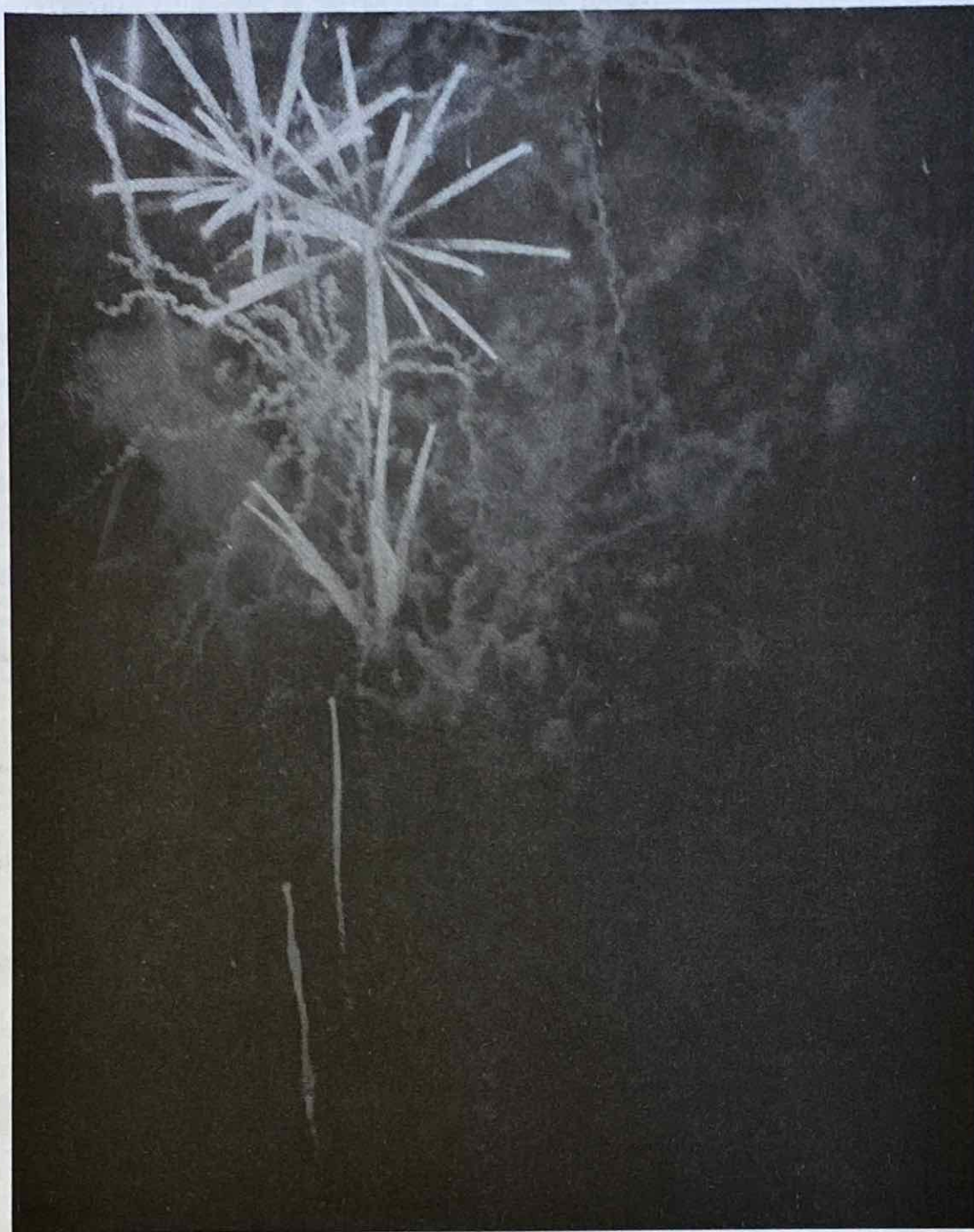


THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE NUMBER 202_FEBRUARY/MARCH 2005



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NYSCA
New York State Council on the Arts

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

December was a rough month all around, and I'd like to call your attention to one more piece of information that could use some care via Suzi Winson:

On Friday December 10th, poet, activist, and naturalist Michael Rothenberg, also editor of recent *Selected Poems* volumes by Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger, had a catastrophic fire at his home in Pacifica, California. Michael shared this home with artist Nancy Davis, their son Cosmos, and the prestigious Sheldance Nursery where they raised bromeliads and orchids. The nursery is still open for business but a lifetime of books, archives, artwork, and personal possessions was mostly destroyed. I'm asking artist/writer friends of Michael's to send books to him that they have written or other noteworthy works to help rebuild his library. The address to send books would be the family's temporary rental at 200 Bonita Ave. Pacifica, CA 94044. Thank you for your support. Please contact me or Suzi Winson, with any questions at all at fishdrum@earthlink.net.

Also, as we go to press with this issue it's unclear when it will hit mailboxes, but The Poetry Project will be hosting a memorial for John Fisk on Saturday, January 22 at 1 pm in the Parish Hall. All John asked was that we get someone to sing "Amazing Grace" and then open the mic to anyone who wanted to speak. Please join us in honoring his life and spirit.

Love,

Anselm Berrigan

NEW YEAR'S THANK YOU'S

A huge thank you to the following volunteers and donors who helped out during our Annual New Year's Day Marathon.

Volunteers: Aaron Kunin, Adeena Karasick, Allison Cobb, Arlo Quint, Atticus Fierman, Becky Kosick, Bethany Spiers, Bill Kushner, Bob Rosenthal, Boni Joi, Brenda Coultas, Brenda Iijima, Brendan Lorber, Brian Kim Stefans, CA Conrad, Cailin Wilson, Carol Mullins, Cassie Carter, Catherine Tyc, Charles Babinski, Charlotte Phillips, Chris Martin, Christopher Stackhouse, Chris Ward, Cliff Fyman, Courtney Frederick, David Cameron, David

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GINSBERG CD

Artemis Records in conjunction with the Allen Ginsberg Trust and The Poetry Project has recently released a wonderful, high-quality Hal Wilner-produced CD of Ginsberg performing "Wichita Vortex Sutra" at the Project on October 29, 1994 with a host of musicians backing him up: Art Baron, Stephan Smith, David Mansfield, Arto Lindsay, Marc Ribot, Michael Blair, Elliott Sharp, Lenny Kaye, Lee Ranaldo,

Steve Shelley, Lenny Pickett, Philip Glass, Christian Marclay and Hal Wilner. "Wichita Vortex Sutra" is available at record stores and through the Ginsberg Trust at www.allenginsberg.org. A very limited number of copies are also available through the Poetry Project, as well, and the cost is \$16. It's a hell of a thing to hear, especially now, Allen recite statistics, call out senators and McNamara, and declare that "almost all our language has been taxed by war." And the music, in this case, lays low and complements the poem. Well worth having and hearing.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Harryette Mullen and Carla Harryman for receiving grants from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts.

JANET RICHMOND

The wonderful poet and visual artist Janet Richmond passed away on December 28th. Many of us knew her and her wild poems from Poetry Project workshops. In the last year, other people grew to love her poetry in issues of *Lungfull!* and *Hanging Loose*. Joanna Fuhrman is organizing a reading of her poems; if you are interested in reading one at the event, email Joanna at Jofuhrman@excite.com.

MORE FAREWELLS

To Lucia Berlin, author of many books, including *Homesick*, *So Long*, and *Where I Live Now*; Susan Sontag, who interviewed and was interviewed by Richard Hell and Victor Bockris in the February/March 1995 *Poetry Project Newsletter* (with gorgeous cover photo); and Agnes Martin, the magnificent abstract painter.

BROADSIDE SHOW

The 4th Floor Gallery at Soho Letterpress is currently (mid-January to March) showing a choice collection of letterpress broadsides by such authors as Philip Whalen, Susan Howe, John Yau, Hélène Cixous, and many others, printed at a variety of places, including the Center for Book Arts, Naropa University, and Woodland Pattern. The gallery is located at 69 Greene Street, between Broome and Spring on the (sic) 4th floor, open weekdays from 10 to 6. Call (212) 334-4339.

JACKSON MAC LOW 1922-2004

A resident of New York City since the early 1940s, Jackson Mac Low, who died December 8th, brought light and wisdom to successive generations of writers, artists, and activists. Known for his association with John Cage, he was, among other things, a member of the performance group Fluxus, an experimental poet and composer, and a social activist. Mac Low, much like Robert Creeley, provided a link between contemporary avant-garde poetry and modernist master Ezra Pound. Yet through myriad media and complex variations of his compositional methodologies, and over the course of working with several generations of poets, he never towered over the community, but rather was always contemporary in the constitution of it.

Via anarchism and Buddhist metaphysics, Mac Low's work challenged the primacy of the poet's ego in relation to a poem. In 1955 he followed composer Earle Brown's use of the Rand Corporation's table of random digits as one of many so-called "chance" methods of composition. Throughout the '50s and '60s he pioneered the use of various formal procedures for writing poetry, procedures often grouped together as "chance" or "aleatoric," but which actually utilize a variety of methodologies, from the diastic-acrostics of the early '60s to the associative poems of the last few decades. Less known, however, is his connection to various cultures of resistance, a history that puts his life work as a poet in a strikingly different context from the formal movements in art with which he is normally associated.

Raised in the north shore suburb of Kenilworth, Illinois, Mac Low entered his senior year of high school in 1938. A precocious high school senior, he took the train into the city in an attempt to meet his hero Bertrand Russell, then at a table at the University of Chicago bookstore read Pound's *Guide to Kulchur* from cover to cover. As a student at UC that fall—during a time of war when the university was a cauldron of radical thought—the Sandburg-influenced liberal pacifist's interest in poetic form met with an evolving social consciousness. His poetry at that time began to acquire a depth of historical reference; experiments in form marked by Pound's internationalism and Stein's cubist opacity. From Chicago Aristotelians, such as Richard McKeon and R. S. Crane, as well as Chicago PhD student Paul Goodman, Mac Low wrote in a letter that he had learned "to regard Aristotle's *Poetics* as an empirical, post-hoc, analysis of two plays," not, as others might have it, a prescriptive "recipe bk."

Moving to New York during World War II, Mac Low participated in anarchist and pacifist gatherings, including discussions at the Spanish anarchist meeting hall on Broadway and weekend picnics and dances at the Ferrer colony at Stelton, New Jersey. During the war and until 1954, when it ceased publication, he was one of the contributors to, and editors of, the NYC anarchist paper *Why?* (later called *Resistance*). In June 1955, he was arrested in the first organized protest of civil defense drills.

Mac Low was, even in the early (and last) years of his life, an extremely prolific writer. By the time he left Chicago in 1942, he was an accomplished poet with a manuscript of poems at the ready. In New York he met Robert Duncan—a figure who provided access to New York anarchists as much as literary culture (the two poets met William Carlos Williams after a reading in 1943)—and while he wrote many poems before 1954, that period of his life marks an extraordinary shift in the level of his poetic output. The great bulk of his work

remains unpublished, in part because of the relatively large number of works he produced and their increasing length. While it's possible to imagine that non-intentional methods might allow a poet to generate longer poems, note that even the later works, which are largely "intentional," are quite long.

In Mac Low's work, the prescriptive, the instruction, and the empirical have a

unique relationship. He was famous for his explanations of his compositional process and his instructions for performance. That he worked, as he says in a letter, "as an etymologist, writer of reference-book articles, copy editor, indexer, proofreader, and fact checker," perhaps explains his attention to detail—he was able to render specific microscopic fragments in ways that drew attention to what is often visible but not seen.

Mac Low himself defined his career in terms of shifts in how the very matter of poetry was handled. After 1954, he explained in a brief biographical description, how "nonintentional" procedures, including systematic chance operations, indeterminacy, acrostic and diastic 'reading-through' text-selection methods, and 'translation' between verbal texts and music, figured largely in his production of verbal, musical, visual, and performance works." Mac Low also wrote what he called "Simultaneities"—performance works for multiple "players" (both vocal and instrumental), and if his reading-through worked to rethink notions of prosody, of the line, the performance of his work required an end to generic distance between dance, poetry, and music.

In the last 20 years, the context for his work was internationalized as more than a dozen books, including *Representative Works* (Roof, 1986), *Twenties* (Roof, 1992), and the forthcoming *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces 1955-2002* from Granary, have allowed new generations of readers to discover his work. He was a constant presence at readings in downtown New York, where many of the city's initiates first encountered him. Seeing Jackson Mac Low with a notebook in his lap gave one a sense of comfort, as if history's recording angel were present, "reading-through" our most infinite particulars.

In addition to Anne Tardos, his wife and collaborator of over 20 years, Mac Low is survived by children Clarinda and Mordecai-Mark.

