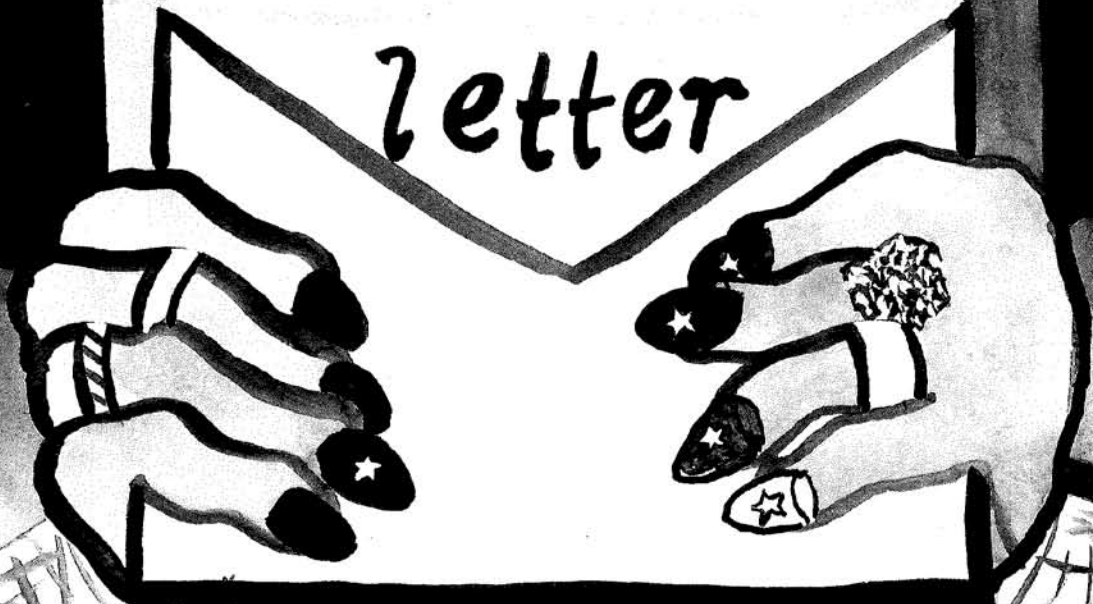


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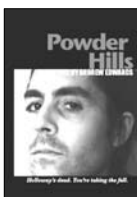
UNCENSORED SONGS: A SAM ABRAMS TRIBUTE, ed. John Roche (Spuyten Duyvil). ISBN 13: 978-1-933132-55-6. Paper, 83pp., \$12. Contributions from Baraka, Waldman, Sanders, Kupferberg, Codrescu, Holman, Stephens, many others.



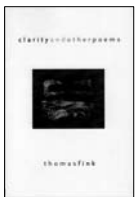
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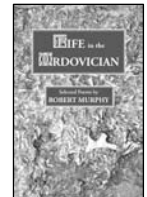


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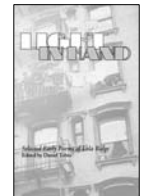


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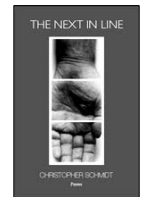
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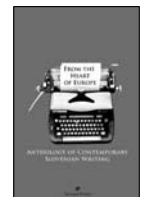
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THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#215 APRIL-JUNE 2008

NEWSLETTER EDITOR John Coletti

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Poetry Project will be holding our 3rd silent art auction/book sale this spring.

The date to mark on your calendar is Saturday, May 24th, from 2-7pm in the Sanctuary. The event is a fundraiser for the Project's programming as well as an opportunity for the community to celebrate spring and the near-end of a very rewarding season of readings, workshops, and publications. Aside from good company, this auction event boasts provocative performances throughout the day, book tables (rare and new) with various other tempting ephemera for sale, and snacks and drinks on the balcony. The work available for bidding will be displayed in 10 custom-crafted display cases—and you never know who you will brush elbows with in the bidding alley. Last auction I had a war with a certain bidder #6 for a Jimbo Blachly/Lytle Shaw collaboration that now hangs in my home. Yes.

Our past two auctions, in 2004 and 2006, were by all accounts fine times and, importantly, successful fundraisers. Part of what makes this auction unique is the congenial environment along with the fact that there is a good amount of work made accessible to people who typically can't afford to purchase art. We will have a wide array of books, broadsides, collages, drawings, magazines, photographs, poems, prints, and other goods generously donated by a large number of artists, writers, and Poetry Project community members available. Opening bids have ranged from \$50 to \$2500. There will be a \$15 admission at the door. Once you are in, you will be regaled by performances by Bruce Andrews and Sally Silvers, Legends (Elizabeth Reddin, Raquel Vogl, and James Loman), Franklin Bruno, and several other distinguished guests. No pressure to bid or buy, though we do hope you'll check everything out.

As we go to press we have some items and commitment of items in hand, and we are expecting a lot more to follow. We are in the process of developing an auction items list on our website so please check www.poetryproject.com in early April for the descriptions, and then keep checking for regular updates. You should also feel free to call or email the office for more information. For interested

out-of-towners, we will take bids during the week leading up to the auction. We will be accepting payments via cash, check, and credit card. And remember that every dollar is used to keep the Poetry Project stable amidst ever increasing operating costs.

It feels odd to be thinking summarily in February, but I do want to say that my 1st year as Artistic Director, in terms of curating, which is now a done deal for season 42, has provided me with new challenges and profound pleasure. Thank you to those who read here September 2007–June 2008 and all who came to listen so carefully.

- Stacy Szymaszek

NOW, THE AUCTION

Artwork by: George Schneeman, Will Yackulic, Zachary Wollard, Erica Svec, James Franklin, Anne Waldman, Rackstraw Downes, Christopher Warrington, Beka Goedde, Star Black, Brenda Iijima, Mimi Gross, Jim Behrle, Etel Adnan, Simone Fattal, Jonathan Allen, Susan Bee, David Shapiro, and more to come.

Books, Broadsides & Other by: Ron Padgett, Andrei Codrescu, Ed Ruscha, Ed Bowes, Kyle Schlesinger/Cuneiform Press, Ken Mikolowski/Alternative Press, Ted Greenwald, Robert Creeley, Bill Berkson, Jo Ann Wasserman, Gillian McCain, Legs McNeil, Jack Spicer, Henri Chopin, Anne Sexton, Yoko Ono, Dave Morice, Anne Waldman, William S. Burroughs, Tony Towle, Lewis Warsh/United Artists, Charles North, Jack Kerouac, Hannah Weiner, Fielding Dawson, Jim Dine, Rudy Burckhardt, Simon Pettet, Steve Carey, Charles Reznikoff, Lydia Davis, Lee Friedlander, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and more to come.

Some particularly sexy items: a Portfolio of Ten Original Flyers from the Friday Night Series 1991-1994, EGO: The Group Therapy Card Game, "Iggy Pop at Max's Kansas City, August 1973" (original B&W photo 16" x 20") taken by Danny Fields, and an array of rare poetry mags. Rumors continue about some kind of frankenpoet lab in the basement with Project staff DNA but I haven't pulled the right candelabrum yet. We'll see what other oddities we can

drag up. That Virgin Mary grilled cheese went for \$28,000 on E-Bay after all. If anyone sees Joel Oppenheimer's visage in their toast let us know.

NOW, DIG THIS METHOD AIR

Four issues, one year, and "History becomes legend. Legend becomes myth. And then there are none left who truly remember...." I've become fantasy flicks after the year's final Newsletter. 1987's non-classics sung beneath nostrils released to the unwild. My room's almost clean. Stacks of books wink at me upon a rickety glass table saying, "April, May, June, July?" No. No. No? (Oh yes. Yes. Yes.) I see pushups before me. Bok choy stretching in a deep silver bowl. Molly by evening. Pen, paper, lemonade, and salt-covered caramels. I see rereading issues 212, 213, 214, and 215 without visions of 216 prancing in my lead. All good things for summertime. Giant love to my village of support-readers (especially DH, EN, CC, AB, SS, CF, and AQ) and ALL contributors! Stay cool. Don't change. See you in Mrs. Pothetes' class next September. It looks blue and warm somewhere. Cilantro in it. I will now go into reverse hibernation.

- John Coletti

WILL ALEXANDER

As many of our readers know, Will Alexander has been seriously ill and is recovering from a recent surgery. Please continue to support his recovery by sending your contribution check and notes of encouragement and love to Will Alexander or Sheila Scott-Wilkinson at 400 South Lafayette Park Place, #307, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

READING REPORTS

Anna Joy Springer & Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi,
The Poetry Project, February 1, 2008

The reading was an exceptionally intimate one, as both Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi and reading curator Corrine Fitzpatrick had previously studied with Anna Joy Springer on the West Coast. The two readers, though

quite different, both led the audience into tangled allegorical environments, beginning with Azie's fictional garden. Her prose work, read pensively, opened up a site of reflection, a world rooted in a woman's notebook, her dreams, and the lake in which she regards herself. In this garden, objects are only objects in relation to others. The protagonist's acute observations lead to doubt, and she hypothesizes that "without its shadow the nose cannot be certain that it exists." Naming becomes a complex project that requires continual fascination. Anna Joy Springer, who has performed as a singer in a few punk bands, started her reading by telling the audience what a "good-looking crowd" it was. Her work explored many themes similar to Azie's, and she presented her interrogations of individual and group consciousness as "for-ests" of tangled problems. In "The Forest of Myth and Stink," she imaginatively and poignantly explored relationships between body, text, and soil. The humor and intellectual force of her writing is exciting, and on a late Friday night, it rejuvenated those exhausted by the AWP crowds.

- Kareem Estefan

Landis Everson Memorial Reading, The Poetry Project, February 15, 2008

The first significant snowfall of winter was melting as eleven poets read, without interruption or introduction of each reader, from Berkeley Renaissance poet Landis Everson's work. Many of the night's readers ventured down from Boston, including the editors of Fulcrum, Philip Nikolayev and Katia Kapovich. Ethan Nosowsky, representing Graywolf Press, publisher of *Everything Preserved* (Everson's only book published in his lifetime) began the night appropriately with "Coronado Poet," whose first line is, "I am an old man who writes like the 40's." For an intense and intimate hour, listeners were transported to Everson's universe where "the sun is a far rabbit," "bombs drop on Shanghai movies," and "All those years without a Chinese poem / from the head of John Ashbery." Birds were present everywhere. Before reading "Poet's Pepper Tree," Jason Zuzga recalled Everson training blue jays to eat peanuts off the top of his head at his home in San Luis Obispo. Mark Schorr read "If The Question Is A Bird" from a copy he'd

handwritten on seed packets. Humor, both in Everson's work and through touching anecdotes, dotted the evening, as when Bill Berkson recounted his first meeting with Everson in the hospital just after Everson's first stroke. Everson wondered earnestly about all the scurrying nurses and doctors, remarking, "Are all of you in some sort of play?" Matt Henriksen, Mark Lamoreux, and Stacy Szymaszek paid tribute with distinctive readings of "A God," "D-Day at the Beach," and "When You Have A Rabbit." Ben Mazer, who inspired Everson to begin writing again and edited *Everything Preserved*, recounted Everson's life with a short biographical essay and closed the evening with "A Prism of Birds." Afterward friends sipped remnants of red wine and marveled at how Everson's poems could be read by everyone and still sound great, before stepping out into the cold. Lingered poets and friends decided pierogis, borscht, and Ukrainian beer would be a perfect way to end the night, so they wandered over to Veselka to begin a new day.

- Katy Henriksen

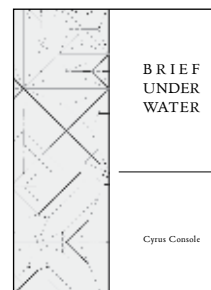
Burning Deck 2008

Cyrus Console: *Brief Under Water*

This first book is a sequence of 55 short passages that uses prose narrative as a design element in a larger lyric structure. The title refers to Kafka's 1919 *Brief an den Vater*, reflecting a struggle with the notion of literary inheritance.

"[The] manuscript is terrific...The sensory detail of the writing, not surrealistic, not plot-oriented, is not even with the sense of 'leading anywhere' but accumulating both detail and expansion at once, opening a floating, fascinating, sometimes apparently violent yet detached terrain, as if not the author's psyche...but the world itself... seen from at once extreme and mundane edges." —Leslie Scalapino

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Heather C. Akerberg *Dwelling*

Heather C. Akerberg: *Dwelling*

The poems of *Dwelling* investigate, musically and with "bended" syntax, the issue of form—in body, home, and poem. They ask questions like: Is a "home" a series of spatial or cognitive experiences? What makes a space a home? Is it shape, architectural elements, the experiences and interactions transpired there, the objects contained in, or the language ascribed to it? Is a "home" just a backdrop for events or is it another body, inside which is found the stuff of self, a body to be read like a text?

Born and raised in the Midwest, Akerberg lives in Omaha, Neb. *Dwelling* is her first book.

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Caroline Dubois: *You Are the Business*

[Série d'écriture, No.20; translated from the French by Cole Swensen]

C'est toi le business uses an eerie cadence to examine the construction of identity in a media-saturated world. Focusing on icons of cult films like *Blade Runner*, she develops a haunting collage of overlay and echo populated by unsettling twins (a "sister," a clone, a verbal stutter), which evokes the doubles with which a society based on representation invests us. The book is poetry in its linguistic freedom, film criticism in its thematic aspects, prose in its physical shape. But it always pushes language toward new sensual territory.

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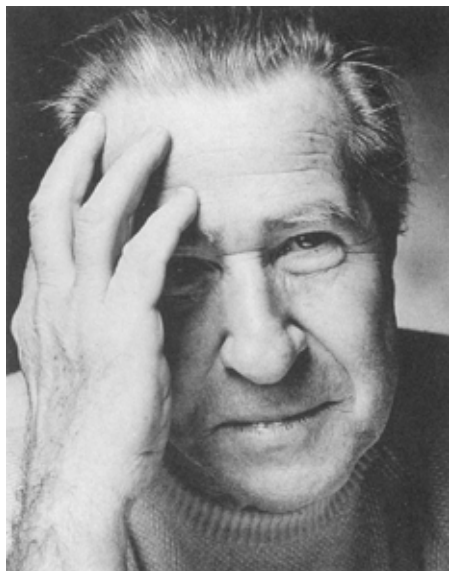
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REMEMBERING MICHAEL GOLDBERG

(1924-2007)



Michael Goldberg, abstract painter, died Sunday, December 30, 2007, of a heart attack while painting in his Bowery Studio. Music was playing, definitely jazz.

