listening as a technical composing. Here, listening is passive in that it receives, and artful in that it complicates, transduces the assumed binary of inner and outer, of subjective experience and wordly economy, of reception and extension. And here I'd suggest that passivity is an intensely figured grouping of agencies and techniques of reception, rather than an erasure of agency, a feminized naught.

Niedecker charts this co-determining movement of reception and extension in what we might call the acoustic subject, in the 1933 poem "Progression":

I must have been washed in listenably across the landscape
to merge with bitterns unheard but pumping, and saw,
and hammer a hill away; sounds, then what sound, then
by churchbell or locomotive volubility, what, so unto
the one constriction: what am I and why not¹³

Her adverbial subject does not project identity, but loosely gathers identity's strands from all over the sonorous landscape, to bring them, or follow them, to a point of questioning that only freshly releases potentials. In this sentence two directional compulsions coexist; as the listenable pronoun receives, "I" also fluently disperses across place to be washed in, "listenably." We have not so much a knot as a pleasurable harmonic slippage in sound's uncertain, yet constituting movements, a slippage paced in the dense lines by consonantal stutter or static, a slippage that wittily twists to address itself—"what am I and why not."

A related slippage can be read in the relation of sound as a field of recorded, or technologically reproduced media, to an unmediated model of sound's—or silence's—sensual authenticity. In the opening stage directions to the 1935 play "Domestic and Unavoidable," we read a complicity, a syntony, in the comparison of falling voices to a radio's dreaded dead air—yet for Niedecker the turned-on, static-making silent radio is an organ of potentiality, as alive at least as the biological apparatus: "A confused murmur of voices of men and women from dining room soon becomes merely a suspicion of sound as of air in a tunnel or as a loudspeaker of a radio turned on but not speaking—movement in stillness out of which the action of the words becomes clear."¹⁴ In this play, a young man seated at a desk listens to voices emanating from an adjoining room. Of the other speakers, only their shadows are visible on the stage. In following stage directions in this play, she places the word "sound" in quotation marks. In Niedecker's description and placement of sound and its relation to silence, the radio denatures silence, transforms it into a technological reproduction. It is an odd thing to read silence doubled thus. This doubling provides for the "movement in stillness," so that the voice, or silence itself, can figure as movement, not meaning in its presence or absence. The effect is an exchange, or circuit in the habitual meaning relation between vocality and silence. The not-speaking radio becomes the cultural organ, the acoustic gland, with silence as its fuzzy material product. In a semantic reversal, it is the

turned-on but still radio that gives meaning to the drifting, delocalized voice, as if whatever the voice is receives technology's silence. This is syntony—a constructed compatibility. It's a useful word for thinking through what might happen when sound's movement turns inward, becomes a material of thought. In a 1949 letter to Zukofsky, Niedecker wrote of Mozart—"I read and read and it's all like that music that I never seem to grasp, but always transports and never means twice the same. I love it because I feel that I think this way, not *thought*, but everything in a movement of words."¹⁵ I hear here the echo of her "movement in stillness." Thought's not a noun, but a syntonic shift acted through or among acoustic movements—it's an attunement receptive to material silence, perpetual shift and vibration. Thought attends the acoustical. It's silence's movement.

I offer these reflections as a beginner's notes. Much remains to be said, for example, about the dictaphone as a transducing device.

This brings me, also circuitously, to my own introduction to Niedecker's poetry. In the mid '80s, as a student, I worked at the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University, helping to catalogue the poetry audiotape archive. This archive holds the only publicly available copy of Niedecker's recorded voice, made in 1970 by Cid Corman. On this audiocassette recording, she reads from a typescript of *Harpichord and Saltfish*, then concludes with a brief comment on her writing before the tape cuts off. It was a shock and an excitement to me to hear her unscripted speaking voice. I'll cite her from my faulty memory—*more and more I think in lines of poetry, all day long, and even in the night*. I recall her small, firm-sounding voice through screen of tape hiss, and the slight snap of the tape ending, or the machine being switched off, my disappointment in the fracture of the recording. This brief, clear statement, the poet thinking in lines of poetry, even in the night, has in my imagination continued to cycle back into itself, shaping a question—what is it to think thought's line? I'd like to return this "thinking in lines" to Niedecker's "movement in stillness," or "everything in a movement of words." As the mind turns outwards in a worldly gesture of perceiving that extends, it turns inwards also, and with a similar perceptive attention receives and follows its own material silence. Lorine Niedecker thinks *in* poetry—as if poetry is the palpable radio static through which the movement of thinking becomes perceptible. This prepositional inwardness has learned from the acoustic gland. "And why not."

Lisa Robertson's books include XEclouge, Debbie: An Epic, The Weather and Occasional Works and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture, recently published by Clearcut Press. "In Phonographic Deepsong" was prepared as a talk for "Niedecker and Sound, Performance, Experiment" at the Niedecker Centenary Celebration, Milwaukee, WI, October 10, 2003.

¹ *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Jonathan Sterne, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, p. 31.

² *Syntony and Spark: The Origins of Radio*. Hugh G.J. Aitkens, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1976, p. 31.

³ *In Marconi's Footsteps 1894 to 1920*, Peter R. Jensen, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, Australia, 1994, p. 10.

⁴ Aitkens, p. 130.

⁵ Rilke, Rainer Maria, "Primal Sound" in *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Steven Mitchell, Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1997, p. 202-203.

⁶ Penberthy, Jenny, ed. *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, National Poetry Foundation, Orono, 1996, p. 96. (In his essay "Lorine Niedecker: Before Machines," Jeffery Peterson cites a 1966 letter from Niedecker to Ronald Ellis.)

⁷ Niedecker, Lorine, "Progression" in *Collected Works*, ed. Jenny Penberthy, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002, p. 27.

⁸ *Ibid*, "Darwin," p. 296.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, "Progression," p. 31.

¹¹ *Ibid*, "Switchboard Girl," p. 336.

¹² Eliot, T.S., *Collected Poems, 1909-1935*, Faber and Faber, London, 1936, p. 70.

¹³ Niedecker, *Collected*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 68-70.

¹⁵ Penberthy, Jenny, ed. *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 157.

EDWIN TORRES

Talks Interactive Eclecticism, Banana Peels, and Walking in Your Calling WITH MARCELLA DURAND

Out of the mists of confusion, nonsense, and non-sequiturs, comes the figure of the Poet, i.e., as in *Interactive Eclecticism*, Edwin Torres. Gargoylesque, in that he hurls nonsense back at nonsense in order to make sense, he talks into himself the multiplicity of words, activating each one before he delivers them back to us, creating buzzing wires of interaction and possibility. Torres is one of the most challenging poet-performers around, always inspiring in his unwillingness to rest with the “given.” He is also one of the very few poets who moves across the various cliques, factions, and schools of the NYC poetry scene—from the Nuyorican Poets Café, where he “began” as one of their top Slam Poets, to the Poetry Project, to Roof Books, he transverses false boundaries to offer something new to everyone, while remaining himself in full veracity and integrity. He is the author of *Fractured Humorous* (Subpress); *Onomalingua: noise songs & poetry*; and *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker* (Roof Books) as well as the CDs *Holy Kid*, which was part of the Whitney Museum’s exhibit, *The American Century Pt. II*; *Please* (Faux Press); and *Novo* (Oozebap Records). This year through Composer’s Collaborative, he worked with composer Akemi Naito on “Liminal Kin,” a suite of poems with music by The Nurse Kaya String Quartet. The same text was used by sculptor Nancy Cohen in their collaboration, “Mute Thunder,” for an exhibition at The Hunterdon Museum of Art.

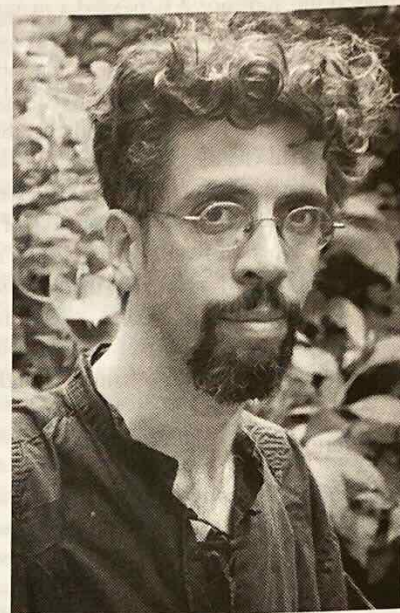


PHOTO BY ANNA SIANO

MD: The School of Yelling?

ET: The School of Yelling. There’s this French theater director, Enrique Pardo, who teaches a workshop on choreographic theater. In one of his workshops he says, “Then there’s also this manner, what is ugly,” where as a performer you have to know there are all these things that are not schooled, that have this feral kind of energy. That’s ugly sometimes and that’s where the School of Yelling comes in. What are the highs and lows of the possibilities? How far can I go with this? You need an audience for that.

MD: To tell you when you’ve gone too far?

ET: In the good old days of Bauhaus, it was “Shut up! Get off!” Now people are too kind.

MD: You’re one of the rare figures at the Poetry Project who also participated in Poetry Slams at the Nuyorican Poets Café...

ET: It’s kind of a dubious distinction, like “Oh yeah, you used to be a Slam Poet.” People are quick to place you in a certain setting. And then there’s my last name. The last year or so, I’ve had to come to grips with what my last name has made me become as a writer. My heritage is not really what I write about, but it does enter my writing in obvious ways, so I’ve been feeling a little more responsible. I need to address that I represent a certain kind of people.

MD: Who are you representing to?

ET: I wrote a long time ago that “my people roam the open field,” and that hasn’t changed. I write for people who are open to experience and different ways of perceiving things. That’s why I gravitate towards the experimental. I feel a need to address—as opposed to “my people,” who might be Puerto Rican people or Spanish people—the “other,” the sense of not fitting in, which I can hold onto a little better, because it speaks to more people. It speaks to me.

MD: You have that one poem about how you don’t quite fit in, [I Wanted To Say Hello To The Salseros But My Hair Was A Mess.]

ET: I’ve always felt that somewhat, not fitting in. I think every poet feels that—we all have “messy hair.” The poem is about going to a Spanish festival in Columbus, Ohio. The next morning I shared a van with a salsa band back to the airport. [They were] these older men wearing typical macho jewelry and clothing and wisecracking jokes. I just felt so out of place. I wanted to be there, but I was embarrassed for being who I was. I didn’t fit in, but I liked these people. They’re full of life and so am I. It’s just a different perception of what life is.

MD: I’m intrigued with how you got into the Slam scene, then became interested in the Russian Futurists, then performed at the Kitchen, these other worlds. How you made

these jumps, found these doors...

ET: Well, there are so many avenues in New York City, so many places to try stuff out. I got into performance first at Dixon Place in ’88. I was fed up with monologues and performance art at the time and I thought, oh, I can do that too. Plus I lived in squalor. I lived in a little studio apartment and I didn’t throw anything away for years. I was one of those people. My floor was a few feet off the ground.