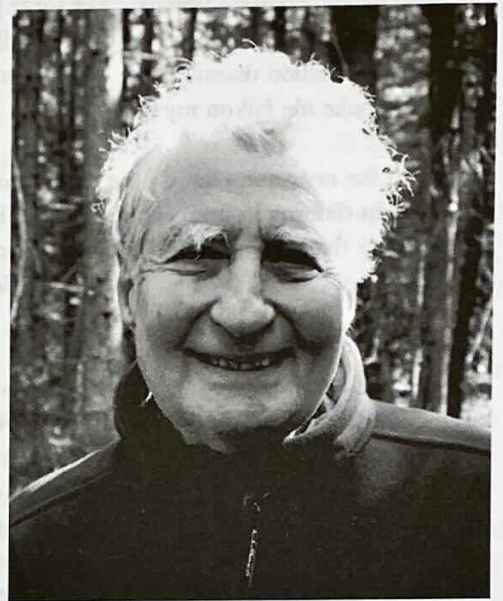


PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNE TARDOS

—Joel Kuszai

58TH LIGHT POEM: FOR ANNE TARDOS—19 MARCH 1979

I know when I've fallen in love I start to write love songs
Love's actinism turns nineteens to words & thoughts in love songs
as your "A" & the date made "actinism" enter this love song

Also I seem to start dropping punctuation
My need for punctuation lessens like some people's need for sleep
My need for sleep lessens too but later I fall on my face
Lack of punctuation doesn't catch up with me like lack of sleep
It doesn't make me fall on my face

So bright the near noon light the toy photometer twirls in
the sunlight slanting in from southeast thru the southwest window
the stronger the light the faster the light motor turns
diamond vanes' black sides absorb white sides radiate photons
See it go

A "42" draws the northern lights into the song
as yesterday into the Taggart Light Poem twice they were drawn
as "aurora borealis" & "aurora" by "A"'s & by numbers
There they seemed eery & threatening Here they seem hopeful
as they seemed when last I saw them over the Gulf of St. Lawrence
cold euphoric after making love wondering
at swirling curtains & sudden billows lighting the sky northwest

I remember their evanescent light as neutral or bluish white
I remember the possibility of yellow the improbability of red
not like Bearsville's rose & blood sky twenty-five years before
Now these memories mingled with pictures' descriptions'
project on inward skies idiosyncratic northern lights
that only exist while I'm writing these lines for Anne
Even the next time I read them the lights they arouse will be different

Nineteen sheds a tranquil light on our love song thru your "T"
Our love's tranquil light revealed by 19 & by T
is turned by 15 to an aureole tipping an "A"
The "A" becomes your face The aureole grows

Relucence from my face glows back on yours

A telephone bell can deflect & dissipate my light
The deflected light is lost to poem & person
I turn my telephone off these days to help ordinary light breed poems

The sun is so bright on my desk now except on the typewriter keys
that there's no need for the light of the student lamp placed to
shine on the paper

But now five hours later the lamp's the only light
& I begin the poem's "astrological" section

58TH LIGHT POEM: FOR ANNE TARDOS—19 MARCH 1979

II

Acetylene light may be what Virgo needs to see the "pattern
except that for him this is something" he will
only acknowledge if it can be seen in natural light

Can we gain new light from astrology that ubiquitous superstition
You Sagittarius Woman Me Virgo Man
What "can happen between them is a" mazing
a dizzying a stupefying or dazing a crazing
a great perplexing bewildering amazing
forming a maze of something or making it intricate
being bewildered wandering as in a maze
What has happened between them is amazing

What is happening between us is amazing
more intense & vivid than electric arc light tremendous light
brighter than acetylene light friendly as reading lamp light

"But a young Sagit-
tarian need have no qualms about taking on a
man considerably her senior if he is a "Virgo"
Rand's random digits underline our case
in this lovely silly optimistic sentence

We've been living I think in a kind of drowning light

"He reaches the age of forty At anything less than that age
he is not even a possible for a Sagittarius"
Me Virgo Man You Sagittarius Woman
Orgone radiation flimmers between us
our curious safety light

"What can happen between them is superb
Something he has spent half his life dreaming about
At last it has come true" O ingratiating
astrological light may you never prove false
even to one who has often decried you as no light
but superstitious darkness natural light would dispel
or the electric arc light of empirical science

The way I'm writing this poem's like using
trichromatic artificial radiance
not as decorative light in place of
ordinary solar radiation as you photographers do

Before I was forty "not even a possible for a Sagittarius"
now I'm sixteen over the line & safe with you

"Her but a young Sagittarian need have" none
"qualms" have no basis
Are we dreaming Is this Virgo Man still dreaming
as "he has spent half his life" they say "dreaming"

"Sagittarian & Virgo"
"The pattern is perfect"
The poem is over

Jackson Mac Low

19-20 March 1979
New York

JOHN FISK 1946-2004

John Fisk died December 20, 2004, quietly at his apartment in the Lower East Side after a year-long encounter with bone cancer. He was the Poetry Project's broadcast consultant for more than 20 years: He directed the audio of all events—from readings by poets like Bernadette Mayer to multi-media extravaganzas. Fisk was known for many years during the 1970s and '80s as the host of *Digressions*, a WBAI 99.5 FM program aired every Sunday night into Monday morning, where he weaved an eclectic mix of commentary, music, and poetry. Raised as a Quaker on the East side of Manhattan, as a young man Fisk earned a black belt in Kung Fu, which defined his distinct brand of consciousness—a streetwise branch of Buddhism grafted to a trunk of Humanism. This was most apparent in his physical appearance: hair to the middle of his back, beard to his chest, always in denim, usually overalls with a black leather car coat. He embodied the tuned-in, turned-on, and dropped-out spirit of the counterculture. Fisk never sold out.

Through his duties as broadcast consultant, Fisk amassed a remarkable collection of contemporary poetry recordings. Along the way he also recorded Allen Ginsberg's workshops at Brooklyn College, including many of his fantastic guests. For the six years that Fisk and I were friends, the tapes were often a topic of conversation. Who was to remaster them? How will they be stored? When will the Project take control of them? In what way will they serve poetics and scholarship? I suspect Fisk was an accidental documentarian. He lacked the megalomaniacal drive to promote his collection that had pushed fellow recorders like Alan Lomax. Perhaps Fisk understood that poetry is just as hard of a sell to scholars as to consumers. Maybe he just felt that his job was the act of collecting and preserving the data, the aural and oral transmission of the artist's work. Later, after his work was done, someone more suited to the task would do the post-production. The tapes are all in Fisk's two homes, labeled in the fair hand cursive of older generations. I cannot wait to have an opportunity to listen to them, finally.

As I write Fisk's resume, I am intrigued by how gentlemanly it reads, unique in the ambitious, bombastic, and charismatic milieu of the late 20th-century Lower East Side community of activists, artists, hustlers, musicians, and writers in which he was a nexus, both a center and a link. Last year, when Fisk began to experience difficulty walking, he was given the cane that steadied the gait of Allen Ginsberg and Harry Smith before him. Fisk knew everybody—Vincent the Chin Gigante, Bob Kaufman, Abbie Hoffman, and Patti Smith—but he never name-dropped. The connections were revealed anecdotally, while swapping life stories. It was precisely Fisk's discretion, generosity, and modesty peppered by his utter confidence of intellect that made him such a desirable companion. Many friends, right up until the moment that he passed away, surrounded him.

Fisk was a great mentor because he was open to information. His knowledge was free of prejudice, rooted in continual learning. One-third of his apartment was stacked floor to ceiling with books, compact disks, and the tapes. Aside this wall was situated Fisk's mission control center: television, radio, and an ergonomic Aeron chair in which he read, received the news, and digressed. Fisk's library contained rare staple-bound chapbooks like Ed Sanders's *Investigative Poetry*, an exegesis of poetry as history originally delivered as a lecture at the Naropa Institute in 1975, essentials like the *Divine*



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG FUCHS

Comedy—actually there were three different editions—and classics like John Coltrane's *My Favorite Things*, which was often played during his last weeks. He had another small apartment in the neighborhood, which held even older, dustier reel-to-reel tapes, as well as the books that he did not need at his fingertips. Furthermore, Fisk was installing a library and repository at his fabulous home in Vermont, which had been gradually built by hand and had been receiving its final touches this year. On many evenings Fisk described to me its slate countertops, octagonal sitting room, and the star-ceilinged tai chi room—stylishly apropos to the man who once told me that he had decided to grow his hair in 1961 because of two magazine articles, one on the Beats in *Life* and a fashion spread in *GQ*. He had not cut his beard since.

I was able to visit the Vermont house last April. John Coletti and I recorded Fisk telling a brief history of his life. I waited to listen to the tape until the day after he died. I cried. Even in the throes of pain and in the wake of pain relievers Fisk was articulate and sharp. He shared a significant moment in his adolescence while touring a prep school with his father who wanted Fisk to go to Princeton. Fisk later told his father that he did not want to attend the school. He explained, "After that I was up and running. Of course the process of becoming an individual is complicated for everybody, but somehow, somewhere in there, I found my self. And thankfully my parents had a theory of child-rearing that had nothing to do with telling a kid what to do."

Fisk will be greatly missed. He gave generously to the Project, especially considering that he had no stake in the game. He simply enjoyed listening to and reading poetry. He was an extremely loyal friend. Thankfully, his spirit will continue to inspire future generations through the wealth of documentation that he left behind.

—Greg Fuchs

Rodrigo Toscano

UNZIPS THREE QUESTIONS ON POETICS

What can a poem do?

Some people have resorted to talking to potatoes out of loneliness. Did the potato need a poetic character to be so convivial?

Someone in jail might have subsisted (mentally) on a single poem, or someone laboring under disease might claim that a particular poem helps ease the torment.

And yet, we (assembled here) might find that particular poem “wanting” in its conception, its execution, be it religious or secular, Hebraic or Qur’anic, Stoic or Cynic, Nationalist or Internationalist.

The one-hundred-thousand strong 1st and 4th Red Armies marching across China, swerving this way and that, over frigid mountain ranges, across treacherous rivers, in such-and-such combat formation, half-starved—strings of words, vectors penned by Mao himself (in rather archaic poetic forms), memorized, recited out loud, acted on.

Kids have been known to OD in solemn celebration of a particular poem.

People around the world have recited poetic charms so that the sun and the moon get out of each other’s way ... what did *those* poems achieve?

A social order (bolstered) of course is the shorthand answer, but let’s remain (or pretend to remain, for now) a little *under* “achieved.”

Neruda’s verses, under the cover of night, hastily scrawled onto crumbling cinderblock walls over much of the world; an Eluard poem printed onto leaflets dropped by the RAF over the Paris metro area during the occupation. Has there been any kind of sustained study as to the aggregate effect of that poem, or any individual poem for that matter?

But it stands, and it’s a good question. “What can a poem do?”

And what can the Qur’an do? “Oh, but that’s a ‘compilation!’”

And what of the Aramaic-to-Greek evangelical “compilations?”

Tyndale¹—was one hell of a poet!

What wretch penned the *Horst Wessel*² song?

Was it an “effective” poem? I’d say yes.

And so was the *Internationale*.

OK ... so, it appears that the “sphere of consequence” is more determinative than any singular poem (surprise) ... and that a *critical mass* of poems is necessary for the “life” of “a poem.”

And do I write one poem at a time? I don’t think I do in the end. I mean *literally* I do, and I feel “I must,” yet I am aware that I am simultaneously operating in (but more importantly, on) multiple cultures of poem writing.

I wouldn’t mind, throughout the next 10 years, to read or better yet, hear you recite your next ... 150 poems.

Wait, don’t run away. Isn’t this what you wanted?

Historical Materialists have long said that poems act as a barometer of one’s developing social consciousness ... I would agree with that.

In order to better determine how one’s consciousness has changed throughout the years—or months, sometimes, even days—this ideological-interfacing called poetry, as measured through one poem at a time, can be a rather *nifty* thing.

What’s demonstrating? What’s counter-demonstrating, clarifying, befuddling, attracting, repelling, delighting, disconcerting?

Something burst overhead just now, like orange fireworks, pungent scraps of green impulses raining down...

Can poetry challenge militarized language and propaganda?

I think so. For example, what if the poets who appeared in the *War and Peace* anthology³ were given the chance to read widely on the radio⁴ or on TV, say, once a week, for two months straight. Before the pundits, or after the pundits, or during. I think many people listening might be less intimidated by (as Jameson coined it) the “prison-house of language” that Corporate America has set up for us. And perhaps this newfound boldness would not only be acquired by the poems being frontally resistant (though certainly that, too), but also by their swerving around obvious traps, or slinking into and out of complex social spaces, or perhaps by focusing on strange new life constructions, and testing them in even stranger ways.

But that’s *if* ... which, for now, isn’t the case. Such (public) recognition of poets as legitimate arbiters of any slice of collective social consciousness is slow in coming (at least in the U.S.).

So let’s for a moment jump to another social arena, perhaps one more currently available to us. If you listen to the mantras of the Right, you’ve no doubt heard how “deeply concerned” Americans should be about the Left presence (or supposed “Left dominance”) in the universities. And how that spills out onto the larger national culture as corruption. I am truly heartened that the Left has not ceded these institutional spaces, and that many of my friends have landed positions in the University, and that they’re now in the process of enabling people to come and speak, relaying social materials from other arenas. (Though the question remains, of course, who in fact is attending—*is able* to attend The U, given the increasing for-profit status of that institution, and are those populations really disposed to upset the power structure?)

Still, I am one with newfound access to these social locales. One who, although for various reasons didn’t attend the University, has striven to craft a writing practice that weighs in on the same ideological struggles that my compeers there are involved in. So that by cross-infusing different loci of inter-related struggles, we can, hopefully, together *multilaterally* challenge what the “proper” role of the poet or the poem “is,” or can be, at any given time.

The best thing that poets did for me at a young age (before I tinkered with writing poetry myself) was to demonstrate how the (so-called) “proper” social role was a form of social control that also depended

TOSCANO UNZIPS

on linguistic constructions, and that those roles could be challenged; that poetry with politics combined could be the *full install*. Worldwide “Post”-Colonial *writing* movements (Black Arts, Feminist, Chicano/Nuyorican, and others in the U.S.) emphasized *critical-expressive* moments in their respective *cultural* movements. While other poetic movements, such as Language and Post-Language poetics (yes, in the main white, and politically conscious) emphasized leaving plenty of *uninstall* (anti-institutional) buttons in their *critical-textual* work. And if you toss the whole New York School and Beat Thing in there, maybe (by now) we can begin to imagine a *continual synthesis* of all that, the outlines of a new internationally committed political poetry, with enough negativity and critical reflexivity to last into the night.