Goldberg enjoyed an eclectic, meandering, and successful career of mythic proportions. His colorfully energetic paintings hang in major museums and private collections. Artists, collectors, musicians, and writers claim him as friend. The Poetry Project hosted in March a bittersweet memorial celebrating Goldberg's life—a dozen speakers and 500 guests filled the Sanctuary. Poets, particularly, have cherished Goldberg. He collaborated with and was poetic subject for Frank O'Hara—luminary of the New York School of poets. Goldberg is known as much as a painter as for being the subject of O'Hara's "Why I'm Not a Painter."

When Goldberg died, at the age of 83, his work-table was strewn with fat oil sticks and old pages of newspaper. In the mid-1980s he began to solely use oil sticks, oil paint manufactured with enough wax to be molded into a stick, allowing the painter to paint directly onto a surface without brushes, palettes, paint tubes, or solvents. After applying the paint, Goldberg would spread newspaper on the surface over which he dragged a trowel to remove as much of the paint as necessary to erase the evidence of his application. "To get this kind of quality you have to use the hand, but sometimes I don't want the hand to be so apparent," he

told John Yau in an interview for the monograph documenting his last show at Knoedler & Company in September 2007.

The building on the Bowery that housed Goldberg's home and studio was originally a public recreational facility. For more than 50 years it has been artist studios, counting among its inhabitants Goldberg's beautiful and sophisticated wife, artist Lyn Umlauf, poet John Giorno, writer William S. Burroughs, and sculptor Lynda Benglis. Goldberg inherited his studio from the elder superstar abstract painter Mark Rothko, who also made large, colorful, and unframed paintings. This studio was once a basketball court. Large canvases, often more than 6' x 6', were hung on a wall where the basket may have stood. Goldberg positioned a chair at a distance roughly equivalent to the free-throw line, the top of the paint in hoop parlance; here he studied his work, contemplated his next move.

Goldberg possessed a legendary lust for life, often remembered by his close friends for singing Samuel Beckett lyrics on the beach, cooking, drinking, and eating well, or racing cars for a living in his 30s. He was born in the Bronx, a place synonymous with tough, which probably informed his own tough, no-bullshit persona. He studied as a teenager with Hans Hoffmann, renowned abstract painter and teacher to many important American artists as different in practice as Allan Kaprow and Jane Freilicher. Goldberg served as a paratrooper in World War II. Upon returning he resumed his studies with Hoffmann. In 1951 Goldberg's work appeared in the groundbreaking exhibition

of New York avant-garde work, the Ninth Street Show, organized by Leo Castelli, later to become one of the most influential art dealers in the U.S.

Michael and I became friends during the last year of his life. We met at the Vermont Studio Center, where we were able to share institutional dinners, made palatable with the best wine that I could find. We discussed painting, poetry, and his dreams for establishing a foundation to support aging and ailing artists. Regretfully, the foundation was not established in his lifetime.

One day upon visiting Michael, I accidentally entered his studio and enjoyed a rare opportunity to observe him working without his realizing it. Meeting Michael, observing his method, and contemplating how Jazz was the Punk of his youth, has given me a new appreciation of abstraction, a practice almost drilled out of me by years of post-modern pedagogy. Ironically, Goldberg has been reaching for the last 60 years for a most post-modern goal: "What I have been trying to do is to make the paintings anonymous. I think I'm succeeding right now," he told Yau. I think this impulse is totally admirable in its lack of ego, divulging a will to erase the cult of personality, beautifully ironic coming from a man so well-known for being larger-than-life. Thank you Michael for making a brief appearance in mine.

- Greg Fuchs
New York City
March 5, 2008

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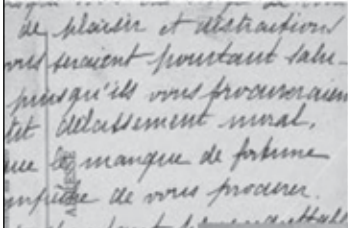
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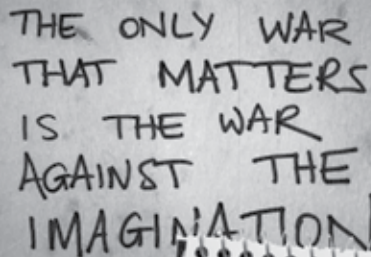
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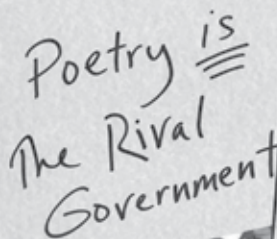
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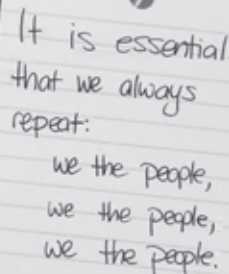
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ont souvent pour cause
jusqu'à vos professeurs
et d'ailleurs mal,
que le manque de fortune
empêche de vous procurer.
et d'autant plus...



THE ONLY WAR
THAT MATTERS
IS THE WAR
AGAINST THE
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Poetry is
The Rival
Government



It is essential
that we always
repeat:
we the people,
we the people,
we the people.

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WEEK THREE: June 30–July 6

Activism, Environmentalism: The Big Picture

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To Do Exactly That, Right Now: The Collected Poems of Philip Whalen

(Wesleyan University Press, 2007, edited by Michael Rothenberg)

by Alice Notley



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It is thrilling to have a huge collection of Philip Whalen's poetry in hand; the poems as always seem the most readable ever written—and why would anyone not want to write like this? You just fall into the work; whereas so much poetry at the moment seems to be more about thinking about it than reading it, this poetry is all tactile and grabbing and natural. Everyone used to say, "That Phil Whalen is too self-indulgent!," by which was meant the work wasn't constantly high-minded—and we're all soooooo high-minded, who can bother with actual reading pleasure what with all the panels to go to? The brow screws up at this very moment, thoughtfully.

A key to getting what he's up to, if that's what you want, really is the famous *SINCE YOU ASK ME*, subtitled "(A Press Release, October 1959)":

This poetry is a picture or graph of a mind moving, which is a world body being here and now which is history... and you. Or think about the Wilson Cloud-chamber, not ideogram, not

poetic beauty: bald-faced didacticism moving as Dr. Johnson commands all poetry should, from the particular to the general. (Not that Johnson was right...)

Whalen wrote down everything he thought about, drawing conclusions too, but within the same poetic fabric, and he thought about toilet paper as well as philosophy, masturbation ("THE WARS OF ONAN") as well as the life of Nikola Tesla, etc. He thought about every tiny and big thing and how to describe it without boring himself or the reader. The mystery is how he managed to unify so much detail so pleasantly and musically; the biggest mystery is how he managed to be himself illuminating words, but who would want to take on the reality of personality in an age of denial?

Quoting from *SINCE YOU ASK ME* brings up the major strategy of this edition, which one is not sure one is in favor of: judgment is reserved by this writer, though people who are reading Whalen for the first time may not care a bit. That is, the editor, Michael Rothenberg, has decided to present the poems in chronological order, as one continuous entity, without any indication, as one reads, of how they were previously collected in books, and making no other divisions in the collection, for example by decade, form, or place of composition (How can one find anything?). Rothenberg pays lip service to Whalen's original books as published, in his initial note, but writes: "...sometimes Philip Whalen's 'creative process' was simply to allow a publisher or editor to make their own organizational choices. For example, when I asked PW why the poems in *On Bear's Head* were not organized chronologically, he told me he had no idea, 'It just came from the publisher that way.'" Well I don't believe any of that for a minute. Phil worked hard on the organization of his books, and the selection and arrangement really counted. *SINCE YOU ASK ME* was the second-to-final piece of the book *MEMOIRS OF AN INTERGLACIAL AGE*; the final piece being the tiny poem *Awake a moment / Mind dreams again*

/ Red roses black-edged petals (entire poem). Obviously quite a lot of deliberation went into this exit—a press release followed by a three-line evanescence in italics? Only the author would have done that.

I sense, throughout this edition, the invisible covers of the books I loved; I grasp at movements from poem to poem that aren't there. When I was young, the publication of a volume by Philip Whalen was a huge event; the copies got worn out, and I have memorized his layouts and transitions. Whalen made something new when he made a book, the same way he often made the poems themselves, out of pre-existing pieces. But it is one convention to demonstrate the chronology of a life's work in a collected poems: another poem has been

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created here in this collected poems, and it must in some sense be PW's. I do keep wanting the books back. But new entities seem to arise from these pages, because it's the nature of the poetry to force chunks of time and space to realign themselves into new shapes. Whalen dated everything in order to underscore not so much chronology as connections. Consider the following short extract:

Songs to induce prophetic dreams
sold only for the prevention of disease

*

We are happy when we are slightly uncomfortable
for a long time & can complain about it
afterwards

*

Choose again, choose as often as you like
you never get your money back
Money is never the same as you've got or as you've had
You must get more. Get a new batch as often as you can.

That's from the long poem, MY SONGS INDUCE PROPHETIC DREAMS, dated 15:x:63-19:i:65, and first printed in the *BRAIN-CANDY* section of *ON BEAR'S HEAD*. Within the same time frame he wrote the lyric *GODDESS*, dated 14:ix:64:

Where I walk is with her
In fire between the ocean waves
Towards that Lady I stand beside
Center of the earth in the center of the air
Stand moving star cloud
Roar music silence
Waves break over our muddy heads
Dash against our sunny feet

GODDESS found its way into a different book (also collected in *ON BEAR'S HEAD*), *EVERY DAY*, along with, e.g. *THE ODE TO MUSIC* and *THE BEST OF IT*, quite important poems, dated respectively 2:iii:64, 2:v:64 (it has two dates) and 3:x:64,7:xi:64 (it also has two dates). *THE BEST OF IT* is a longish, garbage-heap (glittering garbage) poem like *MY SONGS INDUCE PROPHETIC DREAMS*. But it's different: its pieces are less diaristic—there's less tracking (see *MONDAY IN THE EVENING*: "There was an animal / It left a set of tracks / The animal was I / & the tracks also & the mud...") My point is, the poetry becomes a universe of simultaneity and synchronicity that includes chronology. The poet describes himself and his world, but in parallel poems, written virtually at the same time; there are parallel concerns. The reader will figure this out despite the chronological order of discrete poems.

Whalen's secret for unity—his ability to collage, meander and observe, and leap from low-brow to high-brow in an instant—lies largely in his metrics, at least according to his own assessment. I don't think this information has been written down anywhere, but in conversation he often avowed using one particular musical pattern: he tried to tell me, but I didn't get it then but have remembered the gist; I get it now. (In the 70s he credited John Paul, a young Chicago poet, with being the only person who really understood his poetry.) He always, and he meant *ALWAYS*, used the same underlying rhythm for his poetry: an 18th-century-type

bass, almost a basso ostinato, of continuous eighth notes. If you think about this—it helps if you know a little about 18th century music—but if you consider that sound and then read some of the poems, you'll see this is right. There are eighth-notes underneath, and they seem to continue right across the page, even in the white spaces, pulling together just about all the poetry and, one might say, this whole collected poems:

Alas dainty Belshazar! Divine Exogamite!
Perished!

Folie de grandeur: horror & degradation is my name

Another damned lie, my name is I
Which is a habit of dreaming & carelessness
no nearer the real truth of any matter
In any direction myself bound & divided by notions

ACT! MOVE! SPEAK!

(from *SELF-PORTRAIT SAD* 22:1X:58)

Fred Merkel,
What are you doing
Fred Merkel is my name
And I'm just a little drunk
But I'm soberer than I was this time yesterday evening

(from *THE REVOLUTIONARIES*,
15:viii-7:x: 61)

Morganatic marriage is the answer to an otherwise
[ruined life.
Let's rebuild Hadrian's villa.

(from *THE GRAND DESIGN*, 9:x-27:x:66)

"I TOLD MYSELF THAT I WASN'T GOING TO GET
[HIGH TODAY
AND I TOLD MYSELF THAT IF I *DID* GET HIGH
IT WASN'T GOING TO BE ON ACID—

(from "I TOLD MYSELF": BOBBIE
SPONTANEOUSLY, 16:viii:71)

Gibbon says "...the wisdom and authority of the
Legislator are seldom victorious in a contest
With the vigilant dexterity of private interest."

(from *LA CONDITION HUMAINE*, 6:i:79)

It's not at all that the poetry sounds the same, or that each syllable is attached to an eighth-note, it's that underneath, there is a ghostly bass setting the pace; and Whalen does ride the same pace, even though the figuration above is various. This quasi eighteenth-century sound is most obvious, of course, in the quote from Edward Gibbon, the great eighteenth-century (take note, L. Scalapino) historian. Gibbon's is a syllable-perfect prose reflective of its times' taste. The same rhythm, though, might be said to underpin much of 20th century jazz; Whalen always managed to sound perfectly contemporary.

The ground bass technique runs the show in Whalen's longest

poem, SCENES OF LIFE AT THE CAPITOL, written in Kyoto and first published in 1971. Whalen's earlier method for achieving length, which involved the accumulation of clearly separate pieces often separated by asterisks or other symbols, has evolved into a capacity to get everything into an ongoing and similar continuum:

Vegetable nerves
Cold noodle time in the Capital
I got to kick my coffee habit.
Anybody seen my trunks? Remind me
How is Steve Carey?

Haloes
Which the angels left behind
Empty niches where holy saints once
Hand-hewn bases for noble columns: garden decorations
Wintermin (Chlorpromazine hydrochloride, 12.5 mg tabs)
"Motion sickness, vomiting of pregnancy, potentiating effects on hypnotics and analgesics, psychoneurosis such as anxiety neurosis, bed-wetting, Pollakiuria."

did you say "Bum trip"
or "dumb trip"?

There are no breaks in this poem, which states near its conclusion:

Japan is a civilization based upon
An inarticulate response to cherry blossoms.
So much for Western Civilization.

SCENES OF LIFE AT THE CAPITOL is indeed long—over sixty pages in this edition, a heroic feat of edgelessness. I once heard Phil read it *all*, in a dual reading with Allen Ginsberg, in San Francisco in 1971. After we, the audience, had seated ourselves the two poets entered the room from the back, Phil blowing on a huge conch shell. Allen read first for a mere 45 minutes, there was a break, and then Phil read the whole thing. It took a couple of hours. This was still, as I say, the heroic age of both writing and reading. People actually let you read your work! At length! They liked it! Then they ran away and wrote their own. The poetry, with its sound and vitality getting into your nerves and thoughts and memories, was the thing. (I wasn't there in New York the time John Ashbery read all of "The Skaters" and had forgotten to bring the last page, but I've obviously heard the anecdote: 'By that time it didn't make any difference.' I remember him reading all of "The New Spirit" in 1970.)