MD: What did you collect?

ET: Newspapers, clothing. I did throw food away, although a year before I left, Liz [Elizabeth Castagna] found a banana peel. I lived in this situation that was totally claustrophobic and it was like a womb. Everything I wanted was there. It was my playground. It was the world that I was in. In hindsight, I realize it fueled a lot of my writing. That the sense of holding onto things and the tangents I love so much in poetry come from this idea of collecting and holding on and seeing if it will work. This hodgepodge mentality.

MD: I can see that—your work is very unpredictable, like, where did he just find that word?

ET: When I was an amoeba, I saved every little molecule and it became me. *I am my own me*. So I’m living in this squalor and conquering the world with graphic design. I would cut type apart, make it do weird shapes—playing with the page was really satisfying to me. I

would write little notes and over time the notes became kind of poems—I didn't call them poems, they were just word-things. So then fast-forward a few years.... I invented an art movement called Interactive Eclecticism, or I.E. This was before interactive was a catchphrase. I did these I.E. shows for about a year. They became popular, had music and involved the audience. I.E. needed a mantra and the mantra was the audience. There was this one I.E. ritual where one side of the audience got one tape recorder and the other got another. One tape had snoring and the other had Gregorian chanting. One is sleeping and one is revelatory. I was mocking religion left and right. I realize now that it came out of a search for belief, to realize what it is we all believe in. There's this courtship that happens with God and religion that's fascinating to me, this need for us to believe in something outside of ourselves. Plus my family is fundamentalist Pentecostal.

MD: Were you raised Pentecostal?

ET: No, Catholic. They converted about 20 years ago.

MD: What a mix!

ET: *Guilt*. A Pentecostal pastor doesn't wear a robe like I was used to, he wears a normal suit. It's more direct and honest to me. It's clear. Nothing gets in the way. It's just *the book* and the people. And I respect that—I have problems with it, I couldn't live by just one book, but I can respect their dedication. I.E. came about through this search, although I never considered it as religion. It was only

years later when I realized the rebellion that fueled this idea of the shaman, of what words can do. I felt very gratified being up on stage with people watching me, my congregation. I have all this writing that I did before writing poetry. It's innocent, bad writing, but it was rooted in sincerity. It dealt with the theater as a body and that both of us are in this body together. I had these profound things and didn't quite have the language for it. So then this one woman came to me, after I was having a modicum of success downtown, her last name was Torres. She said, "I've been looking for you. You know, you have a responsibility." I was like, "Oh yeah?" I was pleasing her, just listening to her. What's the phrase? Appeasing her.

MD: Playing along.

ET: Yeah, playing along. She said, "People are coming to you, you should do something for *your* people." I was like, whoa! Heavy. I don't want to hear that. Get out of here! So of course that stuck. I was doing this I.E. thing from a place of process. When you do something without an end in mind, there are mostly questions. At the same time, you've got to have some kind of solution, some sort of end in mind, even if that ending is to continue. I'm not interested in telling you what the answer is, because you'll have a different one anyway, which will change my perception. And that's partly a Gemini thing, where I don't want to tell you everything because I want to see the options. There's a certain diplomacy there that I embrace and is part of what I'm about. So then a week or so after meeting with the female Torres, I noticed there was a reading by three poets from the Nuyorican Poets Café put on by Poets House: Miguel Algarin, Bimbo Rivas and Jorge Brandon. Jorge Brandon was this 90-year-old poet who invented, if not perfected, decimas, which are 10-line poems with a certain rhyme scheme. I went to this reading, not knowing what to expect. What's this poetry stuff, you know? Jorge Brandon is this frail old man, huge bowler hat on, orange duct tape taped around him. Miguel is on one side and Bimbo's on the other—they're joking and carrying around like it's the funniest thing in the world. Miguel and Bimbo go into this song, "We got into the cab and Jorge found this tape on the street from a construction site and he just put it on himself and here he is." And I'm like, man, this is nuts. This is poetry? Miguel reads his great words with this beautiful voice and Bimbo was all heart. And Jorge, this frail little guy, had this incredibly deep, sonorous voice. He'd been doing this all his life and you could tell. Right there I got a lineage. I got a sense of place and history. So I went to the open mike at the Café a week later and it began from there.

MD: Had you read or written poetry seriously before then?

ET: Just my text-things for I.E. performances. Very first thing ever. So I went to the open mic, I was on the verge of a relationship—I just met the girl but already there were problems. So I wrote about her. All this love poetry came out. After a few years, I broke up with her—there are a lot of poems that came from that confusion.

MD: This was right off the bat? You're introduced to poetry and—

ET: We had three breakups and this was right when I was doing I.E. and performing. I would use some of the ideas in performance. She said, you don't always have to use me in your performances. As she's pouring her heart out, I'm writing it down...

MD: A true writer.

ET: A true writer and a real idiot. The breakup guy who just writes everything down and makes it into performance. So going back, my interaction with the audience stemmed from I.E. and what it meant that there's a performer on stage and people are listening. It's about the ego, you know, but it's something else too. Why get up there and be heard? My older sister put it beautifully: "Edwin, you're walking in your calling," which may come from Pentecostal ideology, but it's true. I realized that we, as poets, are part of this path. Otherwise, we'd keep our words in our journals. What is it that wants to be heard? What's important enough to share with the world? It's a huge responsibility, but it's also dangerous, because you can get carried away with that kind of power. That self-belief can negate the world around you.

MD: I've seen you do performances where you completely negate that presence. One time at Tonic, I knew you were performing but only heard a disembodied voice. It took me 20 minutes to find you, crouching in a corner, whispering into a microphone.

ET: For about 13 years, I've been collaborating with this amazing drummer, Sean G. Meehan. As an improviser he becomes invisible to his instrument. Approaching sound as if you're a vessel, channeling what's happening around you through your instrument, you know? In the last few years, he's been working with a snare drum—as opposed to the full drum kit—which is incredibly restrictive, but it's opened up other avenues for him, where he's being incredibly creative with just the snare. It becomes as much an orchestra as a full drum kit. With that in mind, I thought, what can I do where it's not always Edwin?

MD: You seemed deliberately to de-center yourself.

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ET: Do you know Stewart Sherman? He does these performances where he has a suitcase with all these props in it. In one hour, he'll do 20 different things. Rarely talks. He takes out Kraft cheese slices and a hole puncher, punches holes in them until he's got 10 slices punched, puts a lid on them, reaches in and pulls out a little suit jacket made of Kraft cheese slices with holes in it. And that's it, that's his joke. Then he puts it away and prepares for the next one, so performer becomes stagehand. I loved that because what that did was give the audience some breathing room. As an audience, I can now not watch you as a performer, but watch you prepare for the next thing. It's a Cage thing, where you present your work, then let it go, unfinished, and the audience receives it. In the performance at Tonic, I wanted to let the sounds grow on their own, so I crouched down and that's when you walked in. The scenario dictates what happens. In "Ball," which was a fuller theatrical production [at the Kitchen], there's still a sense of disappearing there, but definitely a sense of being in the center of everything. That's a theatrical dynamic. How do you take this spatial dimension and bring it into poetry? How do you expand the words, the page into this other realm?

MD: Well, "Gecko Suite" [at the Kitchen] was about disruption. In these huge spaces, you'd be reading and then Gina Bonati singing.

ET: There's a huge amount of space at the Kitchen, almost too much space. We felt like a little league team playing in Yankee Stadium. By not presenting something totally polished, the audience tends to jump in and complete it. But it's raw. And in that rawness is where dialogue happens. The audience has to figure things out. It's chancy to do that—people say, well, if you added this and this and this, it would've been more finished. People will always put in what they need. But the staging was also dictated by the text. It may be non-linear, but I see a flow, a story being told. What happens with color, with lighting, with space that can help the dramatic situation evolve? And then this year, I did these two collaborations using the same text, which was another way to decentralize. I worked with a composer, Akemi Naito, and wrote a suite of poems based on her music. She then wrote new music for the poems to be played by a string quartet [The Nurse Kaya String Quartet]. Then the sculptor Nancy Cohen, with whom I'd collaborated before, wanted to work on a new

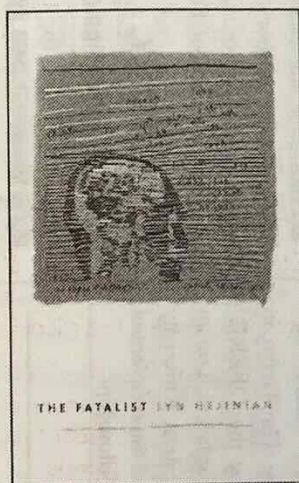
collaboration at around the same time. I thought it'd be interesting to see how this same text would evolve when used in another medium, so that's what I sent her. She created four arches, fitting into the poem's compass-point sections.

MD: Tell me about how you put together your book, *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker* (Roof, 2001).

ET: Well, I chose poems meant to be read out loud, with Roof in mind. I knew there was something worthwhile in the work, although I hadn't put it on the page properly, and now I had this chance. I had been impressed by a book of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's, an oversized chapbook limited-edition thing, letterpress, with these graphics designed into the words. It was Dutch translated into German, so I couldn't understand it, but it was beautifully designed, using simple type cases, little symbols mixed in with words, restraint and space on each page. The book read like a musical score and I wanted to design these new poems that way. I kept myself to circles and triangles, keeping in mind the idea of an old metal foundry, which dealt with size and indents as much as with text and form. The design's restriction was what opened my brain.

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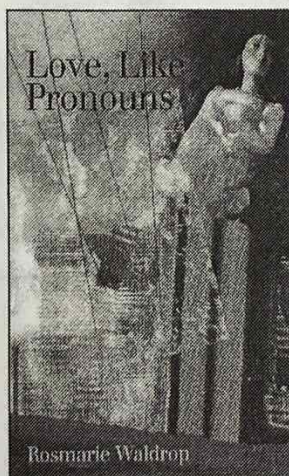


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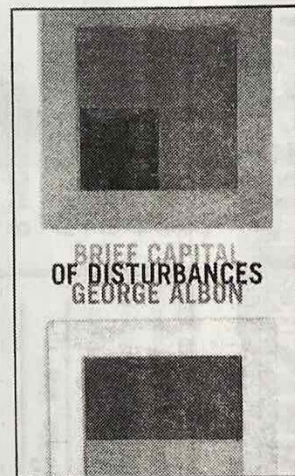
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POETRY PROJECT EVENTS CALENDAR

FEBRUARY_MARCH 2004

FEBRUARY

2 MONDAY

Open Reading: Sign-up at 7:45 pm [8 pm]

4 WEDNESDAY

Adeena Karasick & Mark Weiss

Adeena Karasick is the author of *The Arigula Fugues*, *Dyssemia Sleaze*, *Genecide*, *Ménevars*, and *The Empress Has No Closure*. *The House That Hijack Built* is forthcoming from Talonbooks. Mark Weiss has published two collections of poetry, *Intimate Wilderness* and *Fieldnotes*. He co-edited *Across the Line / Al otro lado* and is the editor and translator of *The Whole Island/La isla en peso: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry, Set: Selected Poems of José Kózer, Selected Poems of Gastón Baquero*, and *Selected Poems of Raúl Hernández Novés*.