So what are the numbers of people who can be reached at readings? A rough estimate, say, for a (busy) poet doing multiple readings, might be as high as 200 to 300 people per year. And that’s just a single poet. Therefore, the number might be as high as 9,000, taking the number of poets present here (at the Conference, approximately 34 writers). That’s more people than attended the founding convention of the Labor Party⁵ some years back, which was years in the planning. What’s more, represented here, today, is but a *fraction* of our respective (interlocking) poetry communities. And so sometimes it does very much irk me to hear people say that, as poets, we are “ineffective” activists and that we exist only for each other. As many may already know, I spent a good portion of my life being an activist in different social arenas, all the while trying to maintain an active writing life—sacrificing a lot of writing, in fact, to that activist life. And I witnessed or was part of many triumphs and many more defeats. At one point I remember losing three whole years of writing poetry. Poof!—just like that. But some six years ago, I found myself *re-committing* to being an activist *within* culture, as *through* culture, because of an overall, comparative calculation as to its effectiveness in expanding our social horizons. But don’t take it from me ... listen to our “concerned” enemies.

So, can poetry challenge militarized language and propaganda?

Yes, in an overt confluence with other social movements, it has a potential to, though it’s also paramount that we talk in the way we need to talk and no one else’s. Forces abound, even friendly ones that tell us to stay in our places, august though those “places” may be. But as the band *Rage against the Machine* put it—“don’t give us the key, we’ll break it.”

Are textual critique, parody, and satire adequate responses or do they reify these abuses?

Social abuses are social abuses, whether satirical, literal, parodic, meta-referential, what have you. How could there be a resolute answer as regards Parody or Satire or any other basic aspect of language expression? I mean, in the vocabulary of an active dramatist, the Humble Haikuist is as much a rhetorician, as much a *theatricalizer*, as the Mad Slammer.

Perhaps we should *ask* each other more often about all of our works, their treatments of contradictions within social relations or aesthetic meanings, or basic dispositions toward the audience, and importantly too, ask non-poets whom we read to, something we rarely do. Now *there’s* a rotting front tooth worth pulling! And how

much do each of us risk a less than perfect smile to *artistic encephalitis*.

Bumper sticker: “How am I troping?”

That “voice” is “dead,” that “textual critique” is “cryptic,” or that “lyric” or “narrative” is essentially “passé”—such pieties I want to continuously shed.

What might “reify” social abuses more than a specific genre or expressive modality is a practice of sitting pretty, clutching some tried-and-true method of yore, effective though it was then, now turned to froth. So this endless being hunted by froth. It might behoove us (resolute word-workers) to better understand *froth* in multiple dimensions.

And yes, it’s all too true, that we’re sinking into a kind of fascism in this country, a kind not encountered before. So my desire is to get serious (with you) about some sort of United Front. Of course, “United Front” doesn’t mean the artificial cessation of contradictions between us, in what we each do. But that we need to articulate those contradictions openly, while moving towards the *resilient joy* of a common struggle.

¹Tyndale, William c. 1494-1536. English theologian, born in Gloucestershire. Tyndale determined to translate the Bible into English, returning to Greek and Hebrew sources. His sharp, lucid English style set the character for every translation that followed. Arrested by imperial authorities in Antwerp in 1535, Tyndale was tried on a charge of heresy and condemned to the stake. He believed that scripture should be available even to “a boy that driveth the plough.”

²“Horst Wessel” was the official song of the Nazi Party, and the unofficial national anthem of Germany during the Third Reich.

³War & Peace, published by O Books, 2004, http://www.obooks.com/books/war_peace.htm.

⁴Two important developments since the writing of this statement are two new poetry-positive radio shows: Cross-Cultural Poetics Program, KAOS-FM, Olympia, Washington, hosted by Leonard Schwartz, http://kaos.evergreen.edu/programs/cc_poetics.html, and Tangent Radio’s “Poetry and Politics,” KWCV, 90.5 FM, Walla Walla, WA, hosted by Jules Boykoff and Kaia Sand, <http://www.thetangentpress.org/>. Additional links to poetry radio shows can be found at PennSound, one of the newest and most exciting poetry archives, <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/>.

⁵The Labor Party was founded in June 1996 at a convention of 1,400 delegates from hundreds of local and international unions, as well as individual activists. The party focuses on issues most important to working people—trade, health care, education, civil rights, and the right to organize, bargain, and strike.

This essay was adapted from a statement presented at “Poetry and Empire: Post-Invasion Poetics,” University of Pennsylvania, October 17-19, 2003, at which the questions/prompts were originally given to each participating panelist. For more information about the event, visit <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/poetics-weekend/ICA.html>.

Rodrigo Toscano’s two latest books are *To Leveling Swerve* (Krupskaya Books, 2004), and *Platform* (Atelos, 2003). His work has recently appeared in Best American Poetry 2004 (Scribner’s) and *War and Peace* (O Books, 2004). He was a recent participant in “Diasporic Avant-Gardes: Experimental Poetics and Cultural Displacement” at the University of California, Irvine. His e-mail is RT5LE9@aol.com.

PECQUE-PECQUE

Ange Mlinko

Chapter 1: Auspicious Birth

There was surface tension at the windows. The breezes wouldn't budge.

The sun was shining in its fashion, smeared across the clouds.

Taoist gestational how-to's said, "Your peony fetus is now a chrysanthemum."

This is the cortical wrinkle for hiding in the windowless corridor

during thunderstorms. Or a green acorn. It didn't crack, the pith just

stealthily appeared. One didn't trepan it. It let the hexes out of their wheel rims.

Chapter 2: Precocity

There indeed was the robin & she thought he looked nicer than ever.
A puff of smoke—no, a cloud—conceded to being a mountain cosy
in one person's eyewitness account.

"Amuse bouche," she said. "Now that we're alone in the camp here,
foot caught in the bag handle, impish."

Whenas she became a Supreme Court Justice,
and "Ev Geny Believes Dostoevsky, Fyodor" reverse-engineered
an acronym limpidly decoded on piano. Also,
the coffee stopped working. It was just an obsolesced tool at that point,
the remedy of a past only up for grabs
after the last survivor of its wounded look
went down i'th' ground, with packing.

The printer got a splinter, the spit of instruments became a river
and the adolescent got over Dostoevsky
so the little cloud wept into sheep. They grazed contentedly,
mollified by a faint remembrance of lanolin.

Show and tell of an empty cylinder, discarded,
with its engraving of the long low distillery, its pitched roofs
and chimney rising into the clouds white as, mirrored below,
whitecaps snapping on the sea!

The stylish lettering and the words "a bit remote,
a touch aloof, ten years old."

PECQUE-PECQUE (CON'T)

Chapter 3: Early Social Death

**You wanted to know from henbane,
but the best we could do was the Dairy Princess of St. Lawrence County.**

**You'd have to hairspray a dragonfly
on its way to the Faery Queen or produce a fine mesh net from a hose,**

**well knit as the rainbow, to get close. You can use a baby as an excuse
to leave the service and plunge into the Sabbath's vacuum.**

**When the Sunday schoolers pass by en masse to get Communion
you know they're wrapping up & you return.**

**Faux rustic til you argue that dogs aren't technically altruistic,
then you've lost everyone. You're shunned. They hate you**

except for the robin, Pecque-Pecque. He's still your friend.

*Ange Mlinko is the author of *Matinees* (Zoland Books, 1999) and the forthcoming *Starred Wire* (Coffee House Press, 2005) which was chosen by Bob Holman for the National Poetry Series. She edited the Poetry Project Newsletter from 2000-02. She lives in Brooklyn, freelancing and caring for a two-year-old son.*

WILL ALEXANDER

A Profound Investigation

WITH MARCELLA DURAND

Will Alexander brings the ancient concept of Renaissance Person (which actually predates the Renaissance by quite a bit) to 21st-century life: Not only is Will Alexander a poet, painter, essayist, philosopher, and playwright, but he embodies the “original current” of Renaissance thought, the indestructible creative energy that has continued through centuries and continents of multi-traditional artistic and scientific innovation, an essential counter to the destructive energies of the fragmenting corporate, military, and fundamentalist mindset that seeks to limit, abolish, forbid, or annihilate. Through his mental travels, projecting his “carbon” self into the personae of Tibetan monks, les Morts of Haiti, the Japanese Crested Ibis, or vertiginous lumen, he reaches spaces—or more literally, space—that he transfigures into language that is like no other poetry: an irresistible spiral of word and energy that shifts paradigms. His amazing journeys are chronicled in *Asia & Haiti*, *Above the Human Nerve Domain*, *The Stratospheric Canticles*, an essay collection, *Towards the Primeval Nerve Domain*, and forthcoming works *Compression & Purity*, *The Sri Lankan Loxodrome*, *Sunrise in Armageddon*, and *Exobiology as Goddess*.

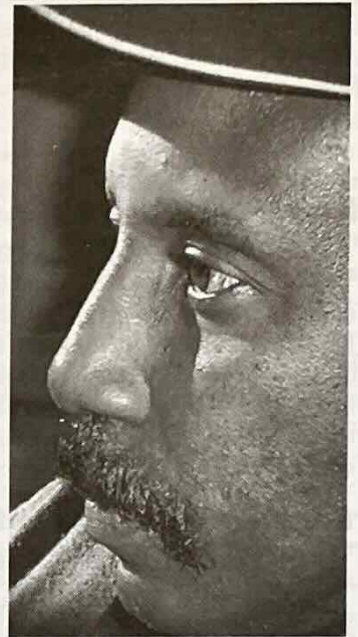


PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEILA SCOTT-WILKINSON, © 2004

Marcella Durand: It's funny—I was looking for your phone number, and then you called me. I thought, how fitting for Will Alexander.

Will Alexander: It's interesting. [Clairvoyance] works out of almost a blind state in terms of the rational context, or a conscious perspective. It doesn't seem to have a clue, and then all of a sudden it arrives on the conscious plane.

MD: How much does clairvoyance figure into your writing?

WA: I'd say a lot because I tend to pick up energy and areas of knowledge that I did not know much about consciously. When I go back and check them out, it's absolutely accurate. I read and I look at the synecdoche. The yogi Swami Vivekananda¹ pointed out that he'll go through a book like that and get the very essence of it. It is not an excuse, but it is a way of working with the text that is supposedly unconventional. It's something that Edward de Bono talks about repeatedly in his book *Lateral Thinking*, that there are different approaches to the mind, rather than this knowledge adds up to this knowledge adds up to this knowledge. There are other ways of approaching reality.

MD: You've described the I as a bit of “carbon”² released outward into experience. Is that what you're talking about as a process of knowledge? Releasing an identity that can be anything?

WA: It's true. This piece of carbon can be an eye, a human being, a leopard or a remora—there are many ways of speaking through ani-

mals. In my latest group of poems, there is one with a voice whose energy is water, but water on another planet. It's called “Water on New Mars” and the water on New Mars is the water of a parallel Mars.

MD: Where is the parallel Mars?

WA: It's in trans-vicinity. Over and beyond vicinity. I'm actually locating and exploring this water in this zone of trans-vicinity. I do mention specific locales on Mars, and they become proto-locals and supra-locals sometimes, but they are locales in themselves, like the Olympus Mons³.

MD: So it's a combination of physical locales and the realm of the mind?

WA: Intersecting, because that goes back to the triple mind, the supra-conscious, the conscious, and the subconscious. In other words, this spills out into all of reality, probably into every zone of the universe that one can find, although we don't really know the mysteriousness of the universe. There may be areas that don't even have carbon-based life. But for this particular level of exploration, the carbon particle is quite apt.

MD: You've said you don't travel much physically, but you're a great mental traveler.

WA: The imagination has to ignite the process, wherever the base is. That said, I find that because the mind goes at such a rate, I can almost—as the old metaphysicians talked about—go directly to Mauritania or to Haiti, or Canada, or Detroit, or wherever I've been to and then relate it to the idea of the supraplane and the physical plane. All of those lev-

els partake of one single substance. The interesting part comes when divisions take place, and separate cuisines, separate psychologies, separate environments come into play—turmoil, political situations, such as in Sri Lanka or Madagascar. I can go there instantaneously. [Gilles] Deleuze talks about that—traveling from your chair. And it works because if I had to travel as fast as my mind was working, I couldn't do it.

MD: Right, and it saves on plane tickets.

WA: Right! I mean, that's the way I work. I know William Vollman talks about having to write his books in the next few years because he won't be able to physically take himself to all these environments that he goes to.

MD: It's not so much that you're using mimetic language—that you go somewhere and try to reflect it in words—rather, you're creating something as you perceive it. I wanted to ask you how you research...

WA: Again, by synecdoche and by predilection and going through a book almost as Tristan Tzara would open up a dictionary. I can read four or five passages out of a book and begin to explore in my mind. Of course, the accuracy of the vocabulary and the accuracy of what I'm talking about have to be explored, too. I'm not going to just say anything. I want to be very site-specific if it's something on Mars or on another planet. I will read in the particular area I need to read on as early as I can and get the logistics, then let the imagination explore and create, as though that part of the universe reflected the

w r i t i n g w o r k s h o p s

at the

POETRY PROJECT

AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY

KEEPING IT SIMPLE/LOOKING FOR THE LIGHT - PATRICIA SPEARS JONES

TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 22ND

"The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live...It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination." -from "Poetry is Not a Luxury" by Audre Lorde. "This is a poetry workshop that takes the poetry of illumination to mean the poetry of experience. How we scrutinize, how we elucidate our lives through words and rhythms, how we make our poems bring new ways of thinking about our lives. We will focus on the basics: line, stanza, cadence, meter, diction, syntax, and point of view—the elements that make a poem. Poets to be read include Lorde, Maureen Owen, Sharan Strange, Jeanne Marie Beaumont, Frank O'Hara, Lorenzo Thomas, and Bob Kaufman." Patricia Spears Jones is an award-winning poet and playwright, and author of *The Weather That Kills*. Students must submit 5-10 page work samples before the class begins.