After SCENES OF LIFE AT THE CAPITOL the poems become shorter and more condensed, partly because PW has absorbed the lessons of SCENES, and partly because Phil became a Zen monk in 1972 and devoted the majority of his time to his new practice. I first met him in Bolinas a year before he became a monk—he still had the red hair and beard—and then we reconnected again in Chicago when he was about to lose his hair and had just sewn his ordination robes. He said he was partly joining up because he needed community and sustenance, room and board: very hard to come by if you're a committed poet. But afterwards he spoke increasingly of the need "to get this thing right"—the Zen thing. Still, there were a lot of poems to come, and the Zen thing wasn't necessarily what they were about. The

Buddhist angle isn't something the reader is obliged to take on: as a friend of Phil's, I rarely discussed Buddhism with him; I noted the references in the poetry, but the poetry remained Phil's poetry. If you're a Buddhist, Buddhism is everywhere, but everywhere remains specific details, everywhere being both concrete and imaginary. I'm now trying to find the poem about the dentist who looks like Kenneth Koch, but instead I come upon the one with Hasleton Brasler, from 1974:

I was falling asleep in my chair
Now I lie on the floor, ruminating ideas of life's brevity
The feeble intensity of enormous ambition
Hasleton Brasler said he'd be over
He had to pick up his car and take a haircut
You understand what I'm talking about . . .
"including the power tools"
There's no excuse for an imitation of Billie Holiday.

(HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL & HAPPY
WITHOUT ANYBODY ELSE FINDING
OUT ABOUT IT)

I'm reasonably sure that there was no Hasleton Brasler, as there was no Fred Merkel, or Margaret Gridley. Whalen wrote two wonderful novels, *YOU DIDN'T EVEN TRY* and *IMAGINARY SPEECHES FOR A BRAZEN HEAD*, and was an inveterate inventor, in his poems, of characters and scenarios. One of my favorite moments in the oeuvre of PW is the invention of Margaret Gridley, which takes place in a poem called WAITING FOR CLAUDE, written in Kyoto in 1966:

Margaret Gridley is logical.
How can evil spring from a virtue?
Margaret Gridley is clinically sane.
Margaret Gridley is ambitious and industrious.
Margaret Gridley grieves
The willows mourn for Margaret Gridley.
She was a Radcliffe girl.

If you've read *IMAGINARY SPEECHES FOR A BRAZEN HEAD*, published in 1972, you will know that Margaret Gridley is one of its main characters, a woman from Whalen's own small town Northwest, who goes away to college, becomes a brilliant and famous assemblage artist, takes up with the black jazz musician Beefy Johnson who dies, shoots a lot of meth, marries briefly the poet Roy Aherne (some combination of Whalen, and, by his own admission, Robert Duncan—whom he always called Dunky Poo), and goes back to the Northwest to marry her childhood sweetheart and best lay, Herbert Wackernagel. God how I love this novel—my worn copy is inscribed "for Alice Notley with vast admiration & thanks for wearing out the first copy, Philip Whalen, San Francisco 26:VI:81." *IMAGINARY SPEECHES* may sound from this description purely comic or even silly, but no discussion of Whalen's thoughts on time, including Buddhist time, would be complete without reference to this book, which destroys chronology as well as making it pretty clear. The story is told in sections taking place at various points in time, all out of order, falling around the reader circularly: Time is. Time was. Time is Past. All at once. The epigrams to the book are from Robert Greene's play *The Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and from *The Famous History of Fryer Bacon* (you will recall these works from your Elizabethan play studies—a devilish mechanical head

is invented, & etc.); the book itself is held together by the pompous sayings of The Grand Mahatma, a brazen, quasi-wise head who simply wants out of the world of the novel by its end—but who can understand the workings of time, which is never over, haunting one in disordered scenes?

It's possible that PW was trying to leave that world, or the world, when he became a Zen monk, but it never felt like that. And, like I say, he kept writing, though not as much or at length in the same way. He did tell me, at least once, that he was going to come out, at some point, with a "big blastola," that would knock everyone over and, it would seem, reestablish some of his previous writerly identity as an extravaganza-maker. I of course liked everything he wrote. I heard him read some of the last works in the collected poems, written, it felt, after a long hiatus, at the Poetry Project circa 1985-86 and begged him to publish them. They were finally published in *SOME OF THESE DAYS*, in 1999, dedicated to me (Why can't I say that? It feels good.). But there just wasn't much poetry after the mid-80s, the reason being that Phil's eyesight failed him drastically. He told me he had "vacant nerve syndrome," though others have told me other things—glaucoma, David Schneider says; but Phil said vacant nerve syndrome—"the nerves vacate themselves." The last time he visited New York, circa 1990, he couldn't walk from Allen Ginsberg's apartment to our apartment on St. Mark's Place without being guided. People began to read aloud to him, and he dictated his correspondence. I received letters from him in someone else's handwriting—a strange thing, since his calligraphy was, as the reader will see from the collected poems, so much a part of him.

Thus I come to the problem, in the collected poems, of the calligraphic pages. They are delightful, but it should be pointed out that they are not poems and are not equal in weight to the poems; they really are more like doodles. And there are probably plenty more of them out in the world. Phil habitually scratched with his pen while he talked to people, writing down things being said and illustrating what was being talked about. (This is also, of course, how he often wrote his poems.) He might then give you a doodle or drawing; I have had a few in my possession. *Highgrade*, a collection of such works, which are distributed chronologically in the collected poems, is a rather puzzling book to own: you can look through it, but you can't do much else with it. You certainly don't read it, but it

isn't art: you can think about Phil in relation to it, and you can just have it.

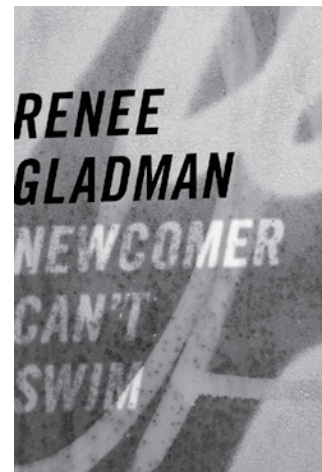
Furthermore MONDAY IN THE EVENING, a long poem presented here in its handwritten form as first published in a small edition in Milan, would have been better off in its typed version (see *ON BEAR'S HEAD*). The poem has been quite influential—along with MY SONGS INDUCE PROPHETIC DREAMS, THE BEST OF IT, and THE EDUCATION CONTINUES ALONG, it taught the Second-generation New York School half of its tricks—and it should be treated as if it really exists. (The Milano edition was, I think, larger than this one and easier to read.) On the other hand, I don't know why *THE INVENTION OF THE ALPHABET* and *WINNING HIS WAY* or *THE RISE OF WILLIAM JOHNSON*, two works that exist only in calligraphic form, aren't included. *WINNING HIS WAY* is a little dirty: I don't own it any more but remember it as featuring a lot of homosexual sex and a man with three penises; but *THE INVENTION OF THE ALPHABET* is perfectly polite and intrinsically apt as calligraphy (note title).

Finally, I am sad to have to close now, but I am glad this book exists. It is lovely to be thinking about PW. The last time I saw him, he was in the hospital he was to die in and couldn't walk anymore. Still being interested in stories, he was "watching" television with his blind eyes: there was a daytime soap opera he said all the Zennies were interested in, and he was following it. He said he could still see movement and now considered—possibly, he said (very carefully), because that was all he could see—the world to be motion. Like his mind, I would think. Mentality is a continuum that doesn't necessarily follow, of and on its own, but you do things to it: for example, proceed from the particular to the general, in that 18th century moralistic way he loved. One imposes order, including the order of being out of order, and it is nice to do so as long as one isn't ordering others. This was a gentle and luminous and musical spirit that I still feel in touch with, particularly through the poems.

I urge anyone with what Phil used to call "a serious reading habit" to buy and read this book.

Alice Notley's most recent books are In the Pines, Alma, or The Dead Women, and Grave of Light: Selected Poems 1970-2006. She lives and writes in Paris.

In languages of elegy and splintered consciousness, the book recreates life for the twenty-first century flaneur in urban America, where, amid a confusion of aims and identities, being attuned to different frequencies also means being lost.



Let them sleep for in a matter of hours new events will replace these old ones. The nice breeze blowing in from the sea will grow stronger and send them all scrambling for their things. A lush gray will efface the now blue and pass its hand over them, bringing rain.

The city will suddenly appear on the beach, first crowding, then displacing the beach-goers. Its intrusion will be unthinkable.

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THE POETRY PROJECT ARCHIVES:

A Fireside Chat with the Director of the Poetry Project



PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE CLAY

John Coletti: What comprises the Poetry Project archives?

Stacy Szymaszek: The archives include recordings, complete sets of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* and *The World*, other Project produced books, poster art, photographs, ephemera, correspondence...all the things one would hope to find. The sale included materials from 1966-2005, and when the Library of Congress came to pick it up last June it amounted to about 150 very neatly stacked, labeled and itemized white boxes.

JC: Who did all that work?

SS: Many workers made this possible. Corrine Fitzpatrick was hired in 2005 to organize and prepare the archive for the anticipated sale. She put in extensive hours up through the day of the pick-up. Michael Nicoloff was also brought on and cataloged the entire alcove in our office. Going back, Ed Friedman initiated the process and hired Elaina Ganim to go through everything and draw up a descriptive summary. Maggie Nelson assisted her. Anselm Berrigan saw the sale through with the help of Steve Clay/Granary Books as our agent. It was on the table throughout Anselm's Directorship, and the poetic justice is that they picked it up on his last official day of work.

JC: Why the Library of Congress?

SS: The Project's primary goal was to place the archives with an institution that

had the resources to preserve the tapes and documents and then to make them accessible. The Library of Congress was the best choice. We had to consider the very pressing reality that a room in the basement of St. Mark's Church was not a safe long-term storage vault, and even though they were on the premises we couldn't provide public accessibility. I know that Naropa and the Poetry Center had the facilities and resources to preserve parts of their own collections, and it's great that this route was available for them. For us, going with the Library insures that the recordings get professional attention in perpetuity in terms of where technology heads in the future. Also, the Library is this magnificent civic institute and container of history of which poets are participating agents. That connection is part of the ethos of the Project.

JC: Did they pay you well? How will the Project use the money?

SS: The payment we received is really significant for us—though to put it in perspective, the amount covers just over a year of operation. It doesn't allow for long-term/sustained expenditures, like raising staff salaries to something closer to the national average for non-profits nor can we relent on fundraising efforts. It does give us a degree of versatility around making improvements as needs arise. We recently upgraded our sound system, for instance, and are looking at new archiving capabilities, to put the money right back into the source. It certainly gives us some added security, which is really good news amidst the turbulent economy.

JC: What does the Library of Congress do with these recordings anyway? Are they sealed off from the public? Are they accessible?

SS: Sealing them off would be antithetical. The Library will process all of the material and then move it to the Rare Book and Special Collections Division or

other appropriate divisions. The recordings that need restoration will be restored, and eventually all of the recordings will be made available for the public to listen to on-site and online. They'll digitize much of the material for availability through their website. Their Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature contains recordings of over 2,000 poets reading their own work.

I want to note that the authors whose copyrighted material is in the archive retain their copyrights. The Library will have to ask each poet for permission to have their readings put on the LoC website. Obviously, making those contacts is something the Project will assist them with. They had talked to us a bit about the exciting possibilities that exist for specially curated exhibits "from the Poetry Project archives" that involve listening stations (perhaps featuring a New Year's Day Marathon Reading from a particular year, the "first" reading...), documents on display, live readings from people whose work is represented in the collection, installations, photographs... I mean, just imagine—to see the archives receive this kind of attention will be gratifying and monumental. I know through my conversations with Anne Waldman that she feels relieved that she has seen this progress in her lifetime.

JC: What kind of timeline will there be in terms of end-users being able to listen to or potentially view the archives electronically? Will the web-accessible portions be mainly or totally comprised of audio files? I guess it would be great if you could talk about the archives in greater detail.

SS: I hesitate to estimate at this point. It's a fact that an enormously labor-intensive job has entered into the bureaucratic time dimension. Part of their Acquisitions mission is to make the materials they acquire for the Library's collections accessible in a timely manner, but, that said, it's still a multi-year project. It's 4,000 hours of readings. The paper archive should be acces-

sible before the audio archive, especially since we already had them extremely well organized for them.

The web-accessible portions will include poems, biographical information on writers, Project history, and photos along with audio. To my mind the most impressive feature of the archive is the comprehensiveness of the recordings: just about every Project reading and event. For a grassroots organization started by young poets in the 60s, it's remarkable that there was that commitment to preserving the work when the Project was really an "experiment" run year to year "on a wing and a prayer" as Ron Padgett said to me. Was anyone thinking it would be around in 2008, still project-ing? I sense not, however, everyone behaved with the belief that what they were doing was of great import, and it was, and it is. I only did a little of the physical packing, but I ended up working on the cabinet with notebooks from Bernadette Mayer's Directorship. I was definitely distracted from the task at hand. Organizational history or memory is also really important, and I look forward to the types of documents that may seem mundane becoming available to the public as well.

JC: Have there been other acquisitions akin to the deal between the Project and the LoC?

SS: If you mean other nonprofit poetry centers, I didn't see evidence of it on their website. I've been talking about what a boon the sale is for us, but it certainly is for them as well. It adds a very contemporary and radical dimension to their literature collection—writing that proposes fresh aesthetic, cultural, philosophical, and political approaches to contemporary society—and it also honors the poets, some no longer with us, who were pioneers.

JC: Can you tell us some more about the LoC as an institution in general?

SS: I love mission statements and theirs reads: "The Library's mission is to make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection

of knowledge and creativity for future generations." Wouldn't it be nice if members of Congress let the Poetry Project's body of knowledge into their brains?

The Library was founded in 1800. They have fire in their history too. In 1814, their collection of 3,000 volumes was destroyed when the British burned the Capitol. There's some interesting information on their website: <http://www.loc.gov/about/faqs/>. Some things that jumped out at me—they have the oldest example of printing in the world, passages from a Buddhist sutra printed in 770 A.D. and the oldest written material in the Library is a cuneiform tablet dating from 2040 B.C. The Library also holds more than 124,000 telephone books and microfilmed city directories from 650 U.S. cities and towns. As an institution, its collections comprise the world's most comprehensive record of human creativity and knowledge.