9 MONDAY

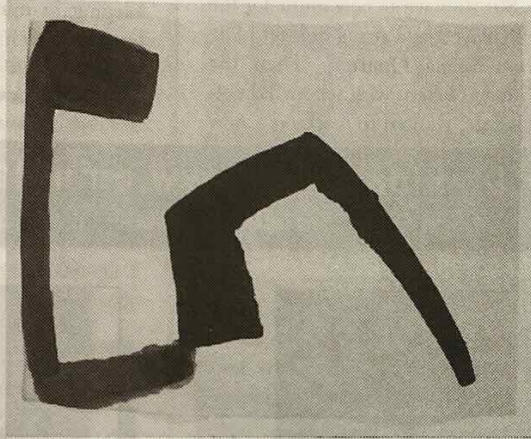
David Lehman & Eugene Ostashevsky

David Lehman's books of poetry include *The Daily Mirror*, *The Evening Sun*, and *Valentine Place*. He is also the author of *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*, and the series editor of *The Best American Poetry*. Eugene Ostashevsky's chapbook, *The Off-Centaur*, was published by The Germ in 2001. He translates 1930s Russian poetry by the OBERIU group, and is currently working with Matvei Yankelevich on an English anthology of their work for Northwestern University Press. He is a co-founder of 9X9 Industries and the recipient of last year's Wytter Bynner Poetry Translation Fellowship.

11 WEDNESDAY

Paul Auster & Laird Hunt

Paul Auster is the author of 11 novels, including the three volumes of *The New York Trilogy*, *The Music of Chance*, *Leviathan*, *Mr. Vertigo*, and *Oracle Night*. Among his non-fiction works are *The Invention of Solitude*, *The Art of Hunger*, *Hand to Mouth*, and *The Red Notebook*. He has edited two anthologies—*The Random House Book of 20th Century French Poetry* and *I Thought My Father Was God and Other True Tales from NPR's National Story Project*—and wrote



and more recently *Run, Duck, Run* and *Selected Poems*.
 discuss their collaborative process and influences. Jost leads her own band and performs regularly at such venues as The Living Room, The Knitting Factory, and Galapagos. She is currently working on a full-length CD to be released later this year. Machlin is the author of *This Side Facing You*, *In Rem*, and a recent broadside from The Center for Book Arts. He is the founder and editor of Futurepoem Books.

25 WEDNESDAY

Regie Cabico & Monica de la Torre

Regie Cabico won the 1993 Nuyorican Poetry Slam and took top prizes in the 1993, 1994, and 1997 National Poetry Slams. He has appeared on HBO's Def Poetry Jam and received three New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships for Poetry and Performance Art. His latest solo show is *straight out*, directed by Reg E Gaines. With Michael Wieggers, Monica de la Torre edited *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry* (Copper Canyon Press, 2002). She has also edited and translated a volume of selected poems by Gerardo Deniz, published by Lost Roads in 2001. She is the poetry editor of Brooklyn Rail.

10 WEDNESDAY

George Schneeman: Painter Among Poets

A book party and reading to celebrate the publication of *Painter Among Poets: The Collaborative Art of George Schneeman* (Granary Books), the first retrospective presentation of the art works that Schneeman has created with poets over the past 35 years. Readers include Edmund Berrigan, Michael Brownstein, Larry Fagin, Ted Greenwald, Steve Katz, Ron Padgett, Lewis Warsh, and other guests TBA, with a reception following.

15 MONDAY

CA Conrad & Latasha Diggs

CA Conrad has three forthcoming books: *Deviant Propulsion* (Soft Skull Press), *advancedELVIScourse* (Buck Down Books), and *Frank* (The Jargon Society). He co-edits *Frequency Audio Journal* with Magdalena Zurawski, and edits *Banjo: Poets Talking*, and *9for9*. Latasha N. Nevada Diggs is the author of *Ichi-Ban: from the files of negrita muñeca Linda* and *Ni-Ban: Villa Miseria*, and an experimental audio essay, "Television." A fellow of the Cave Canem Workshop for African American Poets, she was the 2002 artist in residence at Harvestworks Digital Media Arts Center.

17 WEDNESDAY

Laura Elrick & Barrett Watten

Laura Elrick's first collection, *sKincerity*, was published by Krupskaya in 2003. She is co-curator of the Segue reading series at the Bowery Poetry Club, and is currently working on a project tentatively titled *Fantasies in Permeable Structures*. Barrett Watten is the author, most recently, of *Progress/Under Erasure* and *Bad History*. He has published two volumes of literary and cultural criticism, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* and *Total Syntax*. He was editor of *This*, one of the central magazines of the Language School, and co-edited *Poetics Journal*, one of its theoretical venues.

22 MONDAY

Jerome Sala & Dorece Steinke

Jerome Sala is the author of *Spaz Attack*, *I Am Not a Juvenile Delinquent*, and more recently *Run, Duck, Run* and *Selected Poems*.

ed *Reversible Monuments: Contemporary Mexican Poetry* (Copper Canyon Press, 2002). She has also edited and translated a volume of selected poems by Gerardo Deniz, published by Lost Roads in 2001. She is the poetry editor of *Brooklyn Rail*.

MARCH

1 MONDAY

Sixth Annual Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam

One of the preliminary rounds of Urban Word's Sixth Annual Teen Poetry Slam, where a panel of five judges will determine which poets move on to the next level. The culminating slam will take place on Saturday, March 20. Teenagers from each borough, crossing most ethnic and socio-economic boundaries, will participate. The annual event is open to any teenager between the ages of 13 and 19. A grassroots, non-profit arts-education organization, Urban Word NYC uses the competitive format of the Teen Poetry Slam to bring a community of teenagers together through their love of poetry and spoken word. [6 pm; \$5 adults, \$3 students]

3 WEDNESDAY

Michael McClure & Ron Silliman

Ron Silliman's life can be viewed in real-time on his weblog, ronsilliman.blogspot.com. His 25th book, *Woundwood*, is forthcoming from Cuneiform Press. Others include the anthology, *In the American Tree*, *The New Sentence*, *Kejvak*, and *Tjanting*. Michael McClure is a poet, novelist, essayist, and playwright, and the author of *Hymns to St. Ceryon*, *Dark Brown*, *Ghost Tantras*, *Rare Angel*, *Scratching the Beat Surface*, *Selected Poems*, *Huge Dreams*, *Rain Mirror*, and *Plum Stones: Cartoons of No Heaven*, among many others. He won an Obie for *Josephine the Moise Singer*, and his notorious play *The Beard* was shut down by police after 14 consecutive nights in Los Angeles.

8 MONDAY

Amra Brooks & Simone White

Amra Brooks is currently working on a collection of stories as well as a novel named after her home state of California. Simone White is an MFA candidate at the New School and a Cave Canem fellow.

22 MONDAY

Jerome Sala & Dorcey Steinke

Jerome Sala is the author of *Spaz Attack*, *I Am Not a Juvenile Delinquent*, and more recently *Raw Deal: New and Selected Poems*. A new collection, *Media Effects*, is due out in Fall 2004 from Soft Skull Press. Dorcey Steinke is the author of three novels, *Up Through the Water*, *Suicide Blonde*, and *Jesus Saves*, all of which were *New York Times* Notables. Her new book *Milk* will be out next fall and she is currently writing a book of theology.

24 WEDNESDAY

Renee Gladman & Lisa Robertson

Renee Gladman's books include *The Activist* and *Juice*. She published *Clamour*, a journal of experimental writing by women in San Francisco and founded Leroy, a chapbook series. Lisa Robertson is the author of *XEclogue* (reissued by New Star, 1999), *Debbie: An Epic* (nominated for the Governor-General's Award for Poetry), and *The Weather* (winner of the Relit Award for Poetry). *Occasional Works and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* is just out from Clear Cut Press.

29 MONDAY

Talk Series: Rahna Reiko Rizzuto

Rizzuto writes, "In my talk I would like to explore the poetics and the rhetoric of war, and the language of memory, as I experienced them in Japan in September 2001, and as I saw them shape our notions of ourselves, as individuals, citizens, and members of a global community." Rizzuto's first novel, *Why She Left Us*, won an American Book Award in 2000.

31 WEDNESDAY

Ruth Altmann & Bill Kushner

Ruth Altmann's forthcoming book of poetry is being published by United Artists. Her poems have appeared in *Telephone*, *And Then*, and *Across the Gap*, as well as in various online journals. Bill Kushner is the author of *Night Fishing*, *Head*, *Love Uncut*, *That April*, *He Dreams of Waters*, and, most recently, *In the Hair Arms of Whitman*. He was the recipient of a 1999 Poetry Fellowship from NYFA and the Dylan Thomas Prize for Poetry awarded by the New School for Social Research.

16 MONDAY

Jen Bervin & Paul Killebrew

Jen Bervin is the author of *Nets* and *Under What Is Not Under*. She received an Edward M. Lanman Prize from the Academy of American Poets. Paul Killebrew's chapbook, *Forget Rita*, was published by the Poetry Society of America in 2003 as part of their New York Chapbook Fellowship.

18 WEDNESDAY

Charles Borkhuis & Katie Degentesh

Charles Borkhuis's recent books include *Savoir-Fear*, *Mouth of Shadows*, and *Alpha Ruins*, selected by Fanny Howe as runner-up for the William Carlos Williams Book Award for 2001. His play *Phantom Limbs* won a Drama-logic Award and was a Critics Choice in the *LA Times*. Katie Degentesh's poetry and reviews have appeared in *Aras*, *Combo*, *depoetry.com*, *Fence*, *How2*, and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. She is an editor of *6,500* magazine.

20 FRIDAY

Fall Workshop Reading

Participants from the three Fall Writing Workshops of Joanna Fuhrman, Brian Kim Stefans, and Tony Towle will read from their work. [10:00 pm]

23 MONDAY

Talk Series: Serena Jost & Dan Machlin, "Me, We"

Singer-songwriter Serena Jost and poet Dan Machlin have collaborated on a full-length CD, *Above Islands* (Immanent Audio), and several other text/sound projects. Tonight they will perform selections from past and current collaborations, and dis-

The Poetry Project is located at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery_131 East 10th Street_ New York City 10003_ www.poetryproject.com

All events are \$8, \$7 for seniors and students, \$5 for members and begin at 8 pm unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call (212) 674-0910.