FINDING THE & THEN SOME THERE THERE - MERRY FORTUNE

THURSDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 24TH

"Film of Dreyer, writing of Mayer, painting of Traylor. An identifiable poet "voice" is a desirable, comfortable, and utilitarian achievement. But what potential or beautiful mystery lurks beyond carefully cultivated form, tendency, technique, habit, and boundary? Exploring the processes, qualities, and aesthetics of all art forms, we will collectively discover commonalities and fearlessly apprehend what we may learn to expand our poetic values and vocabularies as well as our very minds." Merry Fortune is the author of *Ghosts By Albert Aylor*, *Ghosts By Albert Aylor* (Futurepoem).

HYPNOSIS AND CREATIVITY - MAGGIE DUBRIS

FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 25TH

"Hypnotic and trance states have been used for centuries by shamans, mystics and visionaries. In this five-week workshop, we will study techniques for self-hypnosis that allow a writer to easily access the creative flow state. We will explore the use of hypnotic tools to generate images, to increase creative focus, to switch gears from a day job into writing, and to circumvent creative blocks. We will also discuss the use of hypnosis to vividly recall memories, and its use in conjunction with other creative tools such as automatic writing." A \$20 materials fee covers four of Dubris's hypnosis CDs, three of which are specifically geared to writing. Maggie Dubris is the author of *Skels* (Soft Skull Press 2004), and *Weep Not, My Wanton* (Black Sparrow Press 2002). She is also employed as a professional hypnotist.

POETRY AND MUSIC - DREW GARDNER

FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN APRIL 8TH

"A workshop investigating the relation of music and poetry, comparing the languages of poetry and music and asking questions about how they can be combined and how they might illuminate each other. What are the poetic implications of improvisation? What are the musical implications of everyday speech? What does our experience of poetry imply about how we experience sound and how does our listening affect our writing? We will read and listen to Harry Partch, Morton Feldman, Leo Smith, Pauline Oliveros, Thoreau, Nathaniel Mackey and others, keep listening notebooks, and collaborate with guest musicians. No musical background required." Drew Gardner is the author of *Sugar Pill* (Krupskaya) and conducts the Poetics Orchestra, an ensemble featuring poetry and structured improvisation.

A LAB: POST-CONCEPTUAL POETRIES - ROBERT FITTERMAN

SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 26TH

"What happens when we ask ourselves not if the poem 'could have been done better, but whether it could have been done otherwise' (Dworkin). In post-conceptual writing, the expression is realized in the process. This workshop will be a hands-on writing lab. Each week we will write poems in-class generated by borrowed models from contemporary, 21st Century poetry. Some of these experiments might include: sampling, bastardization, procedural writing, mixed media, collaboration, etc." Robert Fitterman is the author of 9 books of poetry including: *Metropolis XXX* (Edge Books), *Metropolis 16-29* (Coach House Press) and *Metropolis 1-15* (Sun & Moon Press).

The workshop fee is \$300, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for any and all fall and spring classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212) 674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

www.poetryproject.com

whole of the universe with the motion of living that had gone into creating that part of the universe, then manifest it in language. So in that sense I'm joining the creation of the universe, but in my own particular way, which is opening and opening and opening and opening, which is not a literal reality, but an experiential reality. It remains fresh and it remains fresh. When I've explored it, I've gone through it, I'm finished with it, it's published and put in the world, and it remains in that state of motion.

MD: How do you revise?

WA: I re-hear something maybe once or twice, mostly just once. I handwrite everything and then I get on the typewriter or computer, and I hear other levels and that's my finished product.

MD: In your interview with Harryette Mullen,⁴ you say Rimbaud was an early influence. When did you decide to be a poet?

WA: When I saw that it was the only thing I could really do in this life—like Bud Powell, playing the piano. What he wanted to do and what he could organically do were inextricably linked. I had lived an intense emotional life up to that point and the mediums out of which that emotion could express itself had been inadequate. Around that period, I found this little book on Rimbaud and I read it and I felt it was me. I was able to begin to explore a medium that hitherto was unknown to me. At that point, I felt it more than knew it. I felt poetry. I literally felt it. I had felt poetry when listening to the great jazz musicians, really deeply. When I heard John Coltrane play, I couldn't believe it. It was that good.

MD: I've often thought if I could sit George Bush down and make him listen to "A Love Supreme," his mind would be opened...

WA: Those types are very resistant to reality. They are trees in a hurricane. Since they don't bend, they ultimately break. They don't have any flexibility. When I listen to this music, there's this incredible flexibility. A combination of flexibility and formal sophistication, emotional and technical accuracy. I remember as a child I saw an American doctor's wife on the evening news in attendance at a Haitian voodoo ceremony. They showed her swaying—she had to walk out because she said it was taking her over. Breton had that same sense of the ceremonies, in the 1940s. There's an imaginal power that comes from all over the world, but particularly from the former colonies in the Southern hemisphere, energy that started the knowledges in the world, which is basically a right-brain knowledge. In the early kingdoms, the right brain was the dominant factor. I'm thinking

specifically of Egypt, but it did not preclude profound investigation of the arts, of the sciences, of mathematics. There's a great writer on that area, Beatrice Lumpkin⁵. Cheikh Anta Diop⁶ talks about this area, as well. I'm coming from an energy and experience that predates the Western idea of reality that has been discredited in the past 500 years or so.

MD: You write quite a bit about Kemet.⁷ Could you talk a little more about what that pre-Greek idea of reality was?

WA: Kemet actually means "black soil." For me the "black soil" relates to both the physical climate, as well as the climate of the mind. [In ancient Kemet] if you were studying geology, astronomy, poetry, you got into the whole activity of the cosmos as a whole rather than a part. Knowledge had its own dynamic. Say I was studying the activity, the motion of the land in geology, I would understand it not as a secular or separable activity. Another analogy is to look at how an orchestra is set up—the oboes, the flutes, the piccolos. In some pieces, certain instruments dominate, but the flow of the whole orchestra propels that particular domination at that moment.

MD: When you write, do you feel it adds an essential movement to the symphony, even if it's not read by everyone?

WA: Absolutely. If you move something on earth, it affects something else in the cosmos. These knowledges that I'm talking about are echoed through different times in different individuals. We're not born to set up an artificial division between what happens in the West and what happens in the Southern climes, although there are essential differences. You have people like Roger Bacon⁸ or Robert Grosseteste,⁹ Bacon's teacher, who talked about light and elemental conjunctions of reality, which is pre-Leonardo. Roger Bacon was the first person in the West to talk about a flying machine, not Leonardo.

MD: Leonardo wrote quite a bit on light in his notebooks.

WA: Grosseteste preceded that by a couple of hundred years. They were persecuted by the church because the church is based on a separable condition. Basically [Grosseteste and Bacon] were coming out of Moorish culture.

MD: Oh yes, you've talked about the Moors and how as scientists they had discovered things very early.

WA: They actually created the Renaissance in Europe, but they're never given credit because of their religion and their color. They held the Iberian Peninsula for 500 years. It was the only place where there was an organization of knowledge at that time. After the Roman Empire fell, there was a dispersion, a tremendous dispersion. Texts were held in

monasteries, but never was there a concordance of sustained exploration for centuries. This was pointed out in an astronomy seminar I used to go to many ages ago. I'd go on these retreats with Dr. E. C. Krupp who runs the planetarium¹⁰ here. One day we talked about the Crab Nebula and why it hadn't been recorded in Europe, but was recorded by the Chinese and the Moors [in 1054]. One of the astronomers there said, and I'm paraphrasing, "Well, maybe there was a fog over Europe and they couldn't see it." In other words, you have to have a system of organization to create knowledge. You have to have some sort of consistency with reality in order to organize and understand, say, water systems or water tables. There were hundreds of bookstores in Cordoba, and the seeds for the modern university were sown there. Jewish scholars, Christian scholars, Islamic scholars—it was one of our last hopes, because the three religions [pursued] knowledge in a way that was harmonious without losing their individuality. After the fall of the Moors, Christians began to dismantle the bathhouses, to disrupt and persecute and destroy. It coincides with the mounting fervor of the Inquisition and the beginning of the slave trade. Hermeticism seemed to be lost in Europe. It went underground and went underground and went underground.

MD: Why do you think these things happened at the same time, the Inquisition and the slave trade?

WA: I don't want to give some kind of answer to that. Things coalesce in history and there seems to be some sort of a tie that takes place. You have an idea that other people who are Asian or peoples of color, or people of other psychological persuasions, like Bacon, were no longer necessary. The internal state was superseded by external reasoning and definition began to accrue in terms of outer form. Exterior perfection was exalted, inner form dissolved, or was reduced to a minor rhetoric. Malraux points out the difference between the image of a 9th-century Christ and one of a 15th-century Christ. The former is less technical, but charged with interior feeling, the latter is commanding by means of its painterly virtuosity. The inner reverberation is replaced by technical expertise.

MD: What do you think about the shutdown of the Hubble Space Telescope?

WA: I think it's a disaster. [The Hubble] was an opportunity to explore things that really and truly are unknown. We don't even know about everything on this planet. We don't even know about ourselves. [The Hubble] was a gift. The problem is that we don't have a sustained society, but a truncated one, that moves from fragment to fragment.

POETRY PROJECT EVENTS CALENDAR

FEBRUARY_MARCH 2005

FEBRUARY

2 WEDNESDAY

Cate Marvin & Akiyah Oliver

Cate Marvin's first book of poems, *World's Tallest Disaster*, was awarded the 2000 Kathryn A. Morton Prize by Robert Pinsky, and published by Sarabande Books in 2001. In 2002, she received the Kate Tufts Discovery Award from Claremont Graduate University. Akiyah Oliver is the author of *the she said dialogues: flesh memory* and the chapbook/CD *An Arriving Guard of Angels, Thusly Coming to Greet*. She has been artist in residence at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center.

4 FRIDAY

The Rage of Aquarius

Is when the past and the future have a long, fireside chat.... "The Rage of Aquarius" is hosted by Desiree Burch and features Obie-winning playwright Kyle Jarrow, Def-poet and NeoFuturist Regie Cabico, filmmaker Sarah Reynolds, and Scott Hoffer of the sketch comedy group Trophy Dad, as well as all the live music, live people, and love you will need to make it through the long winter of discontent. [10:30 pm]

7 MONDAY

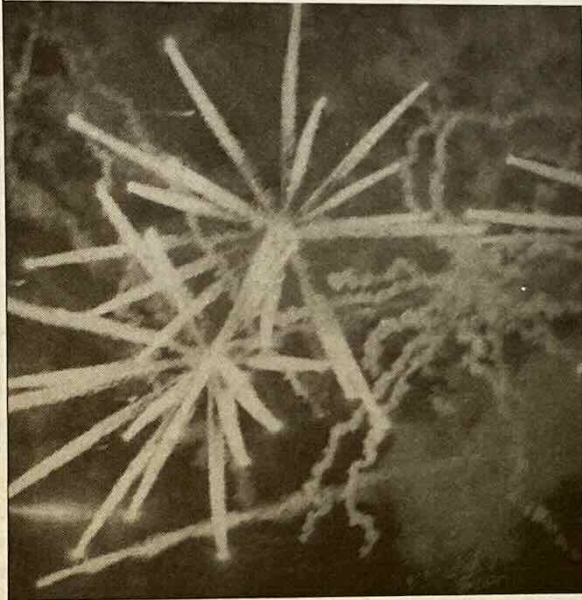
Open Reading: Sign-up at 7:45 pm [8 pm]

9 WEDNESDAY

Kathleen Fraser & Michael Heller

Kathleen Fraser's recent books include *Discrete Categories: Forced Into Couplings, hi dde violeth i dde violet*, and an essay collection, *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and the Innovative Necessity*. Fraser published and edited the groundbreaking journal *HOW(ever)* from 1983 to 1991; in 1997 she initiated its more recent electronic version, *Howe2*. Michael Heller's most recent volume of poetry is *Exigent Futures: New and Selected Poems* (Salt Publishing, 2003). Among his many books are *Concivator's Net of Branches, In The Built Place, Wordflows*, and *Living Root: A Memoir*. His new collection of essays, *Uncertain Poetries*, is forthcoming.

11 FRIDAY



els *Main Brides* and *Herome*. She is co-editor of *Narrativity*, a web magazine on experimental narrative out of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, and co-founder of *Tessera* and *Spirale*. Jesse Seldess edits *Antennae* magazine, and co-curates the Discrete Reading and Performance Series in Chicago. He is the author of *Who Opens* (Bronze Skull Press, 2004).

23 WEDNESDAY

Ted Greenwald & Lyn Hejinian

Ted Greenwald was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and always lives in New York City. His many books of poetry include *You Bel*, *Licorice Chronicles*, *Common Sense*, *Word of Mouth*, *Jumping the Line*, and, most recently, *The Up and Up* (Atelos, 2004). Lyn Hejinian's most recently published books include *A Border Comedy*, *My Life in the Nineties*, and *The Fatalist*. *The Language of Inquiry*, a collection of essays, was published by the University of California Press in 2000. She is co-director (with Travis Ortiz) of Atelos, a literary project commissioning and publishing cross-genre work by poets. Other collaborative projects include *Quié Trán* with music by John Zorn, two books (*The Traveler and the Hill and the Hill* and *The Lake*) created with painter Emilie Clark, and the award-winning experimental documentary film, *Letters, Not About Love*, directed by Jacki Ochs.

Baraka/LeRoi Jones, and *The Music*. His first book of essays, *The Essence of Reparations*, was published in 2003.