JC: Can anyone visit the LoC? Where is it physically?

SS: Yes. Well, they say "above high school age"—it's free, and it's at 101 Independence Ave, SE Washington, DC 20540.

JC: What do you think this project will mean in the long run for the Project?

SS: There will be a celebratory event next season most likely in D.C. and certainly at the Project. We all agreed that it is important to publicly commemorate this transaction to kick off what I think will be a flourishing trajectory. Having the Project's cultural output accessible in the context of the world's largest library, a container of official history (national and global), allows for yet another way for us to put our voice—our vocal record—forward. There are not so distant generations who are going to want to make sense of this place and that information will be there in the raw for them. And, wow, it's good for morale—this extraordinary affirmation of our work (the work of many) as a cultural organization and a model for social change.

Thanks, John.

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An Introduction to Three Poems by Betsy Fagin

by Dana Ward



I remember a conversation around a big table at some bar in Boston, lots of poets on a Sunday evening after the last of a buoyant, long weekend of poetry, at the end of a Boston Poetry Marathon, one of them (2000?, 2001?; those were lovely events), and wow, this was what, seven years ago now? and the game at the table was—what younger

poet should we all be reading more, who, by virtue of modesty or undue neglect, was not getting their share of our marvelous attentions. People sweetly named their friends, and everybody groaned, some suggested poets at that very table were not being loved in an adequate way (damn, just buy me a beer for god's sake!), but as this round of neglectorinos (the By & For Yearlings Edition) played out, consensus coalesced around the poet Betsy Fagin.

I was vaguely aware of her work—a name with a blurry set of impressions attached, a title or a stance I'd latched onto, a table of contents with her name amid it. It wasn't long before Aaron Kieley's first issue of *Torch* came along in the fall of 2002, which kicked off with this galvanic poem of Betsy's called "queer cupids of all." I was floored. Here was a poem whose tonal life was shot through with celebratory electrics. They felt like a defiant push back against reactions to recent events that took place in her city which was then New York (9/11, the murder of Amadou Diallo by NYC cops): "fabulous this year my whole reason / took those drugs, stayed out all night: (that new dj in from the coast)," a poem full of urban reunions with friends, with air-kisses not only of casual affection, but of lips set against the more toxic than ever constituent air of the city. I wanted being fabulous to be the reason for my whole year; I wanted the visceral sense that an urgent, homemade glamour was the only antidote to the enforced fear in a "city that loved its cops." For me it was THE poem of that moment, winded and resilient, as fabulous as its wish for itself and its readers. I swear to this day it hasn't left me.

Betsy's work hasn't quit attending to the dynamics of power—in cities, in nature. They're there in a more spectral fashion perhaps, and as such, more haunting, the promise of recompense more fraught. As a title, "consensus trance" nails down the political atmosphere of recent years, and speaks to all manner of damning assent. It opens with a painful compression of leisure and hierarchy, and proceeds immediately to counter that, lovely rhyme and all, by attempting to embody something more precarious, something that puts any comfortable idyll at risk.

There's something uncanny about the jumps from this to that state of attention, from line to line and across small stanzas, that lets a more glancing, less strident mode of critique operate. Instead of

puncturing the big noxious balloon of War and Enforced Economic Stratification, she's letting the air out in slow, mannered gulps, attending all the while to the physical fact of the world around her. Sometimes it's the oblique graffiti nestled amid bombastic emblems of rejection that best care for a shaken resolve.

These poems in fact have the pace of an anti-spectacle, not "nothing to see here" but a more gracious "come check it out if you'd like." Their dynamics deny the branded swarm of signs its tailwind. Still, it's a tense maneuver, for "even at just the right height, safety reflects / metal poisoned down river late night." That's a little graph of fundamental heartbreak!—the perfect perspective no solace, the comforts we prize with their surfaces mirroring back insoluble pollution. In such a situation "good news is an emergency." Hard won though, and warily embraced.

"Taking to court the earth / full of heaven, full of agency," Betsy's work arrives again and again at these painful and accurate stops on the line, vacated subway stops late at night, between the devastated world that's administered and the possible world slightly glimpsed on the way away. No doubt now the poets at that table in Boston were right—we totally had not been paying enough dear attention to the poems of Betsy Fagin. Here's a remedial window.

Dana Ward is the author of Goodnight Voice (House Press, forthcoming). He lives in Cincinnati.

bridge #36

good news is an emergency.
is miraculous this proves fishes.

authority required a sense of therapy
and decision taking to court the earth

full of heaven, full of agency.
prayers glisten down windows

at just the right height, safety reflects
metal poisoned downriver late night.

no wonder

suddenly so blind. stars these?
one knows the red road's silence.

forever feeled. walnut spine.
acre treed put together beautiful

once thought efficient
like properly designed chairs.

some locked up ancestor
in crimes against nature-state.

name change organized.
resistance creeping under scraped sky.

•

consensus trance

summering within the kingdom
have become the embrace
of riot and meltdown
no longer steady state.

some bedazzled machine
eats evidence
creating a convenient fiction
of emotional force.

Betsy Fagin is the author of Belief Opportunity (forthcoming tinyside from Big Game Books), Rosemary Stretch (dusie e/ chap, 2006) and For Every Solution There is a Problem (Open 24 Hours, 2003), as well as a number of self-published chap-books. Fagin received degrees in literature and creative writing from Vassar College and Brooklyn College and completed a MLS degree in Information Studies at the University of Maryland. Recent work appears at Little Red Leaves and in the anthology Not For Mothers Only (Fence, 2007). She is currently living in London.

EVENTS AT THE PO

APRIL

WEDNESDAY 4/2

JUDITH GOLDMAN & DglsN.Rthsjchld

Judith Goldman is the author of *Vocoder* and *DeathStar/Ricochet*. She was a coeditor in the Krupskaya Collective from 2002 through 2004 and coedits the annual anthology *War and Peace* with Leslie Scalapino. She currently teaches at the University of Chicago, as a Harper Schmidt Fellow. The Poet **DglsN.Rthsjchld** hopes that you will come based upon the recommendations of others. Thus: he says, without any qualifications, that Bill Luoma, Jennifer Moxley & Anselm Berrigan would urge you to attend.

MONDAY 4/7

TALK: KEVIN KILLIAN: "GO GET ME A BIG GRAVE": RECENT EXCAVATIONS IN THE JACK SPICER PAPERS AT THE BANCROFT LIBRARY

Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian have been re-editing Spicer's poems and other work and, in spring 2004, were able to take advantage of the gift Holt Spicer, Jack's younger brother, and Robin Blaser, Spicer's best friend and literary executor, made to the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. The surprises have been numerous, not only a sizable cache of previously unseen material, but enough supporting work to put the poems we know into a radically different context. See website for full description of event.

WEDNESDAY 4/9

ANSELM BERRIGAN & BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

Anselm Berrigan is the author of three books of poetry, the most recent being *Some Notes on My Programming*. He's recently completed a longer poem entitled "Have A Good One" and is Co-Chair, Writing of the Bard MFA program. He is a former Artistic Director of the Poetry Project, a 2007 NYFA fellow in poetry, and co-edited, with Alice Notley and Edmund Berrigan, *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*. **Benjamin Friedlander** is the author of *The Missing Occasion of Saying Yes* and the forthcoming *Citizen Cain*, and the editor of Robert Creeley's *Selected Poems, 1945-2005*. He teaches poetry and poetics at the University of Maine.

FRIDAY 4/11 [10PM]

SPRING IN THIS WORLD OF POOR MUTTS: A READING FOR JOSEPH CERAVOLO

Joel Lewis, Jim Behrle, David Shapiro, Evan Kennedy, Eileen Myles, Susie Timmons, John Coletti, Dustin Williamson, Corrine Fitzpatrick, and more t.b.a. will read work by Joe Ceravolo. As Rosemary Ceravolo writes in his bio on www.josephceravolo.com, "Poetry was Joe's primary love. He lived and he died for poetry. Nothing else mattered as much to his sensibilities as a human being on this earth. Read him and weep. Read him and rejoice. He's here eternally."

MONDAY 4/14

NAROPA POETS NYC ALUMNI READING

Jessica Rogers, Stefania Iryne Marthakis, Gary Parrish, Amy Matterer, Tyler Burba, Emily Crocker, Kim Essex, Lily Heehs, Patrick Scanlon, Bob Doto, Debrah Morkun, Cherie Yanek, Jonathan Pogoda, Danielle Vogel, H.R. Hegnauer and Helen de Give. Please visit www.poetryproject.com for readers' bios.

WEDNESDAY 4/16

PAUL BEATTY & CECIL TAYLOR

Paul Beatty is the author of two books of poetry, *Big Bank Take Little Bank* and *Joker, Joker, Deuce*, and two novels, *Tuff* and *The White Boy Shuffle*. Pianist-composer **Cecil Taylor** has recorded dozens of albums as a solo performer and with various ensembles over a period spanning five decades. He has incorporated poetry into his work in a number of ways over the years; in 1991 Leo Records released *Chinampas*, a recording which presents his poetry accompanied by multi-instrumental improvisations.

MONDAY 4/21

KATE GREENSTREET & FRANK SHERLOCK

Kate Greenstreet is the author of *case sensitive* and three chapbooks, *Learning the Language*, *Rushes*, and *This is why I hurt you*. Her second book, *The Last 4 Things*, will be out from Ahsahta in 2009. For more information, visit kategreenstreet.com. **Frank Sherlock** is author of *Ready-to-Eat Individual* (with Brett Evans). Recent chapbooks include *Over Here*, *Daybook of Perversities & Main Events*, and *Wounds in an Imaginary Nature Show*. A collaboration with CAConrad entitled *The City Real & Imagined: Philadelphia Poems* is forthcoming this spring.

WEDNESDAY 4/23

CACONRAD & LARRY KEARNEY

CAConrad is the author of *Deviant Propulsion*, (*Somatic Midge*, *The Book of Frank*, and a collaboration with poet Frank Sherlock *The City Real & Imagined: Philadelphia Poems*. Poetry is central to his life, "Poetry is our EVERYDAY MIRACLE!" Look for him and some of his poet genius friends at www.PhillySound.blogspot.com. **Larry Kearney**, born in Brooklyn, New York. Brooklyn Technical High School, Harpur College. San Francisco in '64—Spicer, MacInnis, Duerden, Kyger, Stanley, and Brautigan. Bolinas for eleven years. Three works of non-fiction published, as well as a children's book and fifteen books of poetry. Six screenplays, four novels, and a book on films of the late forties ready to circulate. A new book (*Sixteen Poems for Susan and Lawrence*) for White Rabbit Press, perhaps.

FRIDAY 4/25 [10PM]

TARA JEPSEN, MICHELLE TEA, NICOLE J. GEORGES & RHIANNON ARGO

Tara Jepsen is a writer and performer from San Francisco. She toured extensively with Sister Spit's Rambling Road Show in 2007, as well as 97-99, and she just completed a novel, *Like a Dog*. **Michelle Tea's** first memoir, *The Passionate Mistakes and Intricate Corruption of One Girl in America*, was just re-published by Semiotext(e). She has written three others, plus a collection of poetry and the novel *Rose of No Man's Land*. **Nicole J. Georges** is the author of award-winning autobiographical comic zine *Invincible Summer* (now a two volume book set from Microcosm Publishing). In 2007 **Rhiannon Argo** took her tales on the road for an entire month with the new wave of Sister Spit. She recently finished her first novel entitled *Switch*.

SATURDAY 4/26 [1-3PM FREE]

A TRIBUTE TO BARBARA GUEST

Barbara Guest (1920–2006) published over twenty volumes of poetry including *The Countess of Minneapolis*, *Fair Realism*, and *The Red Gaze*, and earned awards including the Robert Frost Medal for Distinguished Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Society of America. Join **John Ashbery, Charles**

Bernstein, Susan Bee, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Peter Gizzi, Kathleen Fraser (pre-recorded), **Hadley Guest, Erica Kaufman, Charles North, Rena Rosenwasser, Richard Tuttle, Africa Wayne**, and **Marjorie Welish** in a celebration of Guest's life and work, including the forthcoming *The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest* by Wesleyan University Press. Cosponsored with The Poetry Society of America. Reception to follow.

MONDAY 4/28

DEREK FENNER & ARA SHIRINYAN

Derek Fenner is project director of *Unlocking the Light: Integrating the Arts in Juvenile Justice Education*. He is the author of *My Favorite Color Is Red: Experiments With Lines*. He is a co-founder of Bootstrap Productions, and co-runs the Union Square Poetry Series in Somerville, MA. **Ara Shirinyan** was born in 1977 in what was then the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. His first book *Syria Is in the World* was published by Palm Press. *Speech Genres 1-2* is available as an electronic download from Ubuweb. *Your country Is Great A-G* will be published in 2008. With the group Godzik Pink, he released two CDs on Kill Rock Stars/5rc.

WEDNESDAY 4/30

FORREST GANDER & JOAN RETALLACK

Forrest Gander has edited several anthologies of work in translation and translated individual books by Mexican and Latin American writers, most recently *Firefly Under the Tongue: Selected Poems of Coral Bracho*. His own most recent titles include *Eye Against Eye* and the novel *As a Friend*. **Joan Retallack** is the author of seven volumes of poetry including *Memnoir*, *Mongrelisme*, *How To Do Things With Words*, *Afterrimages*, and *Errata Suite*. Retallack is the author of *Musage: John Cage in Conversation with Joan Retallack*, *Poetry and Pedagogy: The Challenge of the Contemporary* (co-edited with Juliana Spahr) and *The Poethical Wager*. *Gertrude Stein: Selections* edited and introduced by Retallack, is out this year.

MAY

MONDAY 5/5

OPEN READING

SIGN-UP 7:45PM, READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 5/7

KEVIN DAVIES & NADA GORDON

Kevin Davies is a petite bourgeois lyric poet who lives in Brooklyn. His objectively reactionary verses are gathered in *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia* (just out from Edge), *Comp.* (2000, also from Edge), and *Pause Button* (Tsunami Editions, 1992; reissued online by the haute bourgeois (ubu editions)). **Nada Gordon** is the author of four poetry books: *Folly, V. Imp.*, *Are Not Our Lowing Heifers Sleeker than Night-Swollen Mushrooms?*, *foreign bodie* and, with Gary Sullivan, an e-pistolary techno-romantic non-fiction novel, *Swoon*. She is a proud member of the Flarflist Collective. Visit her blog at <http://ululate.blogspot.com>.