MD: So, just to get a little more biographical background, you curated the Monday Night Series at the Poetry Project...

ET: In 1991, Wanda Phipps was curating the series and she saw me at the Knitting Factory, so she asked me to do a Monday Night. I remember what a great night it was for me: I did a film projection, worked with two musicians. I also had three tape recorders telling an I.E. joke at the same time, I'm there behind them drinking water. Every once in a while I say the punchline and keep drinking water. A year after that, Ed Friedman asked me to teach a workshop, I said no thanks. Then a year later, he asked again. He wanted something that wasn't the normal Poetry Project thing in there. So I took a chance. I had one person sign up that first year.

MD: Harsh.

ET: About two weeks before the class, no one else had signed up. I said, Ed, we can just cancel it. He said, no, no, no. So, thank you Ed Friedman. For 10 weeks, I figured out different assignments. We did a great year-end Poetry-Kabuki performance at Threadwaxing Space. Ed asked me to come back the next year and I had 10 people, the year after I had more. Through Frank, my one student, the transition into teaching was seamless. With one person I felt I could take my time and make mistakes. Frank would be at one end of the room, I'd be at the other, each of us with tape recorders. I'd say, GO, and we

would walk towards each other while talking into them. Then we'd rewind and play the tape at the same time and write what we thought we heard.

MD: Do you keep in touch?

ET: No. I think a few years afterwards I saw him and he was wearing a top hat and a cape, coming from a magic show. At the workshop reading, he said, I don't want to do poetry, I want to do a magic show. Not sure if my class pushed him in that direction, but born of the seed of the Poetry Project is magic!

MD: So who are some poets you go back to time and time again?

ET: Khlebnikov, for sure. Paul Celan is a real influence. Creeley. Octavio Paz is a big one. But I have a very porous brain and what I call a convenient lack of memory, which means I can keep doing something over and over and forget that I've done it. You stay young forever that way.

MD: How about bilingualism?

ET: Bilinguismo.

MD: I think a lot about scansion and how speaking another language affects that.

ET: Growing up in a bilingual family you definitely pay more attention to sound and the moment between words and what their meaning is supposed to be, how something is said, why it means that and not this. More

cultures get fused into more poetics as the world gets smaller. But then culture becomes homogenized. It's interesting this idea of what your culture is supposed to represent. We all are who we are, and we're made of what made us here.

MD: You mentioned sincerity way back, and I'd like to talk about that a little more. In your work there's a kind of urgency, a sense that we're not just playing games for the sake of games.

ET: When I would travel with a group and perform my complicated language stuff, and other poets would perform their more accessible stuff, people would bypass me and go to the other performers. In the beginning, I was like, oh damn, why don't you come to me. But I realized it wasn't meant to be for everybody. You have to believe what you're saying, because you're presenting this world that's different. If you believe in it, somebody out there will believe it with you, and that's where the sincerity comes from.

MD: Is that how you see poetry as revolutionary?

ET: There's an economy of language in poetry that allows interpretation. We're being told something, but we're given the respect, the chance and the trust to interpret it in our own ways. The poet knows that what they're sharing is for us to consume, for us to make what we want of it—our stories grow that much bigger. I did a reading with Yusef Komunyakaa at a university in Sao Paulo this October. Someone asked us, how does it feel coming to South America, representing America? So we answered that the poet is a citizen of the world—our nationality is poetry. Poets from all over the world are one. That's a very spiritual thing, but what do you do with it? As a poet, what do you do with this incredible honor you've been given?

MD: It's rather embarrassing to talk about spirituality...

ET: In poetry especially, the idea of poetry as a religion. The converts show up to hear the speaker [and] there are social implications in this. It's very heavy to get into and I don't have an answer, but it's an interesting layer—the audience gathered to hear *the word*. Although *spirituality* is a different spectrum than religion. The aura that you project is you. Then there's a God somewhere and is that God shining through you or not?

MD: Experimental poetry is so much about mystery and what's more mysterious than the divine?

ET: What's more experimental than the divine?

MD: Experimental poetry!

ET: At St. Mark's Church!

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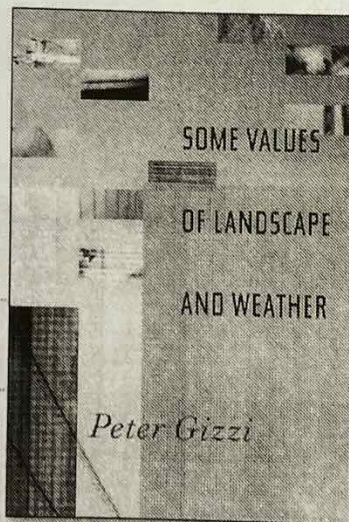
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THE IMPOSSIBLE SENTENCE

Mono lingual / Uni vocality / the impossible sen-tense /// begins with intention of lyric to be lyric about lyric. A poem of poem as a sentence unsentenced. Working against unfragments of gathered vibration, if letter be image instead of symbol...less would be explanation and more would be inplanation. The feet of imagery reduced by the West into static structures of wire and air, the inside speech of rain drops, the stutter, the page turn, the active-vitator. Economy of a transverse cloud settled down here, far from its home, language as fog covering your every move, refiguring your wavery voice into the one impossible sentent.

On the border of if-you-were-here, on the edge of left (*the edging cut*), facing towards the end of your toes at the South of where you fit in...the border notion of l(a/e)ngua(ge) as territory resides; between the in and the out, the border patrol controlling that passage, the nothing that waits for you. Where do you want to go today? Are we going too far? With this? There is an ideal of the un as incoherent razzle; the plura, the toscia, the flitseveranté, the special, the performicity improvising off the one idea. These are edges to explore when faced with the nothing that knows your name.

Trans-intra-contin-nuid-idity...I am riffing off the impossible. Taking notes against the voice falling in the ear, where many ways of understanding stutter into yester-speak. There is a third space, the eye that is the ear in the back of the brain, the pineal gland sitting in its throne...the inside eye that encircles reception — guardian of the junk space, aware of the satellites around the noggin. Weather currents flow against the global uprising of your personal pattern. We are temporal beings fixated on cycles of time. The unheard syntax can be unthought to be the impossible history looking for the new multiplication of time, the start of each day as your personal global direction.

Imagine the year as the sentence you've yet to write. Your vocality is the ecology of what the poem wants. The Uni-Mono-Voco lights the body with unrecognizable patterns of uttering — the polyglot crying for social affiliation — as we portray our demons with hierarchy, the available workhorse is the lingualisualist, acclaimed in many aspects of the final thought...which is now here. I am done with my impossible sentence.

Edwin Torres

**FORCES
OF IMAGINATION:
Writing on Writing**

Barbara Guest,
essays on poetics
*We expect poets
to give
a first-hand
account
of what
poetry is. But
some poets,
when they
write criticism,
produce
a kind of prose
that is
itself on the verge
of being
poetry.*

--John Ashbery
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NEST

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge,
poetry

Richard Tuttle,
cover image & design

*With a deep
attention
to inter-relationality,
Nest constructs
a world
where home is
at once
vulnerable,
suspect,
and sheltering.*

--Christine Hume
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poetry

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BOOK REVIEWS

JOANNE KYGER
AS EVER: SELECTED POEMS 1964-2001
Penguin Poets, 2002, \$20

By happenstance or otherwise, Joanne Kyger's poetry has been passed over by many anthologies, her books are hard to find, or they are simply out of print. The good news is that Kyger's achievement is now available in the invaluable collection *As Ever: Selected Poems 1964 to 2001*.

Although no poems are included from Kyger's exceptional *All This Every Day* (Big Sky, 1971), *As Ever* is a generous cull of her 20-plus books. Capably edited by Michael Rothenberg (also editor of the Philip Whalen *Selected*), the book is grounded by an informative introduction by David Meltzer.

Again and again, the poems reveal more than meets the eye. Her sophisticated simplicity derives from her aesthetic accuracy, with poems that move purposefully across the page in a manner that amplifies Olson's notion of Projective Verse. In "Back in Time," she writes:

No Memory, Right?
hear how people say what they say piecemeal.
Who will show up
Who will go away. My problem heart
was a false me/you. And pursuit and
withdrawal
was too much right here. The way
you are pulling it together, a dream.

Otherwise
for Joanne Kyger

**I get people and the extractive industries
confused. Everything from steel
to Chinese bras.**

**She says: My Lord take
me to the voice / and let it float.
Float to the bottom and stay there.**

**Surrounded by silent trees for months,
the voice is deep, the eyes are close.
The smoky sunglasses are what take you.**

**Past the fear of life's paucity,
you might anticipate that patience or
crazy quilt would be the word.**

**Where else can you be both beautiful and warm?
White is white, it takes up space.
Crumb-stained spicy salt between the pages.**

—Tom Devaney

Communication, I said, is not the word,
you are after. That
assumes separation to begin with.
Hear how people have a focus, a guide,
go back inside—

Is outside! Dead heart, alive.

Associated with nearly every innovative poetry movement during the past four decades (from the San Francisco Renaissance to the Beats to the New York School), Kyger is thoroughly integrated and yet remains distinctive among the poets of the New American Poetry. The associations are evocative, yet they only take you so far.

Identified in part as a poet exploring Asian poetics with an American edge, as well as one whose occasional poems are drawn from her journal writing practices, Kyger is foremost a poet of location—location arrayed across the page, as well as location found everywhere in the *where* and *when* of daily phenomena. In "Chapter Six" of her prose poem "A Novel" (another form she uses with expert skill), written in 1966, she writes:

I do get people and landscape confused,
though. Their route is their route.

My friend at the coal yard can be philo-
sophic about all this. If it's water for your
teapot you want, take it out of the stream
you're next to. The stones, the fish, and the
bank aren't necessary.

Kyger's engagement with place is varied and overlaid with allusions. In poems such as "Visit to Maya Land," *placeholder* phrases stand in for place itself. She writes:

Well then...
And now
And right now then
Look here
Pay Attention
Get this
Look right here
And get this right now

Throughout her life Kyger has kept a journal and in 2000 published *Strange Big Moon—The Japan and Indian Journals: 1960-1964*. She honors the art of the daybook and Asian diary tradition, but the distinction between her journal writing and her poetry is worth making. It does not follow that Kyger, who uses the journal as an on-going practice, must reproduce its sometimes indul-

gent content and banal effects in the poetry. Just as Ron Padgett borrowed techniques and strategies of the comic book to convey a range of effects including satire, sorrow, and irony, so Kyger has transformed the material of journal writings into art.

Like Japanese poetry, which depends upon the subtlety of its effects, Kyger's poetry, using concrete images and the present tense, reveals an often masterful use of its tradition. In "Desecheo Notebook," she writes:

Hunch back whales, big white breakers
out to sea
Three

Or in "Up My Coast":

People no good, People smell.
When they die, they better stay dead.

