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Stop the Presses

LETTER FROM JOE LESUEUR

Talking to Tony Towle

AT FRANK O'HARA'S CITY POET PARTY

Describing Photographs

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Helen Adam, 1909-1993

MAUREEN OWEN AND BOB HERSHON

Two-Thirds of the Earth's Surface

LEWIS, BROOK, DAVIS, STEFANS,
FOSTER, LENHART, MAYER, PEYSER,
MASTERS + OF COURSE, MCCAIN





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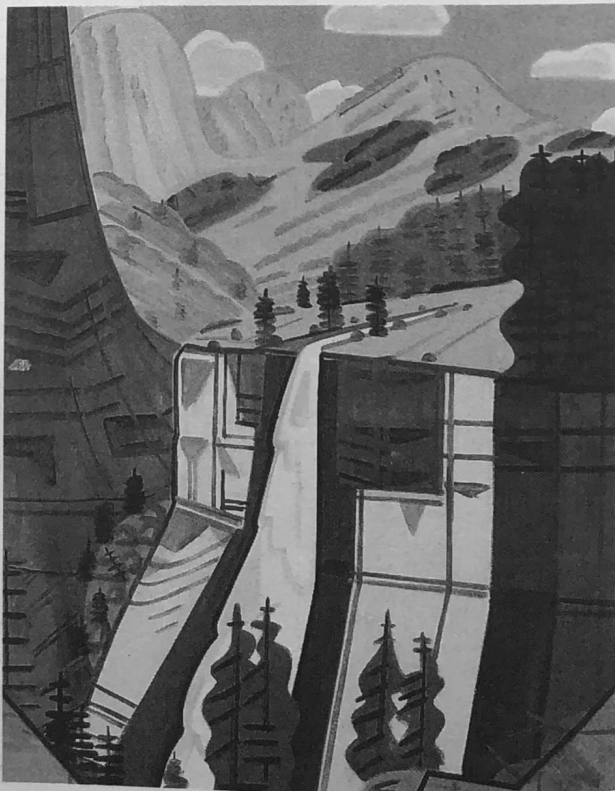
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East Hampton, NY, October 22, 1993

To the Editors, POETRY PROJECT.

As someone who knew Frank O'Hara pretty well, having lived with him for nine and a half years, and as an old friend of the Poetry Project, I am writing in response to the review of Brad Gooch's *City Poet* that appeared in your October-November newsletter. But first a few words about the book.

Though exhaustively researched, *City Poet* is a meretricious and cynical piece of writing that gives a skewed portrait of its subject. Your reviewer, Tom Clark, was on-target in comparing it to "a slightly out-of-focus photo in which the background comes out sharper than the foreground figure." What's worse, when O'Hara does come into focus, he's unrecognizable—not just to me but to other people who knew him. Here, for example, is what a friend of Frank's and mine wrote me not long after the book appeared: "Though I'm glad of the information in it, I don't feel that it ever comes to life or catches Frank's essential qualities. An underlying gloom-doom haunts the book and subtly robs Frank of the excitement and fun which were very much his and which he immediately conveyed to others. A tragic fag secretly lurks behind Gooch's portrait of Frank and contradicts all my memories of him."

Touché; that sums up the book's over-riding failure. I would add that it's impossible to calculate the damage this name-dropping, *Vanity Fair*-like biography has done and will continue to do, because once something appears in print, it is taken at face value and widely accepted as gospel—as witness the review by Tom Clark. To make matters worse, it would appear that this respected poet found Gooch's "gossip-survey" (Clark's epithet) too tame for his tastes—thus, he brutally summarized and exaggerated some of the more juicy stuff in *City Poet*, even going so far as to draw a couple of specious conclusions of his own, to wit:

Frank O'Hara's death "contained suicidal elements"; his James Dean poems were "the objective correlative of his own self-destructive urges" and can now be read "as eerie presages of his own fate"; he found it "harder and harder...to get along [with his mother] even as he increasingly came to resemble her"; he also found "his job security [at the Museum of Modern Art] in time becoming compromised by an increasingly defiant public openness about his gay life style"; he suffered from "neurotic anxiety, insecurity, depression, insomnia, and death-obsession" in his "later years," while "in his heyday" he was

"desperately dedicated to the sexual hunt," involving him in "a frantic whirl of one-night stands" and a "sexual promiscuity... [that] may provoke moralistic reactions in some readers today"—all of this, in Tom Clark's view via Brad Gooch's biography, describes the "depths of a 'hunted and haunted' O'Hara lurking nervously beneath the generous, civilized, witty external demeanor."