MONDAY 5/12

THOMAS FINK & ELÉNA RIVERA

Thomas Fink's fifth book of poetry, *Clarity and Other Poems*, was published by Marsh Hawk Press. He has authored two books of criticism, including *A Different*

POETRY PROJECT

Sense of Power, and he is the co-editor of *Burning Interiors: David Shapiro's Poetry and Poetics*. **Eléna Rivera** is the author of *Mistakes, Accidents and the Want of Liberty, Suggestions at Every Turn, Unknown Land*, and an on-line chapbook, *In Respect of Distance*. Her translation of Isabelle Baladine Howald's book-length poem *Secrets of the Breath* is forthcoming.

WEDNESDAY 5/14

JILL MAGI & KYLE SCHLESINGER

Jill Magi is the author of *Torchwood, Threads*, and *Cadastral Map*. Her most recent projects of text and image include "SLOT/The Exhibitionary Complex," "Compass & Hem," and "Cadastral Map/The Meander." She runs Sona Books. **Kyle Schlesinger's** most recent book is *Hello Helicopter*, and *The Pink* is forthcoming from Kenning Editions. He is the proprietor of Cuneiform Press and the editor of *Mimeo Mimeo*.

FRIDAY 5/16 [10 PM]

HANS KUZMICH & BEN BOATRIGHT

Hans Kuzmich is a Russian-born, New York-based interdisciplinary artist, whose recent projects include a series of speech-based performances and a public access discourse-show for BCAT/Rotunda Gallery. Exhibitions include University Settlement (NYC), AS220 (Providence), video_dumbo (NYC), and Intermedia Arts (Minneapolis). **Ben Boatright** studied at Sarah Lawrence College and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He concentrated mainly in sculpture and performance. Since graduating he has shown work and performed at small venues in Chicago and New York.

MONDAY 5/19

POETS/MENTORS NIGHT

Hannah Zeavin introduced by Mac Wellman: **Hannah Zeavin's** forthcoming book, *Two-way Transatlantic Radio Broadcast*, is coming out on Hanging Loose Press/Scholastic. She's the recipient of the Allen G. Ross Memorial Mentorship Award. **sara wintz** introduced by Rachel Levitsky: **sara wintz** is lead singer of the pretty panicks press, a small press printing compositions, articles, and artwork materials related to rock and roll music, and co publisher of ::the press gang::: Diana Hamilton introduced by Rob Fitterman: **Diana Hamilton** is the editor of *The Minetta Review* and an intern at the Poetry Project. She has a Zoo, which can be viewed at forcefriendlyactivity.blogspot.com. Will Morris introduced by Todd Colby: **Will Morris** is a Brooklyn based English poet/performer. He publishes & distributes his own chapbooks, including the new *Invisible Summer* & performs his work around NYC as a member of the band White Trenches.

SATURDAY 5/24 [2-7PM, \$15]

SILENT ART AUCTION FUNDRAISER

Please join us for our 3rd biennial Silent Art Auction Fundraiser! View work from established and emerging visual artists. Enjoy live, top of each hour performances and readings on the Sanctuary stage. Shop for rare and signed books and printed matter. Purvey the activity from the bar on the balcony, then outbid your friends and fellow enthusiasts on your favorite works of art. If you can't make the party, please contact us for information on proxy bidding. Every dollar earned will benefit the continuance of the Poetry

Project! Participating Artists: **Will Yackulic, Ron Padgett, Andre Codrescu, Zach Wollard, Erica Svec, James Franklin, Ed Ruscha, Ed Bowes, David Shapiro, Anne Waldman, Rackstraw Downes, Kyle Schlesinger/Cuneiform Press, Christopher Warrington, Jonathan Allen, Ken Mikolowski, Beka Goedde, Star Black, Brenda Iijima, Mimi Gross, Jim Behrle, Etel Adnan, Simone Fattal, George Schneeman, Rebecca Moore, Susan Bee**, and more t.b.a. Readings and performances by: **Bruce Andrews & Sally Silvers, Legends (Elizabeth Reddin, Raquel Vogl, and James Loman), Franklin Bruno** and more t.b.a.

MONDAY 5/26

KATE COLBY & JIBADE-KHALIL HUFFMAN

Kate Colby is the author of *Unbecoming Behavior, Fruitlands*, and chapbooks from Anadama, A Rest, and Belladonna presses. **Jibade-Khalil Huffman** is the author of *19 Names for Our Band*. His poetry and fiction have appeared in *Canarium, 6X6, Boston Review, Court Green, NOON*, and *Aufgabe*, among others.

WEDNESDAY 5/28

ROBERT KOCIK & JALAL TOUFIC

Robert Kocik, poet, essayist, artist, architect, elee-mosynary entrepreneur, lives in Brooklyn, NY, where he directs the Bureau of Material Behaviors. He is currently developing a building based on "prosody" and poets' imagined relevance to our society. His publications include: *Overcoming Fitness* and *Rhrurbarb*. **Jalal Toufic** is the author of *Distracted, (Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film, Over-Sensitivity, Forthcoming, Undying Love, or Love Dies, Two or Three Things I'm Dying to Tell You, 'Áshûrà: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, and *Undeserving Lebanon*. His videos and mixed-media works have been presented in such venues as Artists Space, New York; ICA, London, and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

FRIDAY 5/30 [10 PM]

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS & WILL FABRO

Robin Coste Lewis writes poetry, essays and fiction. Her writing has appeared in various journals including The Pocket Myth Series (*Orpheus and The Odyssey*), the anthology *Black Silk*, and is forthcoming in *The Encyclopedia Project*. She is completing a poetry collection titled *Pleasure & Understanding*. **Will Fabro** is a graduate of the writing program at UC San Diego and has been previously published in *Fresh Men*, selected by Edmund White and edited by Donald Weise, and *Userlands*, edited by Dennis Cooper. He is co-editor of the upcoming anthology *Cool Thing*.

JUNE

MONDAY 6/2

THE RECLUSE READING

A reading featuring the work of the poets whose work appears in the forthcoming 4th issue of the Project's house journal, *The Recluse*.

WEDNESDAY 6/4

THOMAS GLAVE & RACHEL LEVITSKY

Thomas Glave is author of the essay collection *Words to Our Now: Imagination and Dissent* and the

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ADMISSION \$8
STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

fiction collection *Whose Song? and Other Stories*. His newest book of fiction, *The Torturer's Wife*, will appear in fall 2008, following his edited anthology, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*. **Rachel Levitsky**: author of *Under the Sun*, poet who writes many sentences, and founder and co-curator of Belladonna Books.

FRIDAY 6/6 [10 PM]

IMAGINATION EXPLOSION presents CARTHARSIS

Cartharsis revels in the guilt and confusion of consumption for American culture. It offers a dream-like progression of visual poetry told through Bunraku style puppetry and the transcendence of an original pop music soundtrack. **Imagination Explosion** is an experimental performance collaborative that creates hybrid works of puppet theater and fine art. I.E. was founded in 2004-05 after emerging from the Cooper Union School of Art, and has since produced over 8 original productions in NYC.

MONDAY 6/9

SPRING WORKSHOP READING

Spring participants from the workshops of **Frank Lima, Vincent Katz, Lisa Jarnot** and **Jill Magi** will share the work they wrote during the courses.

WEDNESDAY 6/11

ELAINE EQUI & DOUGLAS A. MARTIN

Elaine Equi's books include *Voice-Over, The Cloud of Knowable Things*, and most recently *Ripple Effect: New & Selected Poems*—all from Coffee House Press. **Douglas A. Martin** is the author of *In the Time of Assignments*. His prose works include *Branwell, They Change the Subject*, and *Your Body Figured*.

FRIDAY 6/13 [10 PM]

POTLUCK REDUX

Friends and alumni of the Friday night series shall gather and be merry. Details forthcoming!

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IS LOCATED IN
ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER
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WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

BOOK REVIEWS

EDWIN TORRES
THE POPEDOLOGY OF AN
AMBIENT LANGUAGE
ATELOS BOOKS / 2007
REVIEW BY RODRIGO TOSCANO

Think of this scenario. A young, ambitious poet from a small or medium American city sets his/her sights on coming to NYC to “make it” as a poet. The sacrifices will be great, financially, socially, and psychologically. Said poet goes for it. Years go by—3, 5, 10 years, and we watch the poet’s writing get more “polished,” more compressed, more nuanced, intricate as a Swiss watch. We sense the city’s time-space compression has performed its scape through them; these poems are indeed formidable exports. And yet, a hollowness rises out of them, a flat slate of un-peopled (un-besmirched) perfection stares at us.

In this scenario/possibility/expected or unexpected outcome, the *urbs* has rendered this person’s ability to become *permeable* to his/her cultural surroundings to near null. These poems, in fact, could have been written “back home” (and some think they have), and conversely (ironically, diachronically), the poets who stayed “back home” have *widened* their view of the rough-and-tumble of their social surround. What’s going on here? What happened to the vast cross-cultural migratory patterns of language, the public attitudes, the social masking that confronts us everyday on the subway, or the terrible de-masking of an over-

impacted Brooklyn hospital? Zounds! Here’s indeed no alterity (for all the cackle of “alterity” in poetic locker rooms), here’s indeed no wild untethering of *difference* (for all the talk of para-ethical “communities”). It’s as if a prayer book is consulted every morning: thou shalt not learn Spanish; thou shalt not paste a spate of second generation Russianglish in thy poem; if thou art straight, thou shalt metaphorize according to thy divine directioning; if thou art queer, thou shalt metonymize according to thy divine directioning; thou shalt pronounce the English tongue the way thy Father and Mother hath taught ye; thou shalt inhabit thy body as thy body inhabits thee; thou shalt not confuse thyself with not-thyself, thou shalt endure with grace and dignity and above all else, polish, all cultural-political collisioning against thy rump; thou shalt manufacture a critical language to *enjoy* thy non-collisioned rump.

What else can the urbs do?

It can rain down on your permeability, it can build in you more response-time reflexes than you can handle, it can pogo right past you, laughing (or weeping), it can collapse before your very eyes and pop up against a giant gleaming shard of global sugar. It can Edwin Torres you. It can intimate to you your most private utopianism on a giant billboard—to your embarrassment. Your embarrassment can be chopped up, sautéed, and served up hot—just for you. The *urbs* can hinge two opposite direction one-way turnstiles on the same axle and

usher you in and out—at the same time. No returns. No regrets.

Nearing his 50th year—among us, “The Kid”—remains the kid. Edwin Torres’ newest book is a wickedly well-stocked compendium of NYC home-quarried experimentalism. Though a large portion of Torres’ oeuvre can now be described as “univocal” (non subject-sliding, intimate, me-to-you mode diction, as in his upcoming book *In The Function Of External Circumstances*), most of it is ventriloquistic in the extreme. In this new collection, a sizable array of 20th century avant-garde currents get *trip-hopped*. Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, Lettrism, Beat, Nuyorican, (post-classical) Black Arts Movement, (post-classical) Language School writing, are not spoken in a naïve, regressive “neo” mode, but rather, their combined utopic girding is momentarily revived by way of maximizing the proximity of each to each: Dada bass rides Constructivist beats on spacey Nuyorican scratching, etc. Result: flash coloration! This is the dynamic palette that Torres’ requires to spell out a complex urban reality. That is to say, it is not *eliminationist* at the level of demographic politics (see trust fund hipsterism for opposite), it is *co-convivialist*.

Torres grew up in a post-Robert Moses “meat-axed” Bronx environment (via the Expressway). As largely working-class (and often very radical) Jewish neighborhoods were ousted and scattered, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and African Americans from all over the city and beyond moved into very tight spaces [note: out of those old neighborhoods came poets, artists, historians, and activists like Jerome and Diane Rothenberg, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Jack Hirschman, Grace Paley, Stanley Aronowitz, Marshall Berman, and many others]. Encountering Torres’ *PoPedology* is akin to coming onto a corral reef chattering away the day (“ambient”). But it isn’t an a la carte carnivalism that’s at work here; there’s loads of criticality to this urban-committed poetry. I’ve asked myself for years, how does Torres code these larger movements within formal literary constraints?



Poets In Need is a non-profit organization providing emergency assistance to poets who have an established presence in the literary community as innovators in the field and a substantive body of published work. Assistance is given only in cases of current financial need that is in excess of and unrelated to the recipient's normal economic situation and that is the result of recent emergency (due, for example, to fire, flood, eviction, or a medical crisis).

Checks should be made payable
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Poets In Need is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization.
Donations are tax-deductible.

Poets In Need
Post Office 5411
Berkeley, CA 94705

And so opening up the book, and looking for a clue to this quandary I find...

**Control of Page
Leads to Control of Brain**

**Tomorrow's Leaders
Are Today's Sheets of Paper**

Now, one could easily let loose a neo-absurdist chuckle over this passage, but on closer inspection...are these pop-up couplets a sly response to the "interesting reading, BUT...I'd like to see it on the page"? And is the seeming gravitas to that nudge a residual New Criticist way to patrol genre boundaries, a way to manage the fear of poetic lineage miscegenation? This is not to say that poets who are intricate weavers of texts (something Torres excels at, something that many of us strive to do) are "residualists" in intention—no, but that the *value* of the mighty page *peremptorily abstracted* from the larger/wider practice (i.e., of the gambit of reading to live and diverse audiences) automatically miniaturizes cultural praxis into a mere shade of its potential self ("interesting neighborhood you got here, but do you all *own* your places?").

Edwin Torres has been a one person Poetics Theater for over 20 years. At once paradoxical, hilarious, unpredictable, and always boundary hopping, this new book is your anti-putz guide to the city.

Originally from the Borderlands of California, Rodrigo Toscano has been living in the Greenpoint township of Brooklyn for 9 years. His newest book, Collapsible Poetics Theater, a 2007 National Poetry Series selection, is due out in the fall from Fence Books.