The above is a version of a Native American myth, but Kyger fuses other tones here, including haiku. Like Kerouac, who adapted haiku into his novels, Kyger has adapted the sensibility into her pitch-perfect poems. In "Saturday Full Moon September," giving herself over to the unexpected moment and showing her humor, she writes:

Yuk! Umlaut OM a lot
Let's walk around the yard once, OK?

There is even something very Zen about the intonation of the word "OK?" here—OK? The poem reflects a Buddhist view that value inheres in an equality of the smaller parts to an immense and unknowable whole.

I have yet to mention the use of prayer, creation stories, or what Anne Waldman calls Kyger's "alignments with myth with memory with dream." "Camouflaged with simplicity," her wide-open eye for detail infuses a sensibility, which is subtle as it is sophisticated. Kyger's arrangement of words locates and expands "the moment" with all the ecstatic intricacy of the present. From "Saturday Full Moon September":

and I
am searching in this present
to get full...of its reverberations

Give me a little humble pride to tell
the story

I think I may have to do this forever
just forever & ever

*Tom Devaney is at work on "The Empty House,"
tour of the Poe House in Philadelphia for the Institute
of Contemporary Art's show "The Big Nothing."*



Some poetry is the same old
road to nowhere.
Sad, but true.

For us, it's a thousand
miles of burning
asphalt.

CHARLES BORKHUIS
SAVOIR-FEAR
Meeting Eyes Bindery (Spuyten Duyvil),
2003, \$10

Like any potboiler worth its weight in pulp, *Savoir-Fear* knows how to arrest our attention and keep it locked up. Strangely enough, sitting around in this slammer is a real scream. Page after page of puns, punchlines, crudities, perversities, insults, metaphorical monstrosities, all kinds of body parts, nasty alleyways, dead-ends, and plots that twist and preen like the inevitable over-blown simile pulverize us. This book entertains with a snap, crackle, stop, and not only will it play in Peoria, but it's Poetry with a capital P, Poetry that knows what it is, where it's coming from, and does it, embodying it organically (pardon me, Mr. Wimsatt) and constantly as it goes. It's the kind of poetry other poets (O, green-eyed monster!) will have to reckon with.

Like *Sunset Boulevard*, another yuk-a-minute in morbidity, *Savoir-Fear* falls out of the gate with a sickening thud.

AUTOPSY

the edge of a sharpened image
makes the first cut
peel the skin back
from the verbal incision
point probing between sinews

the sternum sawed in half
exposing a layer
of sky-blue glass
reflecting thought
before touch

before ripples
across the surface
that give the sensation
of writing on water

Not only has poetry croaked but—surprise, surprise—it is its own mortician. Cut open its body and instead of heart and soul you find the in-your-face mirror of language. Then again, if there's no heart, no insides, and nothing's authentic, then there's nothing to die, and the poems become a kind of flamboyant parade of the undead speaking through the pasted-on mouth of their ghostly poet, Charles Borkhuis.

So what does this death (or undeath) consist of? A look at the title, a good example of how workmanlike and tight this book is (of course, Borkhuis is the kind of guy who'll give you the key and throw away the lock!), may help us here. *Savoir-faire* suggests the verbal *élan* that has always been the poet's provenance, the ability to do and make with grace and ease. In Borkhuis's world, action has been supplanted by fear. Instead of the poet doing things, things are done to the

poet. (And how! Owl!) For here, the self is a joke, culture rotten, transcendence impossible, and all three deserve what they get. So what's a poet to do? From "Land's End":

o void you tumultuous leveler!
as we are lowered into the lifeboats
so we will go down clutching
the family jewels to our fabulous diction

If the poet can't do anything, at least he can talk back. Hence, the incessant punning, wisecracking, and hurling of insults—nervous verbal pyrotechnics. "It's freezing in here/ but warm/ where you walk." Poems, of course, walk on their feet, and their syllable-to-syllable snappy pleasures shore up these malevolent ruins. It's this kind of verbal resiliency, what to say when you're cornered, when your mouth is taped shut, or when it's not even your own mouth, that this book attests to over and over. Just as the self is a shifting and ghostly construct that keeps coming back like a zombie, culture, even if it's rotten and empty, will have its say. It's made of words, and we have no other ones to speak with, even if the speaking brutalizes us. From "Waist Band":

the old stories are always
grabbing for the mike ...
not enough wriggle room left in myth?
tragedy?—it's got us by the short hairs
even when you stuff your ears with straw
put your eyes out with a poker
or ironize your postmodern condition
the screaming river will find
a path through your open mouth

Language demands its airtime and the poet must capitulate. Given this tense and nasty situation, the demonic malevolence that is released when the subject can no longer walk the tightrope between going on and not going on is not surprising. From "Bad Infinity":

I followed the dead woman to a filling station
in the middle of nowhere
she squeezed out a vocoder peter lorre voice
to the attendant leaning against a pump
"I've been trying to . . . to finally disappear forever
but I . . . I find myself caught in this . . .
embarrassing orbit of old movies"
"welcome to sim-city" the gas jockey pointed
to the all night lights flickering in the artificial desert
"no subjective experience left here my dear
only replicants androids decoys miniature
models
copies clones and cyborgs"
"in that case" she sneered "fill 'er up"
he stuck the nozzle down her open face hole
and let the gas flow

The unbelievable violence of the image is

not gratuitous. When you give up your voice and your right to speak, then you are accepting the gas of totalitarianism and big money. The knowledge that the stakes are this high gives these poems a kind of moral conviction associated, ironically enough, with a recognizable "poetic voice."

However, despite the dark vision, one never feels weighed down. Au contraire, *Savoir-Fear* is continuously generous and fresh; every stanza offers a twist or punchline or new thought to savor. This poet-dramatist is aware of his audience and is making an effort to keep them in their seats. Language poetry thinks it's attractive because it's more "correct" or more "revolutionary" or "better," whereas it's influential really because it's so infectious. Bruce Andrews's work, for example, is justified insofar as it is funny. All those nasty consonants and juxtapositions are hilarious and freeing and train the ear not to accept the less freeing. However, how far forward they move the cause of social justice is incidental. In fact, long since anthologized and taught, such sectarianism, as Borkhuis knows, is now another tributary of the "screaming river" that flows through the pasteboard mouth of the undead poet.

Joe Elliot's book, *Opposable Thumb*, is forthcoming sometime this year from Subpress.

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RENEE GLADMAN
THE ACTIVIST
Krupskaya, 2003, \$11

In *The Activist*, Gladman offers a series of short and crisply written prose sections all focused around the notion of activism, some clearly attached to current politics. As she does so, she asks questions about the nature of an event, about our processes for determining reality and truth, and about the relation of the personal to the political.

Every time you feel you have a handle on *The Activist*, Gladman shifts the book's terms slightly. The first section, "Tour," explores a reporter's attempts to make sense of activism, attempts that have led to her being implicated in an attempt to enfeeble the social security system. Yet, the reporter quickly drops out as an overt presence, only explicitly reappearing 100 pages later.

The sections following develop a critique of power and government that seems extremely relevant to our current political climate. "Top of the Hour" offers a series of journalistic reports on the collapse of a bridge—a bridge that may still be intact or may never have been there in the first place. In "The Bridge," these reports continue, with the government taking a more frenzied role, storming the houses of people with names close to that of a man rumored to be an activist leader, desperately looking for a scapegoat. Power takes its darkest manifestation in the real or partially imagined tortures found in "The State."

At this stage, one might see the book as a scathing critique of so-called "anti-terrorism" practices. Yet the focus shifts to the activists themselves, portrayed as human and vexed, constantly positioning themselves in regard to one another and self-policing their words to make sure they say the correct things. There is "a language they fall into when they are together, that they do not know on their own." One activist "begins to panic that he has said something to the group without having first approved its release...." As the radicals plan, their stolen map seems to transform before them, reality and representation in an odd flux, and some of them begin to wonder if they are in fact walking into a trap.

The largest shift occurs in the last part when the group's "plan to protest globalization in a coherent circle around the towers is ineffectual without the towers, which were destroyed earlier today." In a public meeting, the activists struggle to maintain cohesiveness, as well as figuring out where to go next and how to respond as activists in the face of terrorism. And we have moved as well, from the realm of uncertain, virtual event—was the bridge destroyed or not, and was there ever a bridge in the first place?—to a realm where reality is

brutal and indisputable, what Baudrillard refers to as "the absolute, irrevocable event." As an activist named Stefani suggests, "The towers were destroyed and there is no news to otherwise disclaim this fact."

The brilliance of this book comes in the multiplicity of response it demands of a reader. One could read the progression of the book as linear, with events accumulating in, or perhaps better put, displaced by the collapse of the towers. Yet, when one first begins to read, early sections such as "Top of the Hour," "The Bridge," and "The State" are so relevant to the repressive aspects of current politics that one feels in the present. As a result, the two final sections seem in some ways prior to what has come before. In that sense, the book can be seen as circular, with contingent, virtual events being replaced by irrevocable events, and with the irrevocable events of terrorism causing overreaction, fear, and political panic in regard to activism. How, Gladman's book asks, in the face of terrorism and government repression, can we help activism hold itself together and remain strong and active and vocal in a way that will continue to facilitate change? Yet, this is complicated in intriguing and beautiful ways by Gladman's play with voice and language, by the fragmented relationship of her sections.

Add to that complexity the care with which Gladman treats the relations between individual activists and the sense that "Everyone uses one's body for escape. A few with complete sincerity" and one develops an elaborate sense of political relations and human relationships. Gladman's *The Activist* is a wonderfully complex and satisfying narrative.

Brian Evenson teaches at Brown University and is the author of six books of fiction, most recently Dark Property (Black Square).

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE:
EXPERIMENT IN ART
EDITED BY VINCENT KATZ

MIT Press and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2003, \$75

Discussions of Black Mountain College always entail a reverent listing of illustrious faculty: de Kooning, Kline, Twombly, Rauschenberg, Motherwell, Greenberg in painting; Siskind and Callahan in photography; Cage, Harrison, and Wolpe in music; Cunningham in dance; Olson, Creeley, and Wieners in literature. The comprehensive catalogue of names that comprises Vincent Katz's 200+ page essay functions as a Theogony of American Modernism, rivaling Hesiod in its broad sweep. A new world was born, and gods usually do come to the mountains for confabulations, and despite the enduring American distaste for them, some-

times great art happens in schools.

BMC embodied enough contradictions to ensure that it remains an occulted bit of history: it was a school, but one founded expressly to subvert pedagogical hierarchies; it was a magnet for prestigious artists, but always on the verge of financial collapse; it was an outpost of cosmopolitan Modernism in the Appalachian wilderness; it was a collective sometimes overwhelmed by dominating personalities. Therefore it is appropriate that this gorgeously illustrated book contain essays by four authors—including a personal recollection by Robert Creeley—each evoking a multidimensional world from a different angle.