5 SATURDAY

A Tribute to Jackson Mac Low

A tribute to the much-loved and much-missed poet, composer, and performer, a long-time friend of the Poetry Project and one of the most significant American artists of recent decades, who died in Manhattan on December 8, aged 82. Full list of participants to be announced. [1:00 pm; free]

7 MONDAY

Seventh Annual Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam

This annual event is open to any teenager between the ages of 13 and 19. A grassroots, non-profit arts-education organization, Urban Word NYC uses the competitive format of the Teen Poetry Slam to bring a community of teenagers together through their love of poetry and spoken word. [6:00 pm; \$5 adults, \$3 students]

9 WEDNESDAY

Steve Benson & Brandon Downing

Steve Benson's books include *As Is*, *Blindspots*, *Blue Book*, *Roaring Springs*, and *Open Clothes*, just out from Atelos. Recent work appears in *War & Peace*, *Markszine*, *Antennae*, *Primary Writing*, and *Tolling Elves*. His renowned public readings often offer some kind of oral improvisational performance process as "live" composition. A photographer and collagist, Brandon Downing's poetry collections include *The Shirt Weapon* and the forthcoming *Dark Brandon* (from Faux Press).

14 MONDAY

Kaia Sand & Genya Turovskaya

Kaia Sand is the author of *Interval*, co-author of *Exit* (with Jules Boykoff), and two self-publish or perish chapbooks, *Aquífer* (with Mark Wallace) and *cognitive dissonance*. She is also the co-creator of *The Tangent*, a magazine of politics and the arts (www.thetangentpress.org). Genya Turovskaya is the author of *Calendar* (Ugly Duckling Presse). Her poems and translations from Russian have appeared or are forthcoming in *Companions*, *Auffgabe*, *Not of the Genre*, and other publications.

11 FRIDAY

Fall Workshop Reading

Participants in the five Fall Writing Workshops of Larry Fagin, Janet Hamill, Rachel Levitsky, Oz Shelach, and Edwin Torres will read from their work. [10 pm]

14 MONDAY

Valentine's Day Spectacles

Bent just slightly on Valentine's Day, dazzling romantics and else fans will be: writer Gary Lutz, author of *Stories in the Worst Way* and *I Looked Alike* (who Ben Marcus pronounced "the new sad man of contemporary fiction"); experimental, devoted theatriacs by Ugly Duckling Presse/Loudmouth Collective (www.loudmouthcollective.com); and a gun of beauty incarnate, singer-songwriter Rebecca Moore (www.bluviolin.com). This is spectacle—then there's PARTY!! Cake, food, wine, and red décor should make for a grand time... as *The Daily Mail* put it to the Lord Chamberlain, "It's going to cause some headaches."

16 WEDNESDAY

Bruce Andrews & David Meltzer

Bruce Andrews is the author of over two dozen books of poetry and performance scores, most recently *Lip Service* and *The Millennium Project* (online at www.princeton.edu/eclipse). His essays on poetics are collected in *Paradise & Method* and are also online at the Electronic Poetry Center. David Meltzer's most recent book of poetry is *Beat Thing* (La Alameda Press, 2004). He is the editor and interviewer for *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (City Lights, 2001). With Steve Dickinson he co-edits *Shuffle Boil*, a magazine devoted to music in all its appearances and disappearances. His selected poems, *David's Copy*, will be published in 2005 by Viking/Penguin.

21 MONDAY

Gail Scott & Jesse Seldess

Gail Scott is co-editor of *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative* (Coach House, 2004). Her novel, *My Paris*, was published by Dalkey Archive in 2003, and her other books include the nov-

25 FRIDAY

Funk Cantabile

Featuring four emerging writers, Roger Bonair-Agard, Tyeimba Jess, Ishle Park, and Patrick Rosal, whose poetry explores a range of poetic heritages, including toast, kundiman, hip-hop, and the blues. Their work yokes the seemingly disparate relationships between the page and the stage, the virgule and the slash, the local and the manywhere—that which is funky, that which is "worthy to be sung." [10:30 pm]

28 MONDAY

Christian Hawkey & Bruna Mori

Christian Hawkey is the author of *The Book of Funnels*, published by Verse Press in 2004. His poems, art criticism, and non-fiction have appeared in such magazines as *Frieze*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *American Poetry Review*, and *Paris Review*. Bruna Mori's book of New York cityscape poems with paintings by Matthew Kinney is forthcoming from Meritage Press. Her recent work appears in *Fence*, *3rd bed*, and *ZZZZZA*.

MARCH

2 WEDNESDAY

Amina & Amiri Baraka

Amina Baraka is a poet, vocalist, actress, singer, and dancer, as well as a political activist. Her first book of poetry, *Songs for the Masses*, was published in 1969. She has also co-authored several books with her husband, Amiri Baraka, including *Confirmation Men: Anthology of African American Women* and *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*. She is the co-founder and director (with Amiri Baraka) of Kimako's Blues People, and poet-singer with Blue Ark: The Word Ship. Amiri Baraka, founder of the Black Arts Movement in Harlem in the 1960s and a literary and political revolutionary who has lectured on cultural and political issues extensively in the USA, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe, is the author of over 40 books of essays, poems, drama, and music history and criticism, including *Blues People*, *The Dutchman*, *Selected Poetry of Amiri*

16 WEDNESDAY

Reed Bye & K. Silem Mohammed

Reed Bye's books of poetry include *Some Magic at the Dump*, *Heart's Bestiary*, *Passing Freaks and Graces*, and *Gaspar Still in His Cage*. A new and selected poems, *Lakeside Strain*, is in the works. K. Silem Mohammed is the author of *loovercraft*, *Deer Head Nation*, and *A Thousand Devils*. His poetry has been published in *New American Writing*, *Fence*, *The Poker*, *Stampoo*, *CrossConnect*, and *The Best American Poetry 2004*.

28 MONDAY

Talk Series: Bernard Horn, "O'Hara, Olson, and The Life & Times of a Family Man"

Since Romanticism and the assault on the idea that humans are primarily polis-dwelling animals, poets have been challenged to write poems which are both authentic and relevant. Seemingly contradictory temptations have been: indulgent excursions into the egotistical sublime; self-reflexive play with language and its limitations; and a sort of political poetry that is no more than disembodied dogma for the initiated. Drawing on Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Frank O'Hara, his teacher Charles Olson, and the poetics of Biblical narrative, Bernard Horn responds to these contraries with neither synthesis nor dialectics, but rather with simultaneity. Poet and critic Horn is the author of *Facing the Fires: Conversations with A. B.*

30 WEDNESDAY

Vincent Katz & Lourdes Vazquez

Vincent Katz is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Cabal of Zealots and Understanding Objects*. He is the curator of Black Mountain College, and the editor of the catalogue, *Black Mountain College: Experiment In Art* (MIT Press, 2002). His translation of *The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius* was published by Princeton University Press in 2004. Lourdes Vázquez's latest books include *Bestiary: Selected Poems 1986-1997*, *La estabulla*, and *Park Slope*. Her first novel, *Sin ti no soy yo*, is forthcoming from Puerto Press.

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

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

MD: Do you see the poet as having a mission to discover wholeness again?

WA: I wouldn't just say the poet, but also the mathematician and the scientist. I think mathematics and science in the created sense come out of the same spirit. We've gotten to this extreme level of separation where we have to have conflict. Once in a while, a few conjunctions appear.

MD: I think astronomy is one way to restore people to their proper sizes.

WA: Astronomy does, because it is so strange. We've come to this point that when you look at astronomy, it explodes completely into another zone. None of our ideas of God—how can I put it?—none of our ideas about religion are capable of understanding it. The shadow system that they're exploring now—dark matter, what put that there? Stellar nurseries in Serpens with cloud towers six million trillion miles long. Yet the movement of life found there is the same energy that's populating this zone.

MD: Have you heard this theory that the chemical involved in the Big Bang is the same as when people fall in love?

WA: Basically what love is, is conjunction. What I think plagues the West is this whole idea of separation. Lots of beings, lots of objects. It's why the ecological situation is such a disaster. I've thought many times about how we can run an economic system without a stable weather system. You can't. Whether you call it global warming or climate change, it will destroy the economic base. A perspicacious 10-year-old can figure that out. I've talked to children and they understand it.

MD: It's not really about money. It doesn't make monetary sense.

WA: It's an ideology. There are other knowledges being explored that are not on the level of the strictly visible. There have been writers in the West who have actively sought this, most notably Rene Daumal. People like him keep this underground current that goes back to Bacon alive. It's everywhere. Octavio Paz said this current will always be here no matter what name we call it. It will never go away, no matter what the dominant ideology that seeks to prevent its praxis is.

MD: What other poets are you inspired or influenced by? You've mentioned the Surrealists...

WA: Oh, there's been so many. Basically, they come from obscure areas. People like Robert Marteau and Dino Campana, Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms. Of course.

The Mexican poet Gorostiza, for topical relevance. For the impact he had on the modern world of poetry, Ramon Lopez Velarde. Edgar Rincón Luna from Juarez, Mexico, for his dialogue across borders. Martín Camps. Gaspar Orozco, who translated my poetry into Spanish. Julian Semilian. César Vallejo's poems are incredibly exciting and powerful. Also early Williams.

MD: Not later Williams?

WA: Not the *Paterson* Williams but Hart Crane. Philip Lamantia. Bob—I've been in his presence.

MD: Bob Kaufman?

WA: Yes. We were in the same house together, although Bob was sitting in another room. It was myself, Philip Lamantia, and Neely Cherkovski looking at the original typescript of *The Ancient Rain*; I saw the original form and the original type.

MD: Are you in contact with Philip Lamantia still?

WA: I just called him yesterday. I had finished an incredible experience with the Alice Farley Dance Company. It was amazing—we had dancers, forms, all the incredible costumes she makes, we read the poems to the poet Laurence Weisberg. It was the most unconventional reading because we choreographed it like theatre, music, sound, poetry, dance. It was fortuitous energy. It was recorded and filmed, so we have the document.

MD: I wanted to ask you about your essays. Do you work out philosophical concepts in them that you use later in poetry?

WA: Certain energies come out as poetry, while certain ideas come out as essays. They form into this or that configuration. For me, my initial idea in writing essays is something I came to not right away, but I just found that I needed another way to express myself. I got the idea from photography. When a photographer is out shooting things, he or she finds things that impress him or her instantaneously. For me, an essay is like that—I find something interesting and write about it.

MD: I was particularly intrigued by your essay on Azarian Mathematics.¹¹

WA: Oh, yeah. That was *completely* something I created. I would like to get enough knowledge at one point to actually study the symbols of higher mathematics and visualize Azarian Mathematics—mathematics simultaneously strengthened by a powerful visual stimulus. Mathematics and

poetry are very, very close in the sense that a theorem or an equation functions as a penetrant calligraphy. Here's a quote from an essay called "Beauty of Mathematics: A Review"¹² on British mathematician Godfrey Harold Hardy: "Everyone knows that mathematicians sometimes speak of perfectly formulated equations as beautiful and are excited by them as are connoisseurs excited by works of art. The present volume will be of greatest interest and value to estheticians and the sense that it is here for the first time that the beauty of mathematics will be discussed by a mathematician. Professor Hardy's analysis of this beauty is penetrating and illuminating in welcome contrast to the vagueness that is so characteristic of most modern writings on the criteria of beauty in other kinds of art." Here's another quote: "A mathematician like a painter or a poet is a maker of patterns. The mathematician's patterns like the painter's or the poet's must be beautiful. The ideas, like the colors or the words, must fit together in a harmonious way. Beauty is the first test. There is no permanent place in the world for ugly mathematics." This is the way I look at it because as I see it, poetry has to be this beautiful and this accurate.

MD: It reminds me of the Golden Mean.¹³ So many painters used it in their work. And what about your artwork, which has patterning in it reminiscent of astronomical or biological patterns?

WA: That realia of drawing came to me before my first recognizable poems evinced. I had been studying so much of Miro's work that I began to draw a figure in pencil one day and it worked—I've been working that way ever since. Federico Garcia Lorca's drawings gave me the initial impetus to go forward in this direction, simply working with intuition. I've never taken an art class in my life. I've never had a tutor. I'm seriously involved right now in finishing a volume of drawings.

MD: Who is your writing community? Do you have a community in L.A.?

WA: There is a community, people that I know in different parts of the country—yourself, Andrew Joron, Nathaniel Mackey, Philip Lamantia. There's so many of them, I can't tell you. Listen, I'll leave people out, but I know they're there, and they know they're there. And there are some who are not in print, and people reading this interview will have never heard of them. For instance, Jim Henderson. The lifelong conversation I had with him was spectacular. We discussed an integral metaphysics combining the whole of life, sparked by our mutual understanding of Sri Auribind.

He's passed on now, but he was very vital to me. People like that have been important to me.

MD: Do you correspond with writers in the Caribbean or Tibet?

WA: At this point, I don't. I quite, quite strenuously tried to contact Aimé Césaire. Last spring, I organized a national Surrealist conference, "The Imaginal Present And Future," co-sponsored by the French Consulate. I posted contact with Césaire, which they transmitted. We did not get any response. This is unfortunate—I know there may be a language barrier, but that's not insurmountable. I'm thinking about going to Martinique in the not-too-distant future.

MD: People have compared you quite a bit to Césaire—Do you feel that's accurate?

WA: Well, in a spiritual sense, yes. What he was doing, and continues to do—there's nothing like it. He'll come up with a phrase and it's like a beautiful breath of oxygen. He was speaking in his "Letter to Maurice Thorez" about the particulars of the Southern Hemisphere and people of color and the way he put it together was quite extraordinary. There's just nothing like it, the power in the poetry and his *Discourse on Colonialism*. I call it the "big book." It is some 75 pages, but it seems as though one had gone through 300 pages of insight. So, it does feel accurate in that sense, but not in terms of my experience—I'm coming out of another world.