STEPHANIE GRAY
HEART STONER BINGO
STRAW GATE BOOKS / 2007
REVIEW BY BRENDA COULTAS

Stephanie Gray's *Heart Stoner Bingo* charts a rite of passage as Gray, a poet and filmmaker, leaves her home turf of Buffalo for New York City. Throughout this collection, Gray addresses her two loves: her hometown of Buffalo, "dreary-Erie-the-mistake-upon-the-lake," and her new city, New York City, and neighborhood Red Hook, where Gray arrives just in time to document the extinction of its working class roots and transformation via the pending arrival of another newcomer, the big box store Ikea. There is much to say about this debut collection: Gray is by turns tough, gritty, romantic, and even generous towards the trustfunders in trucker hats as she outs them for their faux working class garb.

Following the trail blazed by Eileen Myles and others who have made this same leap, Gray worries if a poet and filmmaker and romantic can still make it here where rent for a studio is "\$2000." She writes, "I heard that Bette Midler moved there with just a suitcase and maybe Eileen too. How can you make it open sesame for you too without drowning in the pool you'll never swim in? So you think she'll burn you. Yes the figurative burn supposedly no one will see, but why is the checkout girl mentioning it? They're out of Band-aids but Eileen says it's not as hard as it looks." Gray wonders

if Myles meant that figuratively or literally.

The title poem "Heart Stoner Bingo" develops the theme of the working class ceiling: the numbing of one's intellect and dreams, the fuel of capitalism and economy. She takes on the man. "Typing in the Lemon Pool" instructs the reader, "Typing in the lemon pool isn't as easy or as hard as it seems. Watch me eat this entire lemon. And then with my burning cuticle fingers, type your letter." Meanwhile the girls of the lemon pool dream of "falling backwards like that Lipton iced tea commercial that the girls with long blonde hair and orange lipstick and rouge fall back in....For years we typed and typed 3, 4, 5 drafts on carbons copies, breathing in ink, going home with fingers that looked like they need oxygen."

However, the pool is reserved for the greedy bosses who ask more and more of the girls typing in the lemon pool. Gray says, "You wish we could read your Dictaphone mind, your endless revishuns so well that we could dive into a pool of lemon juice opened eyed, seeing the transcripshuns in the bottom of the pool."

Gray's "I" is also a romantic documentarian. She notes the astonishing demise of authentic New York City, like Zito's, an Italian bread shop in the village:

This is why people move to ny because
All the zito's everywhere else in
[the world
Have been replaced
By the wonderbreads and
krispy kremes and the walmarts of the world.

Arriving on nearly the last day, she asks Mr. Zito, the owner, for permission to capture, at least on film, evidence of what was. "I Loved Rachele's Coffee" which Gray describes as "A DYSFUNCTIONAL SONNET AND FUTHERLY, A DYSFUNCTIONAL VILANELLE." is a praise of the proletarian fuel that gets us through the day, the simple pleasures of the daily.

There are many shapes, concerns, and loves within these living pages, but most of all, what Gray really wants to know is how to make it here.

Brenda Coultas is the author of The Marvelous Bones of Time released by Coffee House Press in 2007.

GREG FUCHS
METROPOLITAN TRANSIT
ISABEL LETTRES / 2007
REVIEW BY ANSELM BERRIGAN

There's a moment about two-thirds of the way through *Metropolitan Transit* in a short poem called "Silent City" when the poet, speaking of an unnamed "one" after having relayed some grim-to-mundane details regarding the life in question, writes, "His dreams become an excuse to exercise / His loss..." It's a beautiful, complicated

BOOK REVIEWS

instance that merges personal trajectories of creativity and resignation without pinning an outcome or even a product onto one's imagination, and it happens six lines into a poem that handles empathy, self-doubt, and fucked-up family situations as subject matter while opening in San Francisco and closing in Asheville at nineteen lines. "Silent City" is not exactly a portrait, as the remainder of the poem moves into a kind of informal philosophical crossroads littered with sensory and memory debris passed between the speaker and the initial subject, but then it's not so easy, nor ultimately desirable, to put terms to Greg Fuchs' poetry.

The word "portrait" may have come to mind in my thinking about Fuchs' work simply because he happens to be an accomplished photographer with a particular skill at shooting portraits. But the word is too limited by its own specificity within the context of visual arts to use as a framing device for Fuchs' poetry. One quality that does seem to move between his artistic practices to differing effects is an emphasis on moments in other people's lives as jump-off points for an exploration of, to put it bluntly, how to live, and particularly how to live while being crowded in on by the other eight to twelve million people you can find in New York City on any given day. However, these poems do not tell you drawn-out stories, nor do they comprise the kind of love-affair-with-the-city affect many writers take on when using NYC as subject and/or canvas. Information comes quickly, through short, unpunctuated lines and phrasing that may dawdle then abruptly leap:

Contrary to the weather report
It's all smell the green grocer, silver truck
And velvet fog on Second Avenue, my artery

'I'm glad you killed it,' said Dindrane
'Me too,' replied Percival
'Let's take it home and put things on it.'

from "Poetics of Reverie"

The kindnesses exchanged between familiars in these poems (thirteen of which are dedicated; many more of which involve others, though as a reader one is not placed in a position of needing to "know" who anyone is—the pacing is what keeps you on your toes) are offset by the indignities of being broke, insufficiently employable, unfeeling, guilt-ridden, disabused of one's own talent, and accused of behaving badly. These are experiences shared by the passing characters in Fuchs' poems, and reflective of the rampant togetherness an over-crowded life provokes (Dante's *Inferno*, if you think about it, is one big commune of suffering, and is fleetingly alluded to several times by Fuchs). So when the lines "Instead of getting ahead / I'm in love" appear in "The Day The Ball Player Crashed The Plane Into An Apartment," it's transparently clear that the tenderness therein is both real and quietly dogged by the

anxiety that some kind of concession has been made—and the combination, in its lack of judgment, is substantial.

Now, I should make it clear that reading *Metropolitan Transit*, and in fact re-reading *Metropolitan Transit* several times, is a highly pleasurable experience. The book is emotionally rich, meaning it has a wide range of feeling and self-awareness in its representation of a life's continuity as subject to unlooked-for shifts on a routine basis. While the work may often deal in transience and uncertainty, the poems themselves are confident, cagey and rife with a diction that can be jarringly unpredictable, precisely because Fuchs isn't obsessed with creating shiny surfaces and is willing to risk embarrassment. The odd usage of the word "to" in the next-to-last line of the poem "Do You Remember?" makes for a moment that I initially tripped over then kept returning to in order to feel its opening while enjoying the bleat of the rhyme this otherwise unrhymed poem ends with: "The job to the City is loyal opposition / Even if one must succumb to its inundation." That first "to" places the poet at odds with and in service of "the City" at once—maintaining a balance of utility and resistance while few of the millions are likely to be paying attention. It's a gentle contrast of scale coming at the end of a poem that is not always kind to the poet, as well as another complex (particularly in its own quasi-opposition to solace) and, yes, beautiful moment in a book teeming with them.

Anselm Berrigan is doing alright.

SUSAN LANDERS

COVERS

O BOOKS / 2007

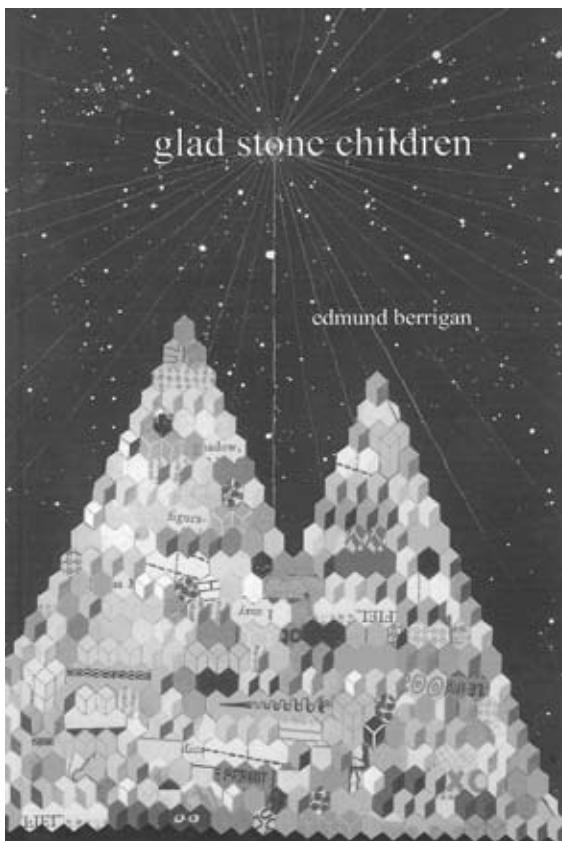
REVIEW BY LISA JARNOT

In a time during which poets descend the rungs of circles of academia, it's perhaps easy to forget about those more vital forces of the creative imagination: that our poetical ancestors from Homer to Blake to Dante to Whitman to H.D. spent their lives responding to the most immediate and vital of human concerns: "the tyranny of establish religions, / the would-be annihilating cloud of lies /...the madness of kings" (as Robert Duncan wrote in his 1976 poem "Circulations of the Song"). And in a time of war—in a time during which the current American aggression extends toward five years of reckless unforgivable bloodshed—where is one to turn? Susan Landers' *Covers* seems a very good place to start. Inspired by and partly built out of translations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Covers* grants the poet the catharsis of placing the powers that be where they belong and offers the reader what Virgil offered Dante: a tour of what we live in and an opportunity to face our own demons. Never preachy or outright polemical, *Covers* instead is an exploration of the landscape of these flatlands of the current American

BOOK REVIEWS

conundrum (fall of empire?) complete with ballot counts, body counts, and diversity counts (white, black, gay, straight, male, female, Christian, Muslim). Rather than going on gut reaction, Landers holds tight to Dante's pant leg, generating a careful, complex reading of the strife that is part of the roil and boil of the species. Built out of a study of *The Divine Comedy* in the Italian, Landers starts into that dark wood of the *Inferno* with the baby steps of a novice of the language: "in the middle of a lost road / forest gloomy / straight craft mislaid / fuck / how many wars / sour wild /..." Throughout the book the work with Dante's text returns, cut with interludes of disembodied voices (hear the privileged Westerner: "I don't care about that cause I'm getting what I want" and clips of tickertape factoids: "110 people 200 injured... insurgence 87"). The beautiful tension of the book comes in the crafting of those voices: letting Dante be Dante, letting the polis be heard, and integrating newspeak without allowing it to overpower the project. In this, Landers is a true heir to the Objectivist tradition, very much working out of the shadow of Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Oppen (and indeed epigramming Oppen's "I have not and never did have any motive of poetry / But to achieve clarity."). Landers' uniqueness comes in the terrifically playful lyric sensibility that made its first appearance in her book *248 mgs., a panic picnic* (also O Books, 2003). It's possible to hear inflections of Gertrude Stein and Harryette Mullen in Landers' line, but there's

also something transcendently other to be read in it. Landers has a sass that is all her own, a "don't fuck with me" undercurrent that feels endearing, tender, and vulnerable rather than off-putting. In this, she and Dante are again a good match: both writers present a supple shape-shifting "I." Dante is as much master as servant, in *The New Life* as a trembling schoolboy with a crush, and in *The Divine Comedy* as a critic of church and state who delights in burying politicians in shit and fire. Landers does well in capturing that wholeness in Dante while inflecting the language through her own skill. *Covers* covers ten of the Cantos of the *Inferno*. (And it's likely that the reader will come away from this book craving a complete Landers/Dante project.) Her Canto 7 translation ("The Hoarders and the Spendthrifts: Fiancés, For and Against") opens gleefully: "Daddy Mouth Satan Pop' choked Pluto with a start. / Broody Pluto hen with his clucks." (Compare a more standard translation: "Pape Satan, Pape Satan, aleppe! We heard the raucous voice of Plutus say."). Landers continues: "And you, gentle salve, sage of all, said to me, 'He will cease and desist. Nothing not night. Knot his knuckle of power. Not power of seeing or not. For whatever power he has sees nothing. Nothing tears us from this rock quest. Nothing keeps us from descending.'" In the sadness of America's globalized neo-liberal Walmart-World feeding frenzy, Landers offers us the most that the poetic imagination can offer: a journey (as Homer, Blake, and Dante imagined journeys) into that place



glad stone children by edmund berrigan

"Eddie Berrigan gives a nod to his lineage, acknowledging his upbringing as poetry's child. Berrigan's music, laced with undercurrents of violence and tension, is elegant and hysterically absurd by turns. These poems are a blueprint for a new generation of young American Poets."

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"These poems carry with them perennial themes, contemporary preoccupations, latent and pressing- the romantic, political, ministerial even (as in 'instrumental' and 'prelatic') - in its use and abuse, praise and critique of lyric, serving a congregation of castaway thoughts. And they are an easy read, as much affable as angry, they capture flow, distortion, a bright lens on the feeling 'Disturningly' (a title). Here is an example of an uneasy Americanist building (piling at times) of imagery and idioms, saying "feel lucky", or wanting to say 'feel love' or, in spite of it all, 'just smile'."

—Christopher Stackhouse

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BOOK REVIEWS

where the real may be revisited and examined and exorcized of its absurdity. Landers grabs hold of the “Code Orange” mentality of our post-September 11th world and shakes it: she allows us to look at those demons head-on and to reckon with them accompanied by Dante rather than by CNN’s Anderson Cooper. This is the power of the poet.

Lisa Jarnot's new book Night Scenes will be published by Flood Editions this spring. She is the owner and operator of Catskill Organics Farm.

STEPHEN RATCLIFFE

REAL

AVENUE B BOOKS / 2007

REVIEW BY MOLLY LOU FREEMAN

A “cosa mentale,” wrote Leonardo da Vinci of painting, reflecting upon art making as thinking, as thought itself, a matter of the realm of the mind. The interplay of visual / forms and thinking in terms of form finds a vivid, unprecedented example in Stephen Ratcliffe’s latest epic: a singular poem / series of 474 days brilliantly described as *REAL*, the book’s title.

In consideration of art and idea—the mimetic and pictorial—as intellectual motion, Stephen Ratcliffe, elegantly takes up questions of phenomena and the essence of perception, representation/s and descriptions of reality, proposing a kind of documentary on noticing and thinking about what and how one sees and perceives.