Katz (who curated the Black Mountain exhibition in Madrid's Reina Sofia last year) wrote the grand survey that stands as the centerpiece. In attempting to do justice to BMC's vitality, he focuses not only on the major deities but allots generous space to minor ones as well. If Katz runs the risk of TMI (too much information) overload, it's a risk well taken. There is a force at large, at least in the literary world, that constantly seeks to consolidate consensus and weed out surplus "marginal" figures. Katz never lets us forget that the focus here is on a social space in which relationships were forged—what an emphasis on "experimentation" entails, after all.

Subsequent essays narrow the scope and capture the essence of the music and literature programs, respectively. Kevin Power's essay "In, Around and About The Black Mountain Review: Robert Creeley and Company" contains a useful summary of the contents of all seven issues of *Black Mountain Review* and gives us a glimpse of what was at stake: William Carlos Williams' legacy, "American" diction, elective affinities, Olsonian "archeology" versus San Francisco "wisdom." Creeley also contributes a short memoir of Olson. Three previously unpublished poems by Olson, Creeley, and the sublime Wieners close the book.

The memoir and poems are powerful testimony to the quality of the affection that existed among and between the personalities at play. What a rare privilege to have one's most important friendships forged alongside events that just happened to become cultural milestones: Buckminster Fuller erecting a Dymaxion Dome with Venetian blinds; the staging of the first Happening, Cage's "Theater Piece #1"; the performance of a Satie play with direction by Arthur Penn, stage sets by de Kooning, dance by Cunningham and music by Cage. The names and lists keep recurring because they are our litany; it's our religion.

Ange Mlinko edited The Poetry Project Newsletter from 2000-02.

RON PADGETT
OKLAHOMA TOUGH

University of Oklahoma Press, 2003, \$29.95.

Before he became a member of the New York School, second generation, Ron Padgett was a leader of what John Ashbery once referred to as the "soi-disant Tulsa School." The Tulsa in which Padgett grew up was Baptist, strait-laced, and dry; selling alcohol was against the law. But many Oklahomans, whatever they might pretend in public, enjoyed their liquor. Drinking wet and voting dry, it was called. There was money to be made in making runs to Missouri, where liquor was legal, and smuggling it back into Tulsa. As Tulsa's acknowledged King of the Booleggers, Padgett's father made a lot of those runs.

A member of what was dubbed the "Dixie Mafia" (there was no connection with the Italian original), Wayne Padgett was a larger-than-life character: quick with his fists and capable of pulling a gun on anyone who tried to welsch on a debt. But there was a Robin Hood side to him as well: courteous, outgoing, and generous with friends in trouble.

Padgett has written about his father before: "Bloodwork," the title essay in a collection of Padgett's prose, dealt with his father's death. Padgett's first extended memoir, however, was *Ted*, a short book about Ted Berrigan. In 113 vignettes, ranging in length from one sentence to three pages, Padgett presented scenes from his friendship with Berrigan, each one capturing the poet as in a scrapbook photo. *Oklahoma Tough* is different. In the introduction, Padgett speaks of his initial ambition to create "a book that would rise like a granite monument so massive that no one would ever forget him." But Padgett still has a small child's awe of his father, a fact that he acknowledges: "... I had begun this project as a biographer and ended it as a child. ..." If *Oklahoma Tough* is in the end less satisfying than *Ted*, it is because, to protect himself in the writing of it, Padgett left himself out of it as much as possible. Yet his story would be the more interesting one.

I mean, think about it. Eisenhower is in office, segregation is the order of the day, the fundamentalists rule the educational system, and here's little Ronnie Padgett, one generation off the farm, sitting in South Succotash reading modernist literature and starting a literary magazine (while still in high school!) that publishes Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Creeley. He has working-class parents who never went beyond high school. His father's preferred reading is *Field and Stream*, when the man reads at all. And yet there's no Tulsa-set version of *Sons and Lovers*. Apparently the two-fisted man's man of a father doesn't wonder what flying saucer dropped this boy off. He has no problems with his son's being a poet and does not even worry that Ronnie might be tutti-frutti.

Even Padgett, for all his comparative reticence about himself in *Oklahoma Tough*, feels compelled to mention the state of affairs: "the oddity of the larger situation dawned on me only years later: at one end of our house was the office of one of the biggest whiskey businesses in town, while at the other was the 'office' of an avant-garde literary magazine. Really, though, I was simply imitating my dad: I had my office desk, I operated a cottage industry, and I pursued a project that most people would have considered bizarre."

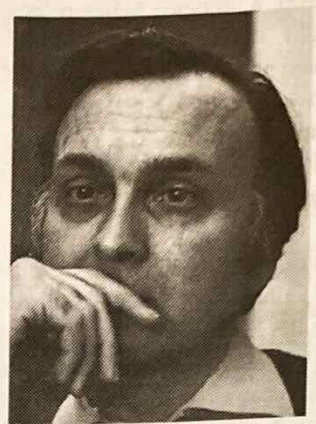
I think it's bizarre. *Oklahoma Tough* presents a vivid picture of the Oklahoma underworld, at least as much of it as Padgett was able to see as a child, and is fleshed out with the reminiscences of many of Wayne Padgett's friends and "business associates." It's a world both disturbing and oddly familiar: *The Andy Griffith Show* cut with *Thunder Road*. But the sense of disconnect between his background and what Padgett became is still too great. The truly fascinating book will come when Padgett gets around to writing his version of *One Writer's Beginnings*.

Reagan Upshaw's book of poems, *Upon a Time*, was published by 5+5 Gallery in 2003.

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ROSMARIE WALDROP
LOVE, LIKE PRONOUNS
Omnidawn, 2003, \$12.95

BLINDSIGHT
New Directions, 2003, \$15.95

There is a distance in the writing of Rosmarie Waldrop, a distance between language and thought that corresponds to a distance between the poem and the poet. The final poem of *Love, Like Pronouns* is a poignant example of this distance at its most effective. Obviously written after and around the events of September 11, this poem in four brief sections of aphoristically shaped bits of prose mourns both the initial events and the immediate, unthinking, nationalist response to them. "A hole is. A space for thought. We fill it with flags." "We can think away towers. We can think away mountains. Once they're gone we can't. Believe it. We're made to dream dreams of fear." "The distance between collapse and the image of collapse. Has a life of its own. And on an adverb we build war. 'Virtually assumed responsibility.' Someone has. It's said." This distance, everpresent in Waldrop's work, highlights the absurdity of recent international politics, of a war against language, against abstractions, that is nonetheless fought against "The people on whom we drop bombs and afterwards food?"

In an earlier section, "Blackwards" (the word taken from a translation by Keith Waldrop of

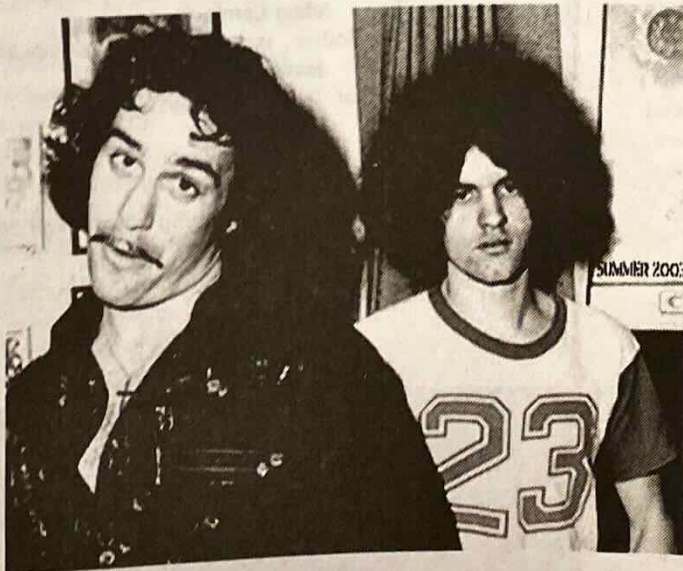
Claude Royet-Journoud), this distance surrounds a fascination with evolution and adaptation, with genetics and the forms of the bodies that have evolved, with the ways language is like our bodies, its/our gaps, anomalies. "Desperately conscious of the invisible we mistake legs for lonely, a hat for history. The contract stipulates a constant back and forth even if there are no travelers.... She lingers in her body. The chromosomes themselves undergo accidents. So agonized a sense of larger than. The contract stipulates drowning." The prose format allows this sort of looping, repetition, and variation (the essence of evolution), that Waldrop does so well. The solidity of the writing itself is in contrast with the ephemerality, the transitory nature of language. "For proper understanding use distance from language."

Waldrop's writing thrives on the structure of the prose poem, loose structure though it may be. She tends toward inclusivity, forcing connections through intention, through repetition, and through happenstance. Her verse swerves, varies, comes back to itself, and, within the confines of the prose box, delights in a very human quirkiness. I find this quirkiness more accessible in the prose poems, while in the conventional (i.e. line-broken) poems, the distance is sometimes overwhelming, the quirkiness lost.

Blindsight, composed entirely of prose poetry, is a delightful collection of intentional distur-

tion of word order, of punctuation that is used to punctuate, i.e. to accent (rather than strictly to delineate and separate thoughts). The words are charged, yet keep distance—between themselves, between themselves and the thoughts they point to, between themselves and their creator. "As when you say both Yes and No instead of music." There is a fascination in these poems with seeing and sight, with looking and light. The title (according to the back cover) is a term used to describe a condition in which a person actually sees more than he or she is consciously aware. These poems do the same, offering more than they appear to be. Light does more than illuminate, it is an active subject. Punctuation marks both separate and join. "The light falls. On. Like the eye. And lingers." The richness of Waldrop's language is such that "And." becomes a viable sentence. With this focus, this fascination with the language itself, comes a fascination with meaning. "When he leaves the room, he recaptures a memory called meaning. A matrix where a word is carried by a foreign language. Say 'th.' Say the whole word: 'death.' *The Box for Learning English by Yourself and Playing* is broken, the string to push the puppet's tongue between his teeth." There is a broadness, a spaciousness, that allows for conversation with the text, within the text, that allows for a peripheral playfulness, such as the permutation of "leaves and fishes" through "loaves and dishes" to "loves and wishes." Language

ECSTATIC PEACE POETRY JOURNAL #6



this issue's theme:

PUNK

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is this sort of permutation, a device we need to hold our thoughts, and we need to go beyond to understand them. If we listen closely, we all describe ourselves. Waldrop perhaps sums up what writing itself is in "Unaccountable Lapses" (part of the *Hölderlin Hybrids*). "And Dante said angels have no need of memory for they have continuous understanding. But we. To enter into thought. Need a bridge." Waldrop provides a challenging and effective bridge into poetic thought.

Laura Wright has two books forthcoming: *What I Should Have Said* (Potato Clock Editions) and *Part of the Design* (Meeting Eyes Bindery).