MD: He's very involved with his locale.

WA: Well, I grew up in an urban society. I don't want to make this a pat answer, but I've had to have to have a big city in order to do the kind of work I do. You need a lot of resources.

MD: Like libraries?

WA: Libraries.

MD: And universities?

WA: Universities. I need to travel across an eclectic range. Libraries, bookstores, cinemas, all kinds of metaphysical societies—I've been going to lectures for years. I have an incredible conduit, a man named Roger Weir. He continues to educate with insight after insight as if a current were running through you. Lectures on China, quantum physics, exobiology, Jung. He's given me a lot of information that I've been able to work with over the years. His lectures should be transcribed and published. He has volumes and volumes; you could fill a library with these lectures. People like that, you wouldn't find in many parts of the

world. There's so much out here, so much to work with. You work with what you can and you work at your capacity. I understand I have limitations and I have to understand those limitations in order to continue to evolve.

MD: You grew up in L.A.

WA: Yes, yet I've never looked at L.A. as a provincial enclave. There are some poets who defend the region against other regions. There's no need to do that. In fact, that's something I've never adhered to. It's anti-poetic in the sense that they immure themselves in a desolate topography. I find this to be incredibly limiting. But the western coast has its own particulars. Many years ago, Jack Wise, the Canadian painter said, and again I'm paraphrasing, "We are looking out at China on the West coast." In the east you're looking at Europe, we're looking at China. The Asiatic influence is incredible. I do customer service for this company, and I've been writing these names down. Incredible long, long, long names. Indian long, Laotian long. Long, long names. I mean, it's unbelievable. My next experience, because I'm gathering all this, is I want to write a novel from the Saxon perspective concerning the re-encroachment of peoples of color overrunning the West. The encroachment of the other.

MD: How are you doing that?

WA: It's very complex. I've done some 20 books and I am at this point where—whoa—I have got to assess some of what I've written. I need to work on getting my trilogy of novels out into the world. Spuyten Duyvil is going to put them out late next year under one cover. And then there's another handwritten novel in a duffel bag, called *Diary as Sin*. Douglas Messerli has a novella called *Alien Weaving*. So the

Saxon novel would be my fourth attempt, but I'm going to take my time with it because I have other things to do and a lot of things I have to work with. As I said earlier on, I'm going to be working on researching and basically being a visual artist for a number of months.

Notes:

¹ *Sage, prophet, and wandering monk Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was founder of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.*

² "... the moon of each of the bodies' vibrations is understood as the flower of spontaneous carbon embodied in the impelling elusives of pure experience itself." *"Isolation and Gold," Towards the Primeval Lightning Field, O Books, 1998.*

³ *The largest mountain in the solar system, over three times the size of Mount Everest.*

⁴ *"Hauling Up Gold from the Abyss: An Interview with Will Alexander," Callaloo, Spring 1999.*

⁵ *Author of Math: A Rich Heritage and African and African-American Contributions to Mathematics.*

⁶ *Senegalese scientist and historian, author of many books, including The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality.*

⁷ *An ancient name for Egypt.*

⁸ *An early (1214-1294) English philosopher, also known as Doctor Mirabilis, considered one of the first advocates of modern scientific methods.*

⁹ *Early (1175-1253) English statesman, theologian, mathematician, and physicist.*

¹⁰ *The Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, CA.*

¹¹ *"Isolation and Gold."*

¹² *Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Beauty of Mathematics: A Review," Art Bulletin, Vol. XXIII, New York, 1941.*

¹³ *A number, represented by the Greek letter "Phi" and also known as the "divine proportion" or the "magic ratio," in which the smaller dimension is to the greater as the greater is to the whole. It is found throughout the natural world.*

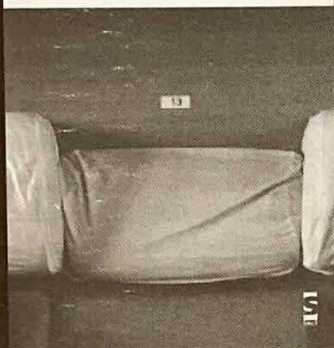
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New Modernist Poems

EDITED BY ROD MENGHAM AND JOHN KINSSELLA



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Edited by Rod Mengham and John Kinsella

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BOOK REVIEWS

CAROL MIRAKOVE

OCCUPIED

Kelsey St Press, 2004, \$10

In *Occupied*, Mirakove—the recipient of Kelsey St. Press's Frances Jaffer Award—offers a multilayered exposition of our current government's politics of dissembling and denial, as well as its short-sighted, hubris-heavy military response to crises, crises with which we citizens cannot help but be "Occupied."

Mirakove's choice of a suggestive past participle as title is apt example of her ability to involve readers in the kind of language scrutiny that alerts us to the manipulative, as well as the allusive power of words. Concomitantly, this poet is concerned with using the experimental lyric to expose language as a pervasive and invasive tool, easily wielded by the hegemony in its "occupation" of an individual's consciousness. Thus, this collection is not only a scathing indictment of the U.S. government's recent course of action—the book's three sections are titled "Afghanistan," "Iraq," and "New Order"—but the poems are also rubric for, and enactment of, the work one might perform in language so as to foster heightened awareness in an "occupied" state.

The weaponry of response to occupation is often small, well honed, and kept close to the skin. Indeed, Mirakove is ready at every turn of the line to thrust through surfaces of comfortable complacency with sharp-edged, surprisingly versatile poetic fragments and found phrases. Her savvy wielding of these terse, transformative bits of startling refuse and combustible scraps of keenly felt immediacy astounds.

pipe dream goliath pundits – power
failure—lights out. candles we might
skewer the noonday go-it-alone leatherneck.

(from "dreams never die")

Here, the tired aphoristic phrase "pipe dream," when linked to the equally well-worn literary allusion "goliath," creates an aptly ironic description of "pundits"—writers who traffic in repetitive rhetoric in their be-numbingly simplistic analyses of current events. Such pundits' writings are a "power failure" indeed and with every implication of that phrase: no electricity in their ideas, no attempt to use the power of the language at their disposal for enlightenment. To follow this with "candles we might" suggests a communal return to a more generative force, which might be a response to the kind

of "leatherneck" rugged-individual-style rhetoric that suggests all is without shadow. Mirakove's conditional proposal allows for the possibility of a reclamation of humanity heated with the lively potential of turning even the most jaded, most worn aspects of our own thinking into something alight with change.

Mirakove uses the subversion of expected formal strategies to suggest the ways in which language is itself a framing device that constrains not only what we see and hear, but also limits our ability to evaluate it. Her often staccato juxtapositions of directly expressed personal sufferings with the sanitized, seemingly sanguine generalities of politic-speak is one of these—a common but nonetheless compelling strategy. And, in poems such as "3rd grade on the 3rd world" (a poem in which Mirakove quotes children from a 3rd grade class in Texas who write to children in Afghanistan), she brings the chilling reality of our cultural climate to us in ways that pages of discursive analysis could not better express.

"In America,
it is not evil. If it was, I wouldn't
be here. Sincerely, Martin."

and

Breanna: "In [America] you can believe
anything you want to believe."

K.RUPERT MURDOCH

::checkpoint::

Mirakove capitalizes the proper names of all subjects of political importance—there are almost no other capital letters in the text, except for a few quoted uses. She then concludes her book of poems with an index of these referenced names. The names themselves seem to stand larger than anything said in their proximity, creating an area of absence around them, a silence in which a reader might begin to hear her own questions regarding hierarchy and hegemony, naming and power. And, as a reader moves from the poem's text to the indexed reference, and back, she may feel a vertiginous sense of the levels of immersion, the layering of objective and subjective assessment, in which reader and writer inevitably participate.

Muriel Rukeyser, in her long poem "The Book of the Dead," fragments and juxtaposes a range of the forms of address from the most personal to impersonal—from diary, interview, to journalistic report, congressional hearings. Walter Kalaidjian

makes the point that this "signifying practice" was, in its time, "revolutionary" and "effected a key displacement of *literature* itself as a bounded, disciplinary field." Rukeyser's subject—the horrors perpetrated by Union Carbide upon the miners who lived and worked in appalling circumstances—became news that wrested public attention and polarized political groups in ways similar to the chilling events that Mirakove offers us in *Occupied*.

Yet, in the midst of the complex compilation of information that Mirakove succeeds in bringing before us, we do not leave these poems overwhelmed by media-saturation and information-exhaustion, for the simple reason that Mirakove brings to the page no false attempt at synthesis, but rather a surging, various, sensate, immediate, almost shockingly palpable subjectivity.

i'm absorbed into the porousness. you
haunt the past into behaving. future too.
present perfect. back to bed

the two of swords, or what makes us
madness. nagging at my back there is a
dull and constant memory of a six-year
old. with spinal injuries. baghdad—
april—'spring' and all

(from "dreams never die")

Here is the intimately approached abstraction, "the porousness" into which we are "absorbed," as we are permeated, even in our "bed," by the terror of reported war victims' suffering, which becomes the memory of other resonant words, in this case, William Carlos Williams "'spring' and all" (where there was also a road to a contagious hospital, and a resurgent energy of "spring" mingled with an invasive irony). And so, though she remains steadfastly in the midst of the horror, and though she makes plain that there is no simple response to these issues, no simple reflection of past event that will not be "haunted" with our own subjectivity—still, Mirakove's is a kind of approachability that offers in language a momentary rapprochement with situations we cannot hope to contain in language. What we are offered is, in many ways, akin to "the two of swords," the card of peace in the tarot deck, which shows two crossed swords in the equanimity of that perfect balance point between opposing forces—impossible to hold.

Rusty Morrison's collection *Whethering won the 2004 Colorado Prize for Poetry. She is the co-editor/publisher of Omnidawn.*

CHRIS EDGAR
AT PORT ROYAL

Adventures in Poetry, 2003, \$12.50

Port-Royal des Champs was the Jansenist monastery where 17th-century polymath Blaise Pascal made his home; it was also the origin of Arnauld's *Port-Royal Grammar* (1660), an influential text on universal grammar. I mention it because it argues that mind and grammar are virtually identical, and mental processes are the same for everyone, hence the rules for grammar must be universal. Meanwhile, Edgar's book suggests that there might be a universal poetic, which demands first and foremost an oneiric grammar.

And that's only the half of it. There are actually other Port Royals: colonial towns in Jamaica and Nova Scotia, creating a climatic antipodes to match Pascal's antipodes of faith and reason. Under the indeterminate and polysemous sign of Port Royal, both place and concept, religious and Enlightened, this book of poems rings changes on every nuance of the name.

Much of it is a travelogue of eras and geographies all but proslapsed:

Behind stone walls built by Romans
At the far end of our yard, where
The jungles of Southeast Asia began.

The travelogue is metaphorical; as in Frank O'Hara's "Sleeping on the Wing," it is the mind that flies. Bursting with verve, the narrator of these poems is a boy (or boyish) wonder, playing at figures on a counterpane like someone from *A Child's Garden of Verses*, convalescing in bed while visiting foreign lands. Hopscotching from Lilliput to "A Fish Factory in Astrakhan" to the nonexistent "Llewellyn," (a strange indexical entry that is either—both?—a place and a person), the poet takes us on a tour of the world that is really a tour of world literature. Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, Alexander the Great, even the Wise Men make oblique appearances:

Punch-drunk, three resplendent kings
Reorient, and slowly find themselves
Deranged, taking flight
Inside the tawny you.

If poetic imagining is a kind of flying, Edgar makes a strong case for it being a species of mysticism. He names one whimsical poem "The Cloud of Unknowing" but takes unknowing very seriously: only a strong negative capability could allow the *pensée* "Man is a thinking reed" to keep to the shadows, unspoken behind

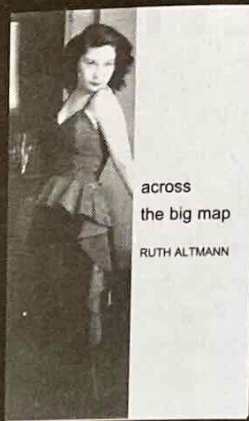
To change the course of history from the piano
You must keep Gieseking from the clarinet

—and this from a poem dedicated to Charles North, clarinetist and poet of the thinking reed *par excellence*.

Pascal more or less invented probability theory, which may also underwrite "Possible Gothams," where skyscraper construction is like "vertical games of musical chairs."

Modernist imagery is thus mapped against Age of Reason indeterminacy; agnostic Modernist indeterminacy may be the heir of Pascal. The syllogism that destabilizes itself (c.f. the famous Wager where logic falls on the side of Belief) is a kind of poetry, perhaps the universal code of poetry: linguistic ruse and rose. The possibilities really are endless, as Edgar joyously stipulates. But I don't want to burden these poems with exactly the sort of thing they leave out, or open. Theories of metaphysical gambling take a backseat to lavish figurative language, which is more persuasive than mere argument. In loving begins learning, and that is the most and least mystical assumption grounding this amazing book.

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



In "To the Muse," her brilliant tête-à-tête, straightforward, admonishing, accusing, imploring address of the elusive Muse, Ruth Altmann defines the unsheathed honesty of her work and sets a tone of reverent colloquialism. Her poems reveal a marvelous concinnity composed of ordinary language and a chronicle of being alive that roars with lyrical compassion. This singular reportage opens thunderous as prairie space.

Maureen Owen

Because she takes various shapes and speaks in many voices, through a long life, and like no other, this is a nourishing, funny, fleshy, brainy book of poetry — exactly the one to read. Follow Ruth to the Midwest, New York, the Antarctic, through literary and drug adventures, into her eighties, her knowing everything, carnally, spiritually, the moon's dust. I love this book.