A series of days, a description of looking-at and as—experience, reveals the remarkable “reality” of appearances:

6.11

Left edge of white cloud moving across pale blue

6.12

Silver brightness of small cloud at top of ridge

6.13

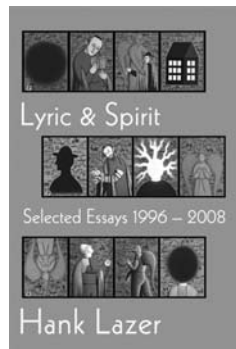
Width of pink-orange in otherwise grey-

6.14

Hummingbird darting down from pale blue of sky

6.15

Profile of finch on lower left perch of feeder



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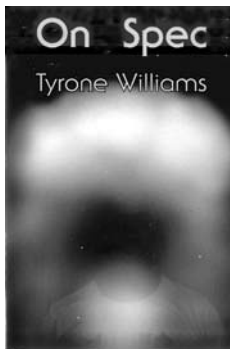
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BOOK REVIEWS

6.16

Silver section of the horizontal line at the top

6.17

Bright orange film of cloud in vertical window

6.18

Three long notes followed by a five-note trill

Looking out (the window), noticing the phenomena of weather, of color, the shape of land, a bird, for example, Ratcliffe's thinking is philosophical as the world he describes is merely there, objectively so, especially since his style renders the seen as fact: things occur, things are. Yet inherent to such limpid vision, the poetic line and the poet's lexicon—of color, spatiality, framing, perspective, for example—are like the telling line in visual art: and by the most exquisite, inherent of gestures—a form, or figure—become a study of rendering how one sees. The poet composes life and art, following the theme and variation of movement of thought over time. Each line is an image, an idea, sometimes incomplete: the act of elision suggesting, perhaps, a form of abstraction. A most intriguing feature of the collection is just this: how the poem composes philosophical paintings, reflections of and upon man's propensity to create images, to mimetically represent, to describe. Thinking of the Aristotelian notion from *Poetics* of "the pleasure derived from representations," one sees the two enduring impulses of painting here (as suggested by French critic and poet, Jean-Christophe Bailly): to pictorially embellish by means of repetition and variation and to mimetically depict.

Drawing upon and extending certain modern and contemporary innovations in visual art (amongst other genres), Ratcliffe composes a pictorial poetics. The poem holds the moment still, seizes it as in painting, frames it, often thus focuses upon the theme of landscape, of the figure, of elements of still life, with the rigor of a personal syntax like the gestures of a visual artist "abstracting" media. The epic poem also has a quality of montage, of film clips, a certain photographic and documentary mastery and majesty. (Informed by looking and reading, the poet also celebrates notions of theatre, an awareness of music.)

The harmony between the realms of the representational and abstract makes reading Ratcliffe's work a profound intellectual and visual pleasure. The poet places us in the continuous present—that of the apprehension of ideas and images—and recalls, "Aristotle saying it's better to be out there / than here in this book. Man in green shirt / looking at Mondrian's grid, in which the picture / itself is the image" (4.25). Interrogating notions of the frame, the interplay between the poem on the page and the mind seeing and composing scenes (sees), Ratcliffe offers the reader singular, philosophical reflections of representation of the everyday—visions

of the essence of the "real" world.

REAL proposes a masterful correlative to da Vinci's notions of the visual—in the now. Ratcliffe explores the figure, the landscape, the composition of perspective in the service of the poem and as the action of pictorial composition—with exquisite rigor of syntactical form—to mimetically and philosophically examine the sentence and poetic line—a system of notation of the reality—like a painter's.

What, in fact, is real? being one central question, the poet looks at the relationship between things seen and perceived—"New green shoots on the apple branch in a vase / inside the window to the left of the viewer" (4.2) or "... articles of which fall to the floor / beside the older man who had wanted to paint / her picture whereas she had thought to write / something about him." (4.5)—and we are invited to wonder at nature, the human, and their composition / transcription in the form of the poem and / in terms of visual art. We read into a lexicon of color, of tone, of line, of perspective, of placement of form, of dimensionality of surface—of images and of meaning. Considering painting, the poet notes: "Mondrian wants us to look not at the image in painting but the painting itself as image" (5.31), and so thought and the moment stay still, like the idea of an image in epic visual and poetic notation, forming "the rhythm of seeing" (3.17).

REAL, as the title evokes, is both nominative in its formulation—a real visual record, a daybook (like Bonnard's cloud diaries), a meditation of the "first person," a "man" watching, documenting weather, a woman, the garden, the ocean—and it's epistemological: about thinking, formulating thought and watching its formation. From one day to the next, a "Line between the blue of the sky below thin white cloud and the jade green opacity of water across which no swells approach, the man [is] sitting on the white board thinking..." (11.7). Like the first person, we are drawn into reflection, the poem placing, proposing the "line" of language between meteorological elements—"blue...white...opacity.... the white board": yes, sky and surf, but suggestive of form (a page, a canvas) and the questions of making and the meanings of form: "actual orange of a butterfly landing next to orange flower on a fence" (4.1). Or, there are:

two yellow petals on the stem in the green glass
bottle to the left of a rectangular darker green
plane of the tobacco plant left above it.
East wind moving across the surfaces of more
distant leaves, small dry cypress needles
raining down on window next to man in red
jacket's right shoulder. The woman on bench
with hair in braid reaching into bag for jar
of blackberry jam, looking up... (11.8)

BOOK REVIEWS

The sentence is a system of transcription, a depiction of the real in the mimetic sense and a system of objectification, of visual wonderment. Ratcliffe's contemporary epic poem abstracts the real in homage to painting, each line an image, a consideration of images: of form, of figure, of nature, the bouquet in a glass (like Diebenkorn's poppy), the flat planes of color (like Cézanne's trees and mountain), the bottle in a still (recalling Picasso, Morandi), then the film clip of a woman gazing, looking up, her pose, composed. Ratcliffe's poem offers us a discretely luminous reflection of the thinking which subtends visual composition:

Each poem, each day, is five sentences, whereby a study of the figure also frames the composition. The poem is a frame for everyday, in California, Paris, Barcelona, Connecticut (or elsewhere). Poetry is figurative abstraction: the mimetic subject is "The viewer's perspective on the bird appearing / between green of field and

blue space of sky / above it, in relation to its point of view / approaching the corner of the fence" (4.23).

The "first person," the observer, the poet, notices elements of his landscape to compose and explore the real and abstract "two-dimensional image" (3.25). The play of perspective is all about the appearance of things and the sensation of seeing: "the light grey feeling of a sky visible / through the upper left corner of the window. Wind sound also missing, the yellow and green / motion of branches above a field where scotch broom appears to be standing about to be seen" (3.27). In a sense, the corner is the page and the poem is the landscape. Ratcliffe tells us he is thinking about perception as much as he is thinking about art: "Constable's impromptu sketch of blue and yellow / cloud on the back of a palette, Cézanne's green / and yellow apples in the corner" (1.8). In their interrogation of the nature and rendering of everyday reality,

the poems are meditations on elements of the present moment, and the nature of representation.

As contemporary genres are not singular, the visual is theatrical, "off-stage action," and musical, a "profile of a rust-colored bird on a branch of a musical score whose direction reads 'Allegro con spirito,'" "a diva in the background sounding like a bird on a telephone wire" (12.19). (References to music abound: Handel's suite in D, Cage, the Goldberg Variations, thoughts of *Aida* in Milan...) Or there's the cinematic "close up," images "continued from an earlier series of events," notes on "how the woman appears." The figure is a form of idea. Or like film, the poem, a picture plan-sequence, a surface, a composition, describing and following its formation. The "dramatis personae" establish spatial, temporal, human relationships and amongst them: hummingbirds, blue jays, chickadees, gulls, song sparrows, small

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dark birds, white terns, man in black sweat-shirt, woman in fur hat, blonde woman, boy in black wetsuit, woman in Paris, man in red truck calling from Wyoming, red-headed man on the twelve-foot [surf] board, outline of an apparently older man, for as the poet recalls Matisse's claim: "rules have no existence outside individuals" (6.20).

One sees, perceives, beyond "the" specific or "a" sense of the general, to reflect upon Machiavelli's prince saying, "the man who neglects the real to study / the ideal' will accomplish his ruin, the real being / 'varying circumstances of life'" (12.19). As a formal gesture, the poet often suspends the article. Everyday life is the composition of situations. Ratcliffe is reading and ordering relationships of "landscape and abstraction" (3.21).

Of central concern is also the question: how does one see and how is the scene to be set in relationship to that which frames

it? The music is subtle, the language, the word choice, is limpid, precise. Documenting vivid elements of panorama, holding life still—as Lily Briscoe, Woolf's painter, aspired—is a form composed, juxtaposed. Ratcliffe's poem derives tremendous force and elegance by the formal and philosophical means it deploys to remind the reader of a reality greater than the poem itself—the grandeur and banality of the real world—the poem being an "ideal" study. In the same poem, on the same day (2.7), just after reflecting on "the iris of Rembrandt's eye," the poet notes, "Bill Gates shouting 'FUCK' in rehearsal for Tonight show... Orin Hatch at the Senate Hearing. Reagan's [comment] 'still a lot of brush to clear at the ranch' after the White House, 'fences to mend and horses to ride'. Then a "Bird's white body [comes] circling down in front of grey-white clouds in pale blue sky, white of water breaking against the green concrete seawall" (2.7). So much happens. Using the "language of painting" (3.18), the

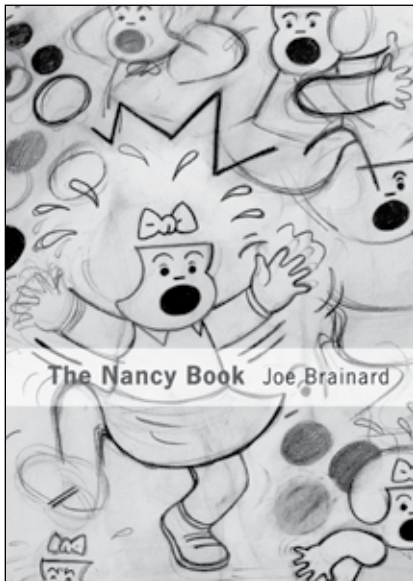
poet has undertaken a magnificent study of everyday life, framing within it deeper questions about how we see, think, create, render an understanding of existence...

At the end of one January day, reflecting upon Bonnard, the poet writes: "it isn't a matter / of painting life, 'but giving life to paint,' Wittgenstein wanting description to replace / explaining" (1.29). The vitality of form, of the form of poetry in this case, is of central concern. And description is the extraordinary mode.

One problem being, as Ratcliffe recalls Merleau-Ponty, "amounts to finding definitions of essences" (1.26). The plastic, epic form is a description of looking, of "giving life" to form, (birds, people, clouds change like the sea); the real proffers a frame, a context, a—stunning—body (of poetry).

Originally from Alaska, Molly Lou Freeman took degrees in poetry from Brown University and The University of Iowa Writers Workshop. Her poetry has been published in numerous American journals. She teaches at the International School of Paris and edits a journal of Franco-American poetics and graphic design entitled carnet de route.

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NICK PIOMBINO
FAIT ACCOMPLI
FACTORY SCHOOL / 2007
REVIEW BY DUSTIN WILLIAMSON

Imagine telling a blogger not to rush into publication: Blogging for Dummies (24)

There is something oddly circular about a review in a print publication of a book that began as blog. In some ways it feels a little like walking into a virtual minefield. Not to trivialize the effects of actual minefields on actual lives, but as poetry blogs and poetry print publications exist in a false binary, where both question the validity of the other, the whole project has an air of contentiousness surrounding it. Perhaps it would be better to say that reviewing *Fait Accompli* by Nick Piombino is like walking into a comments field. Luckily, Piombino transcends the limita-

BOOK REVIEWS

tions of either media, by ignoring the rules governing both of them.

As Gary Sullivan notes in the afterward to the book, “the strength of *Fait Accompli*... has everything to do with Nick’s refusal of “blog time” and to focus and mediate instead on the nature of time itself and the social and aesthetic issues that come up, again and again, for all of us” (130). With its non-chronological format, the book works less as a journal of daily thoughts on life and literature than as a reflection on the nature of time. Piombino takes the chronological sequence, which is an inextricable essence of journals and blogs, and turns the format against itself. He refuses the terrifying record of the progress of time—or at least its continuing movement onward; Piombino breaks and bends time’s hold over him, positing a space of all moments, as one moment. The moment however is not necessarily a static one, though in some ways it refutes the idea of “progress”; instead, the moment, our lives, is an indefi-

nite space of meditation and navigation within our singular head space and its interaction with the cerebral space others have carved out for themselves around us (whether as artists, politicians, philosophers, generals, etc.).

Piombino breaks the immediacy of the blogging in some interesting ways. Because he publishes journal entries, taken from notebooks between the 1970s and 2003, he makes observations that someone writing on a computer, whether on Word or the Blogger interface, never would. In one instance, he writes, “[t]he screen on my watch showing the calendar went blank, so I don’t know the time” (14). I was jarred by this observation, because it questions the nature of blogging: sitting in front of a computer with all of the luxuries of the modern age, or at least a clock in the task bar of the computer screen. These types of observations point to how atmosphere and location, as structure, affect the content of writing. Allowing moments in the writing, such as

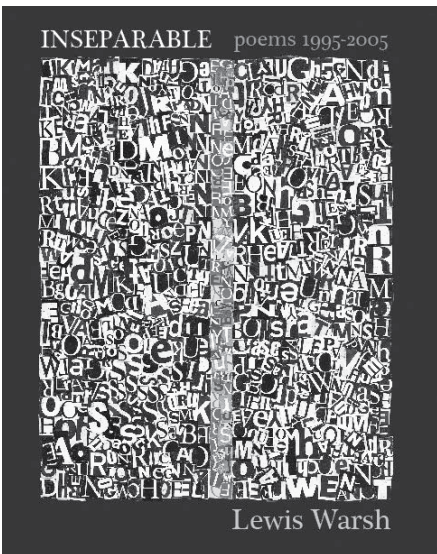
not knowing the time to remain, redirects the attention from the content to the structure of blogging. Piombino reclaims the blog back from the author by disrupting the idea of watching a blogger’s thoughts play out across the screen, day in and day out. Except on the weekends, of course; no one blogs on the weekend.

The entries in *Fait Accompli* alternate between meditations, many written about inhabiting a space during a specific time, and loose aphoristic one shots, such as, “Remember: the thought police will never tell you that you have the right to remain silent” (106). The effect is a cumulative collapse of time, or alternately “[w]ords—built in time travel” (52). One might expect a work composed of entries written over a thirty-year span that deal, in such a similar way, with the uncertainties of time’s passage to have a gloomy or morbid tone. However, *Fait Accompli* exhibits a sympathetic view of the implication that “past, present and future are one” (13). Time is an equalizer and Piombino’s entries from 2003, during the early stages of invasion in Iraq, exhibit no more shrillness or desperation than entries written in the late 70s—though they do level a consistent anger at the monstrous ways in which one group invades the physical and emotional space of another.