LYN HEJINIAN THE FATALIST

Omnidawn, 2003, \$12.95

MY LIFE IN THE NINETIES

Shark Books, 2003, \$12

Are we locked into the present? Are we locked out of it? Have we begun? These are not interview questions nor stopping points nor would answers add to the pleasure of being able to answer.

The Fatalist, one of the latest volumes from the prolific Lyn Hejinian, makes a point of asking more questions than it answers while at the same time asserting the value of the questioning process itself. It is not so much a quest for absolute truths as a good-natured, if weighty, exploration of consciousness. While at times this book evokes the spirit of other authors—for instance, John Ashbery's long, elliptical lines and pithy humor—and name-checks thinkers ranging from Denis Diderot to Lorine Niedecker, it most resembles Hejinian's own body of work, especially the subversively autobiographical strain that runs through *My Life* to more recent texts such as *A Border Comedy*.

In *The Fatalist*, Hejinian approaches, again and again, the concept of gleaning meaning from experience. She approaches it from multiple angles, replicating our attempts to assign significance to our exterior environments even as we seek to master our interior thoughts as well. Along the way, she offers prescriptive advice about writing, sometimes to what seems a writing workshop, and sometimes possibly to herself in a self-reflexive act of composition ("Delete this, delete the whole nest of clichés and discover/ what's at stake and for whom.").

While such passages are often good fun, they also continue Hejinian's career-long consideration of process and its relationship to notions of an ever-shifting self. The tension between assigning patterns to seemingly random expe-

rience and alternately wanting to replicate the mayhem around us is one of *The Fatalist's* primary threads. The text challenges the reader to accept both possibilities simultaneously:

The cosmos written in my calendar can
be tenderly regarded
but play, at least in art, should dare more,
it should create
chaos.

Also new from Hejinian is *My Life in the Nineties*, billed as a continuation of *My Life*, which is now such a touchstone of experimental writing that it is excerpted in the *Norton Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*. The original 1980 Burning Deck edition, written when its author was 37, contained 37 unnumbered sections; the 1987 Sun & Moon edition added eight new sections as well as eight new sentences to each of the previous sections to represent the author's age, 45, at the time of its revision.

This time, Hejinian has generated 10 new sections, presumably to represent the 10 years of the decade mentioned in the title. Hejinian writes, "For experimentation here augment,/ insert, extend," and several of the most familiar phrases from *My Life* are indeed inserted here, providing the most obvious sense of connection between the projects. "As for we who love to be astonished" is woven into the first section, and "(t)he obvious analogy is with music" makes an appearance further along. That said, those moments seem more like (ironic?) homage rather than true engagement with the earlier text(s), and *My Life* in the *Nineties* feels closer in some ways to Hejinian's more recent work, even if it resembles *My Life* on the page. For instance, *Nineties* shares *The Fatalist's* preoccupation with the writing life and with various narrative structures ranging from fairy tales to detective fiction to literary criticism, and both texts make a habit of detailing commonplace interactions with friends and acquaintances. While it would be fair to ask why it was ultimately necessary to revisit *My Life* in this new work, *Nineties* does highlight the continuity of Hejinian's poetic project over the last two decades.

In *Nineties*, Hejinian writes, "Who we/ are—it is only partly revealed in the/ patterns of our lives—something/ remains hidden in our intentions." While *The Fatalist* and *Nineties* feature Hejinian's by-now-trademarked narrative elisions, shifting from a half-completed philosophical statement to a description of mundane physical surroundings in the blink of a winking eye, both are unashamedly readable. As in her other segmented or sequential works, the microcosmic pieces are engaging, but the power of the books is ultimately cumulative; as they move forward, the structures of the books, be it *The Fatalist's* relative-

ly open lines or the justified margins of *Nineties*, allow space for both recurring thematic inquiries and unexpected interruptions and asides. As Hejinian writes in *The Fatalist*:

Who knows? A poem
full of ruptures could be one from which
all kinds of things are flying.

—Chris McCreary is the author of *The Effacements* (Singing Horse) and co-editor of *ixnay press*.

DAVID SHAPIRO A BURNING INTERIOR

The Overlook Press, 2002, \$24.95

In "On a Tennis Court," David Shapiro writes, "Playing without a net's/ not such a bad idea." In tennis, the net is like a barrier between players. It is what defines boundaries, what allows for competition, where a player needs to aim. In *A Burning Interior*, Shapiro's newest collection of poetry, there is no need for a net. The poems volley from page to page, creating a court of interactions all their own. As Kenneth Koch says in *The Art of Poetry*, "the sooner you find your own style the better off you will be." Shapiro found his style long ago (at age 13), but in *A Burning Interior*, he continues to expand upon it by demonstrating the vast arena his style(s) can consume.

The book begins with the title poem, dedicated to the memory of the architect John Hejduk. *A Burning Interior* is itself a unique piece of architecture, comprised of poems of varied forms and voices, ranging from psalm to footnotes to rhymed couplets. In "Semiology and Architecture," Charles Jencks writes, "When one sees an architecture which has been created with equal concern for form, function and technique, this ambiguity or tension creates a multivalent experience where one oscillates from meaning to meaning always finding further justification and depth." This poem begins "of a copy of nothing/ or more precisely a series/ of Xerox sketches," and leaves the reader feeling as though he/ she has just witnessed the drawing of a blueprint. As the poem progresses, from part to part, this building grows and develops, from image to image, meaning to meaning. The reader witnesses "the first mistranslations," "the new poem, the winter flower," "the interruption/ of this fragile art."

It is these tensions between images, between memory and musings, which propel the reader through the rest of the collection. There is an inherent concern for both "form and function" present in all the poems. In "The Car in a Maze" (a poem co-authored with his son, Daniel), Shapiro writes, "I like to get lost in my house," and at the same time, he enables the reader to get lost in his words and to "oscillate" between what one

sees through word choice, as well as appreciate the craft of the poems themselves and the wide span of subject matter Shapiro conquers and treks through. There are playful Disney references in poems like "In Memory of Goofy," where Shapiro writes, "And everyone is guilty of perspective," juxtaposed with more formal pieces like "Wild Sonnet," where Shapiro writes, "the pronoun in its cell/ becomes the healthiest one." Shapiro is able to mediate between acknowledgments of perspective and reveling in the ideas of the poems themselves. There is a consistent flux from "meaning to meaning," from an interior world to an exterior awareness.

It is rare for me to read a collection of poetry from cover to cover. This is not a negative thing. I just like to skip around. But I was able to do this with *A Burning Interior*. Once I read the first poem, I kept going, even if it meant that I had to give up randomness for the chronological. It was like I was watching the construction of a landmark or the last set of a tied tennis match. One of the last poems in the book, "Weequahic Park in the Dark," seemed to articulate my exact feelings about all the poems prior to it. Referring to Joe Ceravolo, Shapiro writes, "I see the words around the emotion/ then I write them down—/ it was your system of the spiderweb." In this book, Shapiro is able to mix art

with music with syllabics, and in the end creates a multi-layered collection that repays a thorough reading.

Erica Kaufman is the co-curator of Belladonna.*

ZHANG ER
CARVED WATER
Tinfish Press, 2003, \$8

The first striking aspect of Zhang Er's newest chapbook (translated from the Chinese by Bob Holman) is the utter delicacy of the tall, slender volume. Its gray-blue cover is the texture of a watercolor; it feels and looks as if Anne Sakutori, the book's designer, hand-washed each chapbook with the precise variations of blue that rivers and oceans achieve as the sun slips behind clouds. This visual delicacy shoots through the book via Sakutori's interior artwork (suggestive of maps or aerial views of river, estuary, and city) and by the arrangement of Er's poems, which are mostly centered, scaling and scrolling down long, pale pages.

The second striking aspect of *Carved Water* comes, naturally, with the reading of it. Whether she is contending with the social and the political, or with the perceptual and the metaphysical, Er's work is every bit as delicate as the volume's design, and every bit as strong as the thick, metal staples that bind its fine paper. The success of this paradoxical con-

junction of delicacy and strength is evident in such moments as the movement that begins the poem, "Bridge Under Construction":

When two points join, the suspense will be over.
 Now colorful flags blow! Bridge probes the bottomless heart of the river. Will it make it to the other side?
 Maybe it just spreads its wide shoulders, lets the boats glide under, no visible wake. Birds above, naturally. Immovable mountain embraces huts, houses, highrises.

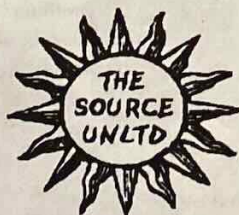
This poem's particular conjunction of delicacy and strength is bound within the image of "the bridge": its spindly convections of steel hold tons of weight above the vortex of the river. And the phrase "huts, houses, highrises" embodies this conjunction of delicacy and strength as Er directs our imagination from thick thatched roofs to tall and elegant towers of glass. The irony involved in the strength of the impossible skyscraper and the vulnerability of a hut's sturdy looking walls is not lost by the mountain's embrace, rather it is made part and parcel of the landscape traversed by the bridge.

The chapbook's title, *Carved Water*, and the river journey and river imagery Er traces

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throughout the work speak to the inevitability of such paradoxical conjunctions and send us beyond the mere juxtaposition of “delicacy” and “strength” into the very heart of paradox itself. The notion of “carved water” is, itself, a paradox, for the act of carving pre-supposes a material that is static, a material like marble that can be mastered and rendered into representational images. Water, obviously, is not static and is contained only to flood its barriers or to seep back into the ground without a trace. Yet, water carves out the land as it rushes towards oceans and crashes upon the shore: these formative forces are evident in the history of such mighty rivers as the Yangtze, which is the central water-body of Er’s work. And just as the Yangtze has carved a riverbed through China, it has carved the port cities that Er writes of, and the people who live in them. Yet as humanity’s technological prowess has increased, bridges, ports, and locks (all present in Er’s landscape) have carved out the river’s way, literally carving water into the form and velocity most useful for our inhabitation of the land.

Although evident throughout the work, this tension between fluidity and stasis, delicacy and strength, is most spectacularly rendered in the two poems identically titled “Plastic Flowers in the Porthole” that face each other at the very center of the chapbook. These poems, a note tells us, are “Dueling Versions”: they are nearly identical in concept and subject matter but are made radically different by subtle variations in syntax, word choice, and line break. With the notion of “Dueling Versions,” the poet and her translator explicitly bring the fluidity of water, and the harbors that carve it into a manageable stasis, into the realm of language. Language and experience, like water, are always in flux and it is the well-lamented (and celebrated) “burden” of the poet to render this flux in the (semi)-static medium of language. In the two “versions” of “Plastic Flowers in the Porthole” we witness the capacity of language to “capture” a particular moment by crystallizing it into imagery and word while, at the same time, miraculously becoming part of the moment, joining and extending its breath and flow.