Alice Notley

Of all the people and things I miss about New York City it is Ruth Altmann who makes it more clear than ever that to change the world through poetry, you don't have to change yourself.

Bernadette Mayer

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across the big map
by Ruth Altmann

JACK COLLOM
EXTREMES & BALANCES
farfalla press, 2004, \$18.95

Just three years after the publication of Jack Collom's impressive selected poems, *Red Car Goes By* (Tuumba Press, 2001), another tome, a sort of younger sibling, with yet more of Collom's always various and inspired writing, has just appeared, *Extremes & Balances*. This new book, according to its preface, is less a "selected" and more a loosely arranged conglomeration of "poems ... largely rediscovered in a forgotten storage place ... generally, with less emphasis on being 'poems' than on being poetic writing, that is having more texture than closure, being less thematic." Beginning with Collom's whimsical yet concise preface (in which he quickly, offhandedly, sets forth some ideas on writing many critics would do well to consider), this book is a most welcome reminder of Collom's continued presence in and influence on U.S. American verse.

It is a delight that both these books have been published in such close succession, as Collom's multiplicitous "voice," his incredible diversity in both style and form demand this much book to be properly displayed. Indeed, it is difficult to consider this second collection without considering how it both differs from and adds to the first. In both are apparent Collom's status as master, a master being one who creates proficiently in all forms; also apparent is his playful and intense relationship with language. However, this new collection is not really a sequel (what relief—sequels so rarely live up to our expectations), but is rather a sort of counter-collection, the "other" work not so much behind the previously published poems, but alongside them.

And how does this difference manifest itself? While *Red Car Goes By* charts the published poems (which otherwise one would have to purchase more than 15 books to read), *Extremes & Balances* documents previously unpublished work, which forms a sort of backdrop, a backroads tour as it were, to the published poems. Included are journal entries, notes, collaborations, translations, meditations, and, of course, poems. In many of these formerly "lost" or misplaced works, we see less experimentation with form and more playing around with ideas of what writing itself is or might be. "Lost my mood, eating food." quips Collom around the same time period as his epic poem/song "Blue Heron" (in *Red Car Goes By*, originally published in *Blue Heron & IBC*, also recorded on CD). Slices of light like dreams/ as soon as you say them they're something else" (from *Bummer's Peak Again*). In one of the many collaborations in this collection, we are intro-

duced to such characters as Depot Creeper, Princess Poem, Mama Paperclip, and Fryingpan Eggs the eggs lifter. Those who have spent time around him know that almost everything he does involves and leads to the creation of poetry, and some of the more narrative, candid writings in *Extremes & Balances* give a glimpse of some of the rest of that everything. Quoting the preface again, "... these are not 'nature poems'; they're about miscellany, machines, work, wordplay, marriages, getting drunk, getting drunk on disconnects and sober on degrees of same. Or something." It's that 'something' that is always extra special about Collom's writing.

Both *Extremes & Balances* and *Red Car Goes By* give evidence to Collom's incredible diversity, his adeptness with form, his wide range of tones, subjects, genres, and even purposes. Few writers even attempt that which he pulls off again and again with grace and aplomb. These two collections together give a good overall sense of the oeuvre of one of Colorado's true treasures. Anyone who is not familiar with Jack Collom's work should rush to the local poetry store or library (or to SPD's website) and prepare to spend serious time with both books. We should all be grateful to these publishers for bringing his work to the fore.

Laura E. Wright's first full-length collection of poems is forthcoming from Meeting Eyes Bindery.

PRAGEETA SHARMA
THE OPENING QUESTION
Fence, 2004, \$12

Prageeta Sharma's second book of poetry *The Opening Question* isn't so much a question as it is a patchwork of queries into subjects such as culture, religion, relationships, writing, and games. In fact, the question seems to locate then relocate itself ("The question is on that cloud, on that screen, pretty vacant") while intermittently playing with surface language. These poems are "a thousand anonymous sounds/ quilted together for you to designate meaning."

Take, for example, this passage from the title poem: "The woman is on the bus with a businessman./ Perhaps this route is longer for the wisest of reasons./ To appear in the mist, in the midst, in the mass,/ the woman places hand on forehead for drama./ She has only gone to Mass a few times/ and there are never any questions posed by the audience." Perhaps in Mass the audience never poses questions, but here we are a central inquisitive figure because nothing is as it seems. We come to understand the premise includes "realizing this immensity/ was fake immensity...that things are unexpected." Sharma's is a language of duplication; pretense is a thread in

her "embroidered fabric."

Sharma reminds us how difficult it is to find the opening of anything, how problematic it is to see the artifice in "truth": "we made imitations and/ found families of restraint. ...I imitate a kicked puppy—that's not truth so I am to interpret/ better things." The opening—or original—question is difficult to trace. It is a simulacrum concealed, obfuscated. Yet, in the process we recognize that "we are hidden by our evolution—we are strangers."

Even so, "strangers" come together to negotiate language, to negotiate culture in this excerpt of "Family":

There are silverfish bugs across the
windowsill
in the white house. He says, my name is
Jug Dish,
and you are pointing west when you say
dish, desh.
And you are taking a stab when you say
jug, Jag.
However, the name is Indian. Point west,
take a stab.
This is my house. I am a child. He is Jug
Dish. We are an Indian
family with Indian friends from India. Jug
Dish studies English poetry.
I study English poetry. I point west to take
a stab at a silverfish.
The mountain of ink is paint, there is
memory here, for friends
of an Indian community.

To negotiate meaning, we "take a stab" at the resonance in Jug-Jag-Dish-Desh. Not only does the shifting in language deepen, but also our appreciation of the "memory here"—a collective one belonging to more than those "friends/ of an Indian community." It is a memory that reverberates in many who have had to explain culture or clarify experience to the outside world. It is not isolated in illuminating Indianness because it encompasses otherness.

Eventually "no more duplications appear." The theme in *The Opening Question* shifts to another strand in this quilted collection. Yet, paradoxically, replicas or versions of things exist everywhere—in the act of defining ourselves, in the act of understanding memory—and when we choose one version over another, we un/consciously negotiate the duplications while we "keep only what parts of it [we] find trustworthy." "Mimicry" as Sharma reminds us "is ironic compromise." It seems that in choosing how we "designate meaning," we determine what is ultimately meaningful to each of us.

Michelle Naka Pierce is director of the writing center at Naropa University and the co-author of TRI/VIA with Veronica Corpuz.

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GEORGE ALBON
BRIEF CAPITAL OF DISTURBANCES
Omnidawn, 2003, \$12.95

George Albon's sublimely beautiful book, *Brief Capital of Disturbances*, opens with the line, "There's something about the book I'm reading...." Anyone who opens the book will most likely feel the kind of self-consciousness one feels in a crowd looking at other people—both observer and subject. The "book I am reading" becomes *Brief Capital of Disturbances* and, therefore, "I" becomes both reader and author. One is placed in intimate proximity to George Albon, as if reading over his shoulder. And Albon continues, describing how he, if we are to assume this is Albon, follows a "rogue narrative" outside of the text, the book itself becoming "unavailable." Here is an associative process in which the book is a catalyst for ideas.

And, indeed, *Brief Capital of Disturbances* takes as its form what Rosmarie Waldrop calls "two strands of notation," usually two short paragraphs per page that gain complexity and depth through their appositional relationship. The reader is invited to make associations not only between the paragraphs on each page, but throughout the book and even outside of the book, as Albon suggests in the beginning. But the book is more than a Calvino-like puzzle of perception: Albon's writing is meditative, quiet, and revelatory, and the notational quality of these short pieces intensifies the apprehensions they evoke:

This blanching out of the surroundings, so that nothing is in the sun's shadow, the fugitive sense that I am being offered more. Not being able to see our location on the window-fogged bus, hearing Buddha as *blue dot*. He who says *we're all created*.

When there are puzzling moments, they are koan-like, in that they heighten contemplation by evoking strangeness, paradox, distance. And the result can often be that the reader has the exquisite sensation of participating in unique consideration:

He laughs in short bursts, then seethes with pleasure.

Albon's quiet minimalist's attention brings a buzz of significance to the seemingly inconsequential:

Midst of light sleeps. On the walls the insects make audible landings.

In these few words, the reader can find a refreshing solace from the anxieties of hurried attention, though they may create a new, perhaps more welcome uneasiness, that of the "strangeness" of renewed perception. But it is worth noting that Albon achieves

"strangeness" not by escapism, but from close attention, which means, therefore, that the world around us is more interesting and worthwhile than the one we often imagine and sometimes wish to escape from. This is a writing that is very much in the moment.

I go out at night, each night a different place, crossing intersections halfway down the block. I go out looking for others like myself. I approach them and at some point jostle them—very slightly. After a few of these encounters I can go home.

I jostle them to judge their mass.

In sections like this, one can see a dark humor, reminiscent of Beckett perhaps, which reveals something of our search for a common humanity. And this search permeates the book, found in lines like the following: "Men's room graffiti: I Am Frightened Too." When one looks closely, one sees fear and sadness as well.

In the following, apparently found section, Albon moves from the small and personal to the widely social and political as well:

GAY EXECUTIONS FAIL IN AFGHANISTAN.

In accord with orthodox doctrine, Taliban Islamic authorities in Kotal Morcha, Afghanistan, collapsed a stone wall on three convicted sodomites Feb. 24, but when the men were still not dead after half an hour, they were taken to a hospital for treatment, reported the Afghan Islamic Press. Orthodox Islamic scholars believe homosexuals must be punished by having a wall felled on them or being flung from a hilltop, the report said.

Authorities ordered that Fazalur Rehman, Ahmad Shah and Abdul Qahir be left in the rubble for 30 minutes then have their lives spared if they had not died.

Albon is not reluctant to engage with several charged issues here. Though primarily the passage evokes sympathy for the accused, disgust, and shock, it also creates broader, more complicated reactions, contextualized by the fact that the author, publisher and (probably) most of the readers of the book are American. The passage is not solely about gay persecution, but also about religious orthodoxy and politics. Further, it is contextualized by its placement among the other pieces in the book, by the associations it gains from being placed amongst other passages, some funnier, some less tangible, some harder to grasp. How are we to take this absurd tale of stupidity and horror? In the complicated context in which it is presented.

Albon's attention covers the universal and the mundane, the bizarre and the commonplace,

but in all of it, we feel the freshness of his unique gift of focus. One feels gently instructed in the operations of humanity's workings, guided toward clearer perception, but at the same time, one feels the sublime thrill of discovering for one's self.

Brian Strang is the author of Incretion and machinations, among others.

RUTH STONE
IN THE DARK
Copper Canyon Press, 2004, \$22

Ruth Stone's ear is more exact than ever in each sounded-out, deeply sounding line of her superlatively phrased, galactically scoped 12th volume. There are 94 pieces here, gifts from extended time: Stone is 89. Her eyesight is nearly gone, but she's seen enough to know, and her other senses all report with laserlike precision. She writes with such utter simplicity, such steady ease of image, tone, and beat, that these poems just sail out of the ballpark into orbit again and again.

Stone's familiar themes remain timely and moving: widowhood, her hopeless love for the foot bones of her lost husband; outrage at so-called progress, Vermont's scenic farmland destroyed by developers; bawdy gleeful misery at the gender wars, a cousin's words "when I was fourteen," she writes, "and still imprinting like a baby duck":

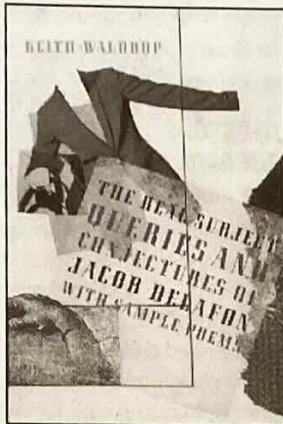
... "It's Jim.
He's left her for that slut. She thought they were just trading partners again."

Now she beholds her blindness like some astounded Tiresias: "How many visions can I understand/ and still be able to see?" Her eyes, or the sights they gave her once, are precious: when they come back, "said the blind mad woman,/ I'll close them every night, and open them every morning,/ like a jewel box." Birds do in fact speak to her, and she's clearly having visions and hearing voices, but then, she always has, because she listens. "Tell me, Ruth, how is your vision?" asks God or an unseen, unseeing doctor. Her reply expands to mythic proportions: "Lord, I say, 'know you not how it is with me?'"—

How is it that I hear this echo,
catching even in my blind eye the death throes of a distant star?

But her hearing can home right in on a grandson, as well: "Walter, Upon Looking Around," says, "Men are getting extinct . . . / Look how little I am; / and I'm the only boy in the family." And even here, her instinct for the mythic is at play.

As always, she continues to consider and transfigure science. A one-sentence fix on "Heaven" offers a magnificently apt, funny,



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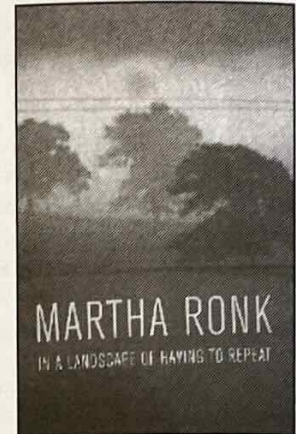
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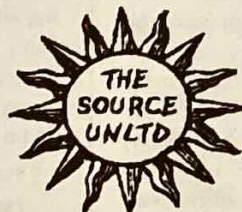
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and finally nostalgic metaphor:

Before we knew the true
polyhedral vision
and reduced all possibility
to a perfectly fulfillable eternity;
ignorance hung
like a bat of viscous glue;
upside down—
beautiful blind insectivore.