I would argue that Piombino’s clear and sympathetic style works best in the longer sections, where he allows himself to dwell on some aspect of the “time travel.” He crystallizes the moment and rests there. At the same time, the fragments illustrate another aspect of time travel: the nature of time vs. subjectivity. And, in true blog fashion, Piombino argues out at any reader who would criticize his “incomplete” thoughts:

Dear Audience,

Whatever yearning that still exists for completed works or pieces of writing is probably the result of a reactionary desire for a coherent place for art within a sadistically conformist and conforming society. Don’t expect it from me. All you’ll get from me are disparate fragments that result from the totalitarian, manipulative and exploitative culture I live in (81).



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BOOK REVIEWS

This position brings up interesting questions regarding the project in general. What is the implication of crystallizing a work like *Fait Accompli*, when the book is only a small fragment of the total project? That is, what happens to a work that is an exploration of the structure and chronology of blogging when it is made physical as opposed to virtual? Is the book an excerpt of the blog, or is the book a re-conceptualization of the project? For one, much of the dailiness has been removed, the announcements for readings and other events. Or perhaps the larger point is inherent in what directly follows the above quote: "Excuse me, but I've been reading Adorno again and he's right. This is an administered culture and like you—I am fucked. The hope for continuity and wholeness, which all of my nature longs for, is dead and gone" (81). Like the fragments within the books, whether or not the book itself is an incomplete fragment is beside the point. In *Fait Accompli*, Piombino works within a view of time that actively resists the narrative of progress restricted by cultural and political authority, so it's only natural that the project exists beyond the confines of the proscribed unit of book meaning.

Dustin Williamson is back from the near future. You'll never believe who the president is.

JOHN KEENE /
CHRISTOPHER STACKHOUSE
SEISMOSIS

1913 PRESS / 2006

REVIEW BY FRANCES RICHARD

To push so far into drawing that you emerge in writing, or to enter so deeply into writing that you arrive at drawing, is to take a radical position on what it means to make an expressive mark. To understand the sense of flicker, imagine a book by someone who both draws and writes seriously, holding two modes of inscription in tension like a dialogue of self and soul. (See, for example, Brenda Iijima's *Animate, Inanimate Aims*, Litmus Press, 2007.) Such a project undoes the allegedly coherent artist, distributing his or her attention—and corollary assumptions about dedication and mastery—across a split field. This is exciting. Perhaps we're comfortable, a hundred-plus years into modernism, with notions of the author as a pulse or filter rather than a grand authority. Nevertheless, we still assume—for practical purposes—a distinction between verbal and visual. Poem-thought and art-thought are not the same.

Where one notation tips into another, though, a fault-line opens and this difference is undermined. We're not sure whether or where to read or look. The drawn and/or written artifact, and the maker who stands behind or inside it, begin to register as simply tremors, oscillations. As John Keene writes in a poem called "Process": "In the mark event, you enter your signature." This means a) that in making a mark you sign on the line; you declare yourself. But also b) that mark-making is a kind of black hole or event horizon into which the signing self tumbles and disappears.

Complex enough to track two media through one person. But in *Seismosis*, all this happens². To put it, again, in the book's terms, from the poem aptly titled "Anamorphosis":

Entering the cut in spite of the pitfalls. Not to say, this is what this *I* means or reveals, or this is what it could tell if it were looked into carefully, if we could say it and hold it as pattern there. Instead, I want to map this cluster feeling, the upheaval of falling for, drawing it...

It might seem that having two names on the cover would simplify the question of who is expressing what kind of perception how. One author could take responsibility for the lexical and the other for the graphic gesture, with no wobbly contact-zone between. (As Geoffrey Jacques remarks in his Afterword to *Seismosis*, publications that place poets and painters side by side typically announce without ambiguity who is the star and who the moonlighter dropping in from a parallel universe.) Keene and Stackhouse, however, stage a truly dialogic collaboration. Their endeavors are distinct but entwined. The book's two aspects would be drastically altered if separated.

This has partly to do with their backgrounds. Christopher Stackhouse is a poet as well as a visual artist. John Keene has made images as well as poems. Each is ambidextrous, and demonstrates a practical understanding of the other's idiom because, in another context, it is his own. In producing *Seismosis*, they literally traded drafts and composed in response to one another. But the polyvocality goes beyond parallel play. They get into each other's heads and finish each other's phrases. It's intimate—not exactly homoerotic, but heteroglossic, telegraphic like longstanding friendship. Stackhouse's drawings hum. Keene's layouts function as gestalts. And so *Seismosis* is a folded map, a two-handed graph of quakes that shake belief in bedrock individuality or medium specificity. "The design event begins in subjectivity," Keene writes in "Cuts." But subjectivity is a crust that slides tectonically on a core of molten idea and desire. It's a stylus that jumps.

The volume is arranged in an irregular ABAB format, with Keene's short lyrics, prose poems, and open-field compositions alternating Stackhouse's nervous scribbles. The images are reproduced in grayscale at close-to-actual size inside the book, and in black on cream on the covers. Suggesting snarls of hair, EKG lines, doodled anger or exuberance, the drawings are unfussy but sensually taut. Keene, meanwhile, works via collage, citing writings on aesthetics, music, seismology, and various branches of mathematics, especially topology. (This is the mathematical study of changing contours, as in surface erosion at a given site over time, or different knots that can be made in the same piece of string.) Endnotes refer to Yve-Alain Bois, DJ Spooky, Cecil Taylor, and Rosmarie Waldrop, among others; names like Plato, Matisse, Lyotard, Kant, and the Dogon crop up in the text.

Given the poems' dense referentiality versus the drawings' non-rational tactility, it's tempting to cast Stackhouse as funky id or wild

BOOK REVIEWS

child to Keene's detached, appropriationist mathematician. In fact, much of the book does interrogate the nature of abstraction, and the two forms are presented as variations, the writing cool and cerebral while the drawing feels instinctive and warm. In "Ontic," for example, Keene seems to analyze Stackhouse, acknowledging him with a pronoun and translating the physical fact of the drawings—their ontic existence—into conceptual terms:

Neurophysical seisms, infinite and organized
as draft environments.
Here each event as vector capturing slip, ripping.
He reimagines nervous graphs, physioscapes,
manifold braids of silence or fractured joy
[as continuous
functions that map the other in a correspondent fashion.

Elsewhere, however, the poems go visceral against the drawings' reticence. An intermittent series is titled "After (C)," which—especially when addressing someone with the initial "S"—sounds like John Keene talking to Chris Stackhouse about feeling and impulses, asking questions and sketching notes to see if he's getting it. The matter at hand is not *not* abstract, since it involves highly elaborated aesthetic choices. But it's not dry math either:

So S. marks like PHALLUS
and its attendant forms
how the negative decomposes
in its consciousness

KNOTTINGS [...]

from the world's BODY, from TOUCH
and FEAR and LUST
come subjects [...]

To S: YOU are
wholly of the DRAWING

In spite of the erudite references, science-y diction, and resolutely non-confessional stance, *Seismosis* is filled with mutual thinking out loud, symbiotic guesswork, sympathy. It also feels, somehow, distinctly male. Tracie Morris, in her blurb, describes it as a "textural performance [of] two men's boyish charms," and when Jacques theorizes comparable collaborations, it's Aaron Douglas with James Weldon Johnson he mentions—though he also reminds us of the tendency to elide avant-garde practice in discussions of work by African Americans and women in general, especially through the mid-twentieth century. Keene's poems contain a "he," an "I," a "we," and a "you," but no "she" (a "CLITORIS" does come into "After C (2): Dialogue"). Even the framing device of Jacques's Afterword, plus a Foreword by Ed Roberson, emphasizes *Seismosis* as a colloquy between men. This is not a criticism. They're talking

about sensuality steeped in intellect, self-enveloping Klein-bottle¹ relationships, semiotic osmosis. If men talked to each other more often like that, it would rock.

¹ A mathematically anomalous surface akin to the Möbius strip, more easily pictured than described. Wikipedia has good examples.

Frances Richard's book of poems, See Through, was published by Four Way Books in 2003. She writes frequently about contemporary art, teaches at Barnard College and the Rhode Island School of Design, and lives in Brooklyn.

CHRIS MARTIN
AMERICAN MUSIC
COPPER CANYON PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY EDMUND BERRIGAN

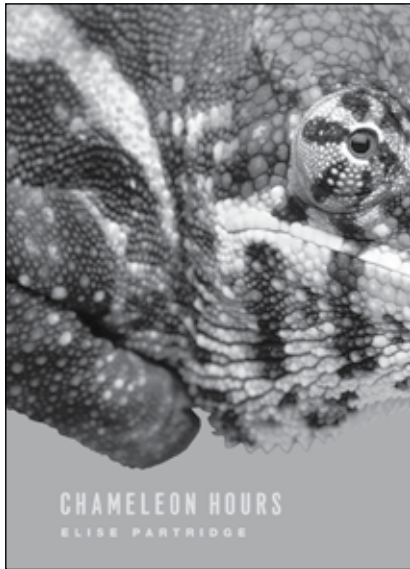
American Music, Chris Martin's debut full-length, contains 37 poems that are all 2-3 pages with three-line stanzas save for a lone last line. His poems read fast and carry a lot of locations, as if he's commuting from one part of the poem to the next. They're fueled on experience and feeling. What else shows up: some healthy straight American male lust; the occasional graffiti; references to Kant, Gerhard Richter, John McEnroe, Buddha, Mormons; dreams about flying a plane in the Andes or being a caveman in a meat vest. Martin finds his way into a poem often through announcing himself or various city characters in mid-thought or mid-stride. "Erupting from / The Carroll Street tunnel" begins one called "Surviving Desire." The poem seemingly takes a subway ride into Martin's psyche, dwelling on the fact of being: "I tremor at the way / The world seems so vigorous / One second and the next / It's swimming, each dumb leaf / Resorting to metaphor / As every winking turn traps / You into thinking that life / Is a meticulous plot dimly allotted / To you alone." The title poem begins, "I don't plan to address the physical / impossibility of understanding / Death." These are the poems of a young man, not naïve but coming to grips with a fascinating exuberance of pure experience and its limits.

The poems keep a balanced take on the personal by reacting heavily to their surroundings, twined with an energetic, comma-studded pace that propels you sometimes through occasional internal rhymes (a habit from Martin's dalliances with hip-hop). A lot of intimate urban appreciation is glimpsed and rolled into the moods: "nothing / Compares to the melt / I feel watching / NECKFACE's glory fritter / Away on the rooftops / Of the Gowanus Canal."

Martin seems to take great joy in the fact of experience, and you get an often-dizzying tour through his version of their psychic consequences. "The recumbent figures / Of capital tragedy / Their

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BOOK REVIEWS

scaly ankles dangling / From soot-soured Wranglers, likeness / Likewise suspended in favor, our teetering off / And on pattern of tapering / Parabola shapes arbitrarily weaving / Depths.”

There’s extensive quoting in *American Music* of various sources, usually indicated by italics, and punctuated at the end by a list of poets, musicians, artists, and filmmakers. It makes for some fun juxtaposition: Nietzsche, Ted Mathys, Van Morrison, Marcella Durand, Andre Breton, Destroyer, Lyn Hejinian, Neutral Milk Hotel, Henry Darger, Mirah, and so on. The blending of their materials is seamless, and though the book jacket raises the question of the joys of plagiarism, the poems don’t seem particularly preoccupied by it. His method for these works already involves a heavy blending of elements involving his surroundings, physical and otherwise, so the pointing out of the usage is for its own sake.

Martin comments on his own process in the

anthemic title poem: “the work that I do does / Nothing to things, I leave home to imbibe / The dislocations of astonishment, to lose / My way and find another, tricking / The moments into line / Before defecting into rearrangements.” It seems an apt description of his mode for these works, which provide more and more payoff the deeper one gets into them. These poems are also extremely social, though mostly not in the detailed Frank O’Hara way, who gets name-checked on the jacket blurb. Martin is never in one setting for more than a few lines and his attention to detail tends to point inward. From “I Ghost”: “I remember the broken / Nose of the man who taught / Me how to kill with the sound / Of my hands clapping as I emerge / Into the eerily natural / Light descending on Astor / Place, thinking again / About the quirks / Of anatomy, how they / Resurface, how even the disciples / Of disciples have disciples, returning / Danger to the tiny / Inner disturbances we share.”

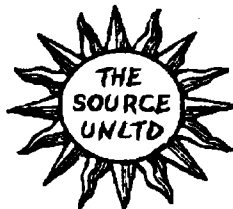
The deeper into *American Music* one gets, the easier it becomes to blend in with Martin’s concerns. His poems are extremely user-friendly, partly because his cerebralness makes for an enjoyable ride, never taking those dreaded steps into a shelter of hyper-intellectual post-modern reduction of feelings. These poems focus on individual feeling in hugely detailed perceptions, and the poet is energized, though not over-exuberant, to see and/or be a part of the implications and results. In that sense it’s a classic, and not to be missed. “...the late / Summer breeze makes / My forearm hair feel particularly / Inarticulate, receiving so much deciphering / So little as too often I invigorate / A line of discourse only to have it / Stump when the telephone / Rings, I dreamt I was a comedian / And the audience was / Laughing so hard I never / Was able to tell / A single joke, so here / It is...”

Edmund Berrigan is the author of Glad Stone Children (Farfalla Press, 2008).

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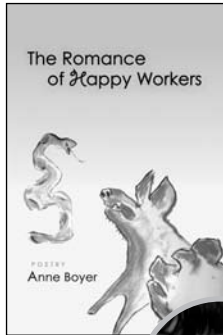
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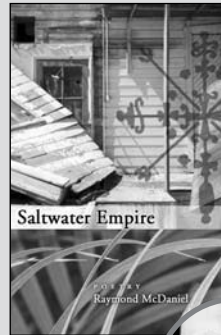
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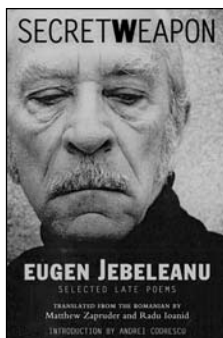
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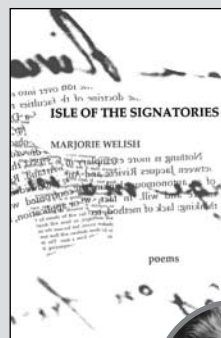
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