Karla Kelsey is the associate editor of the Denver Quarterly.

A RECENT ROUNDUP

Having published numerous poetry reviews in the few years since I began writing them, I can say with some empirical assurance—reviewing books of poetry is a labor of love. Obviously, it is also a labor which I love, and

which had me so intrigued by Greg Fuchs’s suggestion, in a recent letter to the editor, for the inclusion of mini-reviews in the Newsletter. Although impossible to give a book its due in a few sentences, I hope these reviews will at least draw some additional and well-deserved attention to the following works.

Clocking in at just over 30 pages, **Kit Robinson’s** *9:45* (Post-Apollo, 2003, \$10) is an exploration of the mundane but ubiquitous role numbers play in our lives. From license plates and receipts to dates, dimensions, and digital readouts, each of these small poems takes a particular number for its title and proceeds to create an often witty, always human presence around the endless data stream of daily existence. Speaking of small poems, **Graham Foust’s** *As in Every Deafness* (Flood Editions, 2003, \$13) is a veritable echo chamber of diminutive yet somehow expansive utterances. All of the poems seem to stem from a voice inclined toward erasure—toward questioning its own existence. By turns dark, resonant, and strangely humorous, these poems think themselves both in and out of the void. One would be hard-pressed to find much of anything left out of the tour de force that is **Stephen Ratcliffe’s** *Portraits & Repetition* (Post-Apollo, 2002, \$14). This near 500-page mammoth daybook, composed between February of ’98 & May of ’99, charts the poet’s weaving together of empirical perception and the intellect through which it is passed and ultimately transformed. There is a quiet, subtle movement to the uniform five couplets which make up each of these poems. On the noisier side of things, **Laura Solomon’s** *Bwouac* (Slope Editions, 2002, \$12.95) is a bombastically exuberant debut, flirting with the detritus of revolutionary political movements as often as it does with the conundrum of love. Charged with an adjectival reverence for language, the poems here are quick, playful and often poignant. Another debut of note, **Li Bloom’s** *Radish* (iUniverse, 2003, \$12.95) manages to evoke crisp images and a clear emotional register through a cornucopia of tonal shifts and syntactic sleight-of-hand. This book literally oozes with fun, a rarity these days. To turn the calendar back a few decades, the first complete translation of **Tomaz Salamun’s** *Poker* (Ugly Duckling, 2003, \$10), his 1966 debut—translated here by Joshua Beckman and the author—restores the sequential structuring to many of these poems, which previously appeared only in part, and always out of context, in the various selected editions of his work. The beautiful letter-pressed cover lends the book a tactile dimension that parallels the way in

which the wonderfully mystical, synaesthetic, and visionary poems of this book make a strange yet immediate sense. **George Kalamaras’s** *Borders My Bent Toward* (Pavement Saw, 2003, \$12) and **Eric Baus’s** *The To Sound* (Verse, 2004, \$12) share more than the open-ended syntax of their titles. Dense, multi-layered and wholly original, the books are wedded together by both an epistolary collaboration and their collective reinvigoration of the surrealist tradition. With an eye toward the anthropomorphic use of articles, prepositions and entire phrases, Baus and Kalamaras have created poems which enact the paradox of a narrative lyric—part sounding boards, half stories. Also focused on alternate uses of narrative, **Goffrey Dyer’s** *The Dirty Halo of Everything* (Krupskaya, 2003, \$11) unfolds a musical dream world, where travel logs, late night talks, and enigmatic characters are taken through a philosophically spiritual sense of interconnection. Mostly in prose, the poems here gesture both toward and out of events, which include angels as often as they do the more earthly delights of biscuits, cornstalks and roadside oddities. Another book of prose poems, **Eileen R. Tabios’s** *Reproductions of the Empty Flagpole* (Marsh Hawk, 2002, \$12.95) is able to narrate the political implications of place and identity without giving up the desirous, inquisitive or uncertain nature of human interactions. From Greece to Nepal, New York to the Mindanao Sea, the multiple paragraphs of these poems consistently demonstrate a devotion to the life of the pronouns which people them. **Leslie Scalapino’s** *It’s go in / quiet illumined grass / land* (Post-Apollo, 2002, \$12), written in collaboration with the sculptural work of **Petah Coyne**, articulates a perpetual yet shifty present, inhabiting the landscape that it proposes. This single extended poem somehow allows for the reconceptualization of poetry as a spatial art rather than one of duration. Also steeped in the visual arts, **Shin Yu Pai’s** *Equivalence* (La Alameda, 2003, \$14), her first book, takes the more traditional route of ekphrasis. The careful and clear poems map a cross-cultural engagement with numerous works, figures and histories related to the art world, while simultaneously maintaining a personal, meditative tone. **Diane Wald’s** *The Yellow Hotel* (Verse, 2002, \$12) is subtly and completely its own thing: quiet, personable and unpretentious. Her almost awkwardly elongated lines, which carry a confident, conversational voice, work to infuse the domestic sphere with a real, solipsistic-free sense of emotion.

Noah Eli Gordon is the author of *The Frequencies* (Tougher Disguises, 2003).

BOOKS RECEIVED

BOOKS AND CDS

ADVENTURES WHILE PREACHING
THE GOSPEL OF BEAUTY

Joshua Beckman and Matthew Rohrer
Verse Press, CD, \$10

COMPLETE POEMS

Basil Bunting
New Directions, \$16.95, 256 pgs.

I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING

Fran Carlen
Adventures in Poetry, \$12.50, 117 pgs.

ORDER OF THE ORDINARY

Joe Francis Doerr
Salt Publishing, \$13.95, 137 pgs.

GERTRUDE STEIN: THE LAN-
GUAGE THAT RISES, 1923-1934

Ulla E. Dydo with William Rice
Northwestern University Press,
\$49.95, 686 pgs.

SCREAMING MONKEYS: CRITIQUES
OF ASIAN AMERICAN IMAGES

M. Evelina Galang, Ed.
Coffee House Press, \$22, 517 pgs.

POETICAL DICTIONARY (ABRIDGED)

Lohren Green
Atelos, \$12.95, 94 pgs.

CREATURE

Jerry Harp
Salt Publishing, \$13.95, 98 pgs.

MANHATTAN SONNETS

Lynne Hjelmgaard
Redbeck Press, £6.75, 51 pg.

BLUE ROADS

Peter Hughes
Salt Publishing, \$13.95, 111 pgs.

A NOMAD POETICS: ESSAYS

Pierre Joris
Wesleyan U. Press, \$17.95, 176 pgs.

MIRAGE: A POEM IN 22 SECTIONS

Basil King

Marsh Hawk Press, \$15

ROUGE STATE

Rodney Koeneke
Pavement Saw, \$12

GO FIGURE

Drew Milne
Salt Publishing, \$13.95, 113 pgs.

DEER HEAD NATION

K. Silem Mohammad
Tougher Disguises, \$12, 120 pgs.

SMOKING LOVELY

Willie Perdomo
Rattapallax Press, \$12, 70 pgs.
plus CD.

SPEAK TO ME: ESSAYS ON
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
INDIAN POETRY

Dean Rader & Janice Gould, Eds.
The U. of Arizona Press, 294 pgs.

SEE THROUGH

Frances Richard
Four Way Books, \$14.95, 83 pgs.

BEFORE, DURING & AFTER

Hal Sirowitz
Soft Skull Press, \$13, 124 pgs.

STUDIO MOON

John Tranter
Salt Publishing, 114 pgs.

LIGHTS OUT

Geoffrey Young
The Figures, \$15, 171 pgs.

MAGAZINES

CIRCUMFERENCE: POETRY IN
TRANSLATION 1

www.circumferencemag.com.
Translations by Ron Padgett and
Bill Zavatsky, and others. \$10 for
one issue; \$15 for two.

HANGING LOOSE 83

Edited by Robert Hershon, Dick
Lourie, Mark Pawlak, and Ron
Schreiber, \$7.

THE POKER

Edited by Daniel Bouchard, P.O.
Box 390408, Cambridge, MA 02139,
Fanny Howe, Kevin Davies, and oth-
ers. \$10 for one issue; \$18 for two.

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Edited by Susan Landers, 128
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Harryman, Corina Copp, Brenda
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Baraka, Tracie Morris, and others.
\$18 for two issues.

TINY PRESSES

INNERVISIONS

Noel Black
Blue Press, 386 Madeline Court,
Palo Alto, CA 94306, \$5.
Chapbook.

MY UNDERSTANDING

Stephen Clair
Pressed Wafer, 9 Columbus Square,
Boston, MA 02116, \$5. Saddle-
stapled chapbook.

LATERAL ARGUMENT

Kevin Davies
Barretta Books, barrettabooks.com.
Limited edition of 250 letter-
pressed chapbooks.

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Eileen Hennessy
Island Books, 551 Fifth Ave., Suite
720, New York, NY 10176. Edition
of 200, cover by Win Knowlton.

TEACHER TRAINING

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AERIAL VIEW INDIA

Barbara Henning
Long News, 158 E, 7th St., BA5,
New York, NY 10009. Three edi-
tions of 108, signed and numbered.

FIFTEEN FLEAS

Michael McClure
Nijinsky Suicide Health Club, 437
E. 12th St., #18, New York, NY
10009. Edition of 125 copies.

DAYBOOKS

Jonas Mekas, trans. by Vyt Bakaitis

Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 596
Bergen St., Brooklyn, NY 11238,
\$6. Chapbook.

RADIO BEACH

Kevin Opstedal
Pelican Press, P.O. Box 5640, San
Mateo, CA 94402, \$5. Chapbook.

THE OTHER KIND OF VERTIGO

Richard Roundy
Barretta Books, barrettabooks.com.
Limited edition of 250 letter-
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SEEN (UNSEEN)

Unbelievable Alligator Press, c/o
David Cameron, 417 Prospect
Place, Brooklyn, NY 11238. Work
from Anne Waldman's workshop at
the Poetry Project in fall 2002.

STATITICIANS

Christopher Mattison
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs &
Other Publications, 596 Bergen St.,
Brooklyn, NY 11238, 20 pgs., \$6.
Chapbook

SELVÁTICA: AN ALMANAC FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Joe Richey
Selva Editions, 2737 Kalmia Ave.,
Boulder, CO 80304, \$6.95.
An "almanac that charts the move-
ment of durable facts through a
slice of time."

GAM 1

Edited by Stacy Szymaszek, \$2,
142 E. Corcordia, Milwaukee, WI
53212, "A biannual survey of
Great Lakes writing."

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Brian Kim Stefans
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs &
Other Publications, 596 Bergen
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Guy Birchard
Pressed Wafer, 9 Columbus Square,
Boston, MA 02116, \$5. Saddle-
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Michael Rothenberg
Blue Press, 386 Madeline Court,
Palo Alto, CA 94306, \$5.

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