The hard old business of seasonal change leads her to wonder about baby spiders who ride air currents around the globe and to ask if they, “like those lost Russian astronauts,” can hear the wintering sun. What might be just bleak Beckettesque winter—in the poem, in her own mind—is tempered by Stone’s clear-eyed domestic grasp of an enormous range of delicate, expensive facts. She handles these frosty sparklers of clarity deftly, dazzling us with remarkable news about the world’s cheap, quick-to-vanish, eternal beauty.

Stone feels for self and others: she delights in speaking for and with “the mop with its head/ on the floor, weeping;/ or the poinsettia that pretends/ its leaves are flowers,” the rocks that “squint in their gum-dirt sockets.” There are no inanimate objects. She hilariously trumps Robert Frost’s Depression-style rural-poverty poetry-topoi by means of astrophysics, and vice versa: “This asteroid fat boy is learning disabled./ There he comes to shoot up our window,/ the ionosphere.”

There’s no doubt she’s tuned in to Orpheus’s sublime, chthonic, 1940s Mercedes-Benz-limousine radio, as envisioned by Jean Cocteau. “From Outer Space” reports how “the voice from the galaxy” is “ready to translate”:

... “The Japanese report remnants, debris,
gas, large chunks of matter. Listen, listen,
I kid you not. This is real. Now get this
down.”

Although her work has always been narrative and lyrical, fond of fables and inclined to address herself as “you,” she has an appreciation for the latest news in poetry and science. “Riding the Bubble,” her take on the avant-garde, gives us metaphoric benefit of her latest readings of physics; she’s intrigued by

Poetry that uses non sequiturs
which are transformations
in the direction of Zen,
as the hyper-angle in Vasco
Popa’s “Prudent Triangle”—
a linguistic arrangement
of infinity.

And language itself surrounds her now the way images did before. She personifies it as a man beside her in a carriage in some dream-like Asian landscape; she asks, “Where are we

going?” as they talk, “his face in the shadow”:

What he is saying is clear as type,
set by hand and bound for printing.
And yet it is upside down and backward.
I press it to my body and read it
through my skin. It is the primer
of our ancestors. It says nothing
is sacred, nothing repeats.

The key question echoing throughout this collection is “Where are we going?” She asks it for herself and a bird of passage fallen in the roadway; she hears it asked by tree frogs in October wind. “Let me speak as a grasshopper to the universe, rebounding, always rebounding./ Where do we leap,/ old mother?” She asks her surrounding shadows, “And where are we now, old darkness?” But she has also found euphorias in memory and perception. In “Floaters,” her question is instead, “Why this happiness in muted things?” She is amazed at how her age has caused a sense of the world that “strips back like leaves to unexpected glittering.” Who would have thought such treasure would appear at the heart of so much loss? I have read Stone’s poetry for more than 30 years. She has always made me braver about living. Reading *In the Dark*, I feel much less worried about growing old.

Rosanne Wasserman is the author of *Other Selves* (Painted Leaf Press).

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS
DRAFTS: DRAFTS 39-57, PLEDGE, WITH
DRAFT, UNNUMBERED: PRÉCIS
Salt, 2004, \$19.99

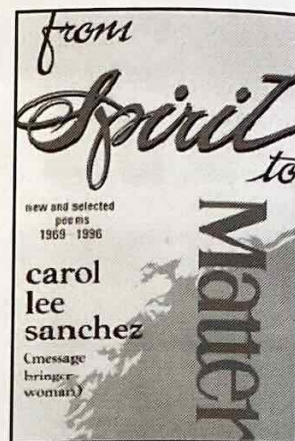
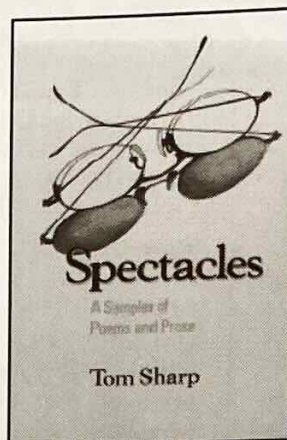
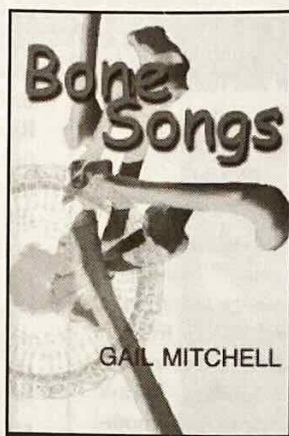
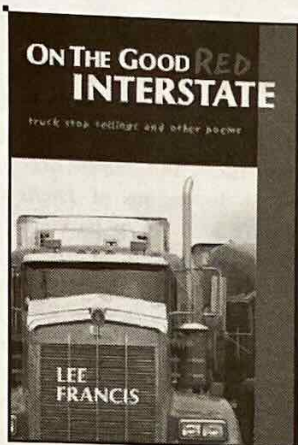
Whereas so many reviews begin by placing a poet’s work within a specific (read: limiting) category, Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s *Drafts* defy such a prefatory gesture. This is no accident. DuPlessis herself has been careful to correct the imprecise label of “Language Poet” so often attributed to her and never tires from troubling the gendered characterization of “woman poet.” But, even more significant than DuPlessis’s own denunciations, the work itself refuses, rejects, and resists any reading practices which attempt to assign reductive labels.

Begun almost two decades ago, DuPlessis’s ongoing serial poem consistently conjures comparisons with modernist long poems. And, although there is evidence everywhere of Williams’s library as Beautiful Thing, Zukofsky’s upper limit music and lower limit speech, Pound’s problematizing of history and politics in canto form, and Oppen’s Objectivist exactitude, it is this masculinist legacy which marks not only DuPlessis’s influences but also her interventions.

As patently obvious as these male predecessors might be in the work, equally present and perhaps more palpable are the female voices—H.D., Mina Loy, Frances Jaffer, Barbara Guest, Alice Notley, Lyn Hejinian, Rosmarie Waldrop, Kathleen Fraser. The fact that these influences are less often invoked in discussions of *Drafts* speaks to the ongoing necessity of DuPlessis’s work—both creative and critical. For DuPlessis is never simply a poet (as if being a poet were simple). A scholar, editor, critic, poet, feminist, and teacher—each voice enters into the space of the poem, each discourse becomes transformed by the larger conversation. Listening to DuPlessis’s ear on the page, one is reminded of the signal importance of dissonance to jazz.

Arguably the single most important page of this long poem sequence appears at the very beginning as “Grid of Drafts 1-38, Toll and Drafts 39-57, Pledge,” which operates as a bridge between the previous collection, *Drafts 1-38, Toll* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001), and this newest installment. As potentially crucial as the Lenati schema to Joyceans or Bach’s fugue to Zukofsky scholars, DuPlessis’s grid outlines the interconnected 19-unit design by which the drafts fold and unfold with dizzying (not to mention Deleuzian) complexity. If DuPlessis’s “Notes”—poems in their own right—form a coda to the drafts themselves, her “Grid” signals a momentous downbeat, the first stroke from which all the music thereafter derives.

Equally significant is the retrospective unnumbered draft, “Précis,” which samples from all 57 drafts to form a re-mix of the overall *Drafts* project. No doubt, most readers of *Drafts* have read the poems individually in small press magazines or chapbooks and then chronologically in book form. Both “Grid” and “Précis” reveal the folly of linear reading practices. Reading across the grid, from book to book, new openings emerge. There are thematic connections such as that of materiality in “Draft 9: Page,” “Draft 28: Facing Pages,” and “Draft 47: Printed Matter;” or silence and space in “Draft 5,” “Draft 24,” and “Draft 43” all titled, “Gap;” as well as formal relationships in juxtaposing “Draft 13: Haibun” alongside “Draft 32: Renga.” In this way *Pledge* forms a crucial counterpart to *Toll*, which leaves off in “Draft 38: Georgics and Shadow” with the speaker asking, “What did the work demand?” before replying, “That the question be asked ... Nothing is inside the work, but everything is.”



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—Joe Bruchac

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—David Bromige

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From this Oppen-inspired place of being numerous, Pledge emerges with even more complex questions. Responding to "Draft 52: Midrash" in the final "Précis," DuPlessis asks

If I were to cry out
the questions why or how or
who would hear us –
and responds, not with an answer, but
with
a poetics:

Therefore it is scrupulous to listen.

The most recent installment of Barbara Cole's ongoing "situation come dies" project, "foxy moron", is available from /ubu editions.

CONSIDERING CHAPBOOKS

Rather than particular subjects or various formal methods, which, although present, are not immediately foregrounded, the poems in **Rebecca Stoddard's** *home?* (Noemi Press, 2003) coalesce around a lyric tone of playful eroticism, with the occasional foray into anachronistic diction à la the neo-dandyism of Jeff Clark. Stoddard, in fact, cites Clark, along with John Zorn, Gerhard Richter, and others, among her coterie of ekphrastic and intertextual influence. Speaking of influence, both the more humor-laden side of language writing and its rambunctious, googled stepchild Flarf, (along with most versions and variants of New York School aesthetics and pretty much any maverick worth her salt) owe a hefty debt to the original ringmaster of confrontational absurdity himself, **Tristan Tzara**. *Twenty-five and One Poems* (Toad Press, undated), meticulously translated in its entirety by **Nick Moudry**, is all too often pejoratively relegated to Tzara's Dada period; yet, it is here that the work remains, to employ a purposeful double entendre: mind-bendingly fresh. One might say the same for the tour de force that is **Jules Boykoff's** *Philosophical Investigations inna Neo-con Roots-Dub Style* (the interrupting cow, 2004). Sewn into a file folder, Boykoff's chapbook features multi-media collages of the erstwhile actor and politician Ronald Reagan on the left facing pages; on the right, one is given sonically spastic, humorous, and politically charged poems that enact the imaged meetings between Jamaican reggae and dub musicians and various international, and often evil, political figures. Boykoff's choice of Jamaican music is not an arbitrary one, as Dread Talk, the Rastafarian dialect ubiquitous among reggae artists,

was created as an empowering re-appropriation of the inherited colonial language wherein words broken into their constituent morphemic elements are reconfigured to trump preexisting hierarchal relationships (i.e. oppressor becomes downpressor; understand becomes overstand) and "I" is often inserted into the beginning of multi-syllabic words as a unifying gesture. And what isn't more unifying to us Americans than a dose of good old honest, non-histrionic, non-epiphany laden, expressive subjectivity? Well, perhaps alcohol, but barring that, the poems in **Erica Jane Kaufman's** from *The Two Coat Syndrome* (Boku Books, 2004) demonstrate that the self, construct or not, can be pretty damned endearing, as Kaufman writes, "I think historians make/ history. what I make/ is expression." With refreshing spontaneity and a near continuous, tangential focus on fashion, the poems move between childhood memories and pseudo-real time events to sculpt an embodied and engrossing voice. The highlight here is the title poem, a crown of sonnets that navigates the intimacy of the I/you relationship. **Paul Stephens**, in his beautifully designed chapbook *Pottlatch, Correction, Pottluck* (A Rest Press, 2004), prefers to negotiate the implicate linearity of a single, thirteen-section prose poem sequence. The distinctively intelligent wit at play in this work, at times reminiscent of early Liz Waldner or Michael Friedman, although wholly its own, weaves together a paratactic template for the reader's mind to both linger on and work through, as happens here: "In a jet flying westward at the right latitude you can watch the sun set perpetually. Things turned out OK." The things in **Naomi K. Long's** *Radiant Field* (TinFish Press, 2004), also a single prose sequence, have an evanescent feel to them, merging with the ghostly narrative that often gives way to aphoristic pondering. Although there are border crossings, a love affair, long drives and train rides, the real subject of Long's work is how the intense and sustained concentration of the mind on these events produces an evocative and satisfyingly unresolved series of questions and assertions. Part peripatetic, subtle, yet quite cerebral, complexity, part humorous, and anecdote-laden travelogue, part meditation on place, simultaneously of the text and the empirical world, **David Perry's** *Knowledge Follows* (Insurance Editions, 2003) is an altogether dynamic assemblage of precisely deployed, lineated stanzas, inter-

persed with bits of narrative prose. Loosely documenting a trip to Chiapas, though in the more Objectivist sense of specificity of focus, Perry's dexterous and attentive writing renders time itself an almost palpable entity. In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that as the publisher of another recent chapbook of his, *New Years*, I am a biased reader; however, this chapbook just further solidifies my commitment to continue following the work of a poet for whom I have the utmost admiration. Who wouldn't admire the way **Edmund Berrigan**, in *your cheatin' heart* (furniture press, 2004), tames the syntax beast by letting it pounce around before pulling in the leash? The controlled wildness of these poems shares something with the working of the mind on the morning after an all-night bender; even as time is seemingly slowed or elongated, the hyperdrive of thought incessantly careening into itself produces a slew of startling and strange images which twist into an almost awkward kind of beauty, one whose authenticity is akin to that of a country ballad played to utter perfection on guitar with two broken strings. A completely different sense of what constitutes "country" is the partial locus for **Karen Weiser's** *Placefulness* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2004). She writes, "Can you push me into the box Country and call it Nature? Between here and there is story, one you tell, one I bury under potted plants on the windowsill." Written in response to Etel Adnan's *There* (which itself was written, according to an interview with Adnan, to re-conceptualize struggle, specifically that between East and West and Israelis and Arabs, "through a self-questioning and a dialogue"), Weiser's poem furthers both the self-interrogation and the possibility for understanding, and perhaps change, such a project entails. The questioning here, as with Adnan's book, is multitudinous: what makes an other, an enemy, a country; how is one responsible for one's history, family, self? Of course, the issues are much more complex than that, which is what makes Weiser's work—in its ability to fold, sometimes into a single sentence, the conundrums of self, text, memory, national identity and history—not only compelling, but necessary.

Noah Eli Gordon's latest book is The Area Called the Subtone (Ahsakta Press, 2004).

REMEMBER THE POETS!

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