What rot! Frank O'Hara was not "hunted and haunted," and there was nothing "nervously lurking beneath [his] demeanor." Though complicated, he was pretty much what he seemed, a lively, compassionate, generous human being with wide-ranging interests and concerns. Far from being suicidal, he loved life too much, wanted too much from it—that was his problem—and for that reason, he pushed himself to the limit. I would also say that anyone who accomplished as much as he did cannot have given in to his "self-destructive impulses," as suggested by Tom Clark. More emphatically, I want to say: FRANK O'HARA DID NOT COMMIT SUICIDE NOR WAS THERE ANYTHING REMOTELY SUICIDAL ABOUT HIS FATAL ACCIDENT. (Thanks a lot, Brad, for playing up Grace Hartigan's dumb "half-suicide" idea, pure projection on her part; as I told you, she hadn't been

close to Frank for years and knew nothing of his mental and emotional state.) Yes, Frank drank too much, as we all did, but apart from that, he was nothing like his mother. Just as outlandish is the notion that he was so openly defiant about his "gay life style" that his job security was threatened. It's true that he made no apologies for his homosexuality, but he also never flaunted it. Nor, by gay standards of the time, was he particularly promiscuous when I moved in with him in 1955; and within a couple of years, he had stopped going to bed with strangers and made out, for the most part, with several of the younger poets who began coming around in 1959—it was romance and friendship he was after, not recreational sex.

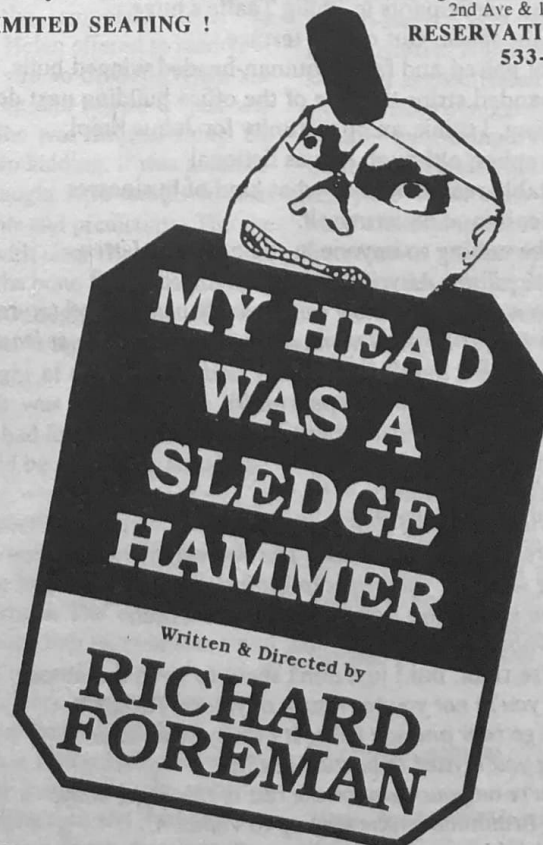
Did he suffer from insomnia and depression, and have an obsession with death? Not that I ever noticed, though I do know he grieved for years over the death of Bunny Lang, occasionally had trouble sleeping, and was sometimes down in the dumps, like anyone else. Neurotic? No more than the rest of us. Insecure? Would that all of us could be as confident and sure of ourselves as Frank was, and as reassuring to others.

Adding insult to injury, Tom Clark had the temerity to dismiss his poetry with a

(continued on page 21)

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Thoughts at Frank O'Hara's City Poet Party, 6/9/93

Hal Fondren was there, and Bobby Fizdale,
John Gruen and Jane—Wilson, that is,
Morris Golde, and a number of others
who were already highly visible on the scene
when I appeared in the background, as a young poet, thirty
years ago this spring. "How are you?" is the question I kept hearing
from the members of this contingent
as I milled about in the clinical orchards of sociability.
How am I? Feeling old, I wanted to say,
as a birthday approached from the end of the week,
but these people had ten to fifteen years on me *then*,
and of course, as is the mathematical way, still did;
and on the other hand there were these clumps of fashionable young men
who obviously weren't even born when Frank *died*. Which was more depressing?
It's a push, as a bookie would say, from his bit part in *Guys and Dolls*.
And Frank's delightful sister Maureen was there, of course;
I don't remember if I ever told her that my first "serious" girlfriend,
in the third grade, was an Irish girl named Maureen, but I guess
I'm telling her now, after a fashion, and this way everybody else
gets to listen in, and be bored, too.
And I guess I could tell Brad Gooch
that in World War II *all* destroyers were called "tin cans,"
not just the type Frank served on,
and the battleship *Missouri* was called the *Mighty Mo*, not the *Old Mo*,
but I suppose I'm telling him now, etcetera.
It's the first unpleasantly humid day in June,
maybe that's why I feel neglected and out of it,
not really involved with the art and poetry world
that still buzzes with participants in Philip Taaffe's huge
and strangely elegant space. Out on the terrace,
I notice the motif of paired and facing human-headed winged bulls
that decorates in banded strips the side of the office building next door.
The Assyrian Building, I think, an opportunity for Julius Knipf,
real-estate photographer, although he's as fictional
as I feel uncomfortably real. I wonder what kind of businesses
rent space there, I continue on to myself,
since I don't feel like talking to anyone at the moment. *Listen*,
Frank cuts in, *what's all this Assyrian baloney? Winged bulls?*
Winged bull-you-know-what! And how can anybody possibly feel too real?
Why don't you trim the fat off your no-moss mind and try to be at least
as entertaining as you used to think you were? God knows
I certainly wouldn't miss that kind of opportunity.
That's not fair, I answer, your just showing up right now
would be entertainment enough,
you wouldn't have to say a word.
Well, I could take their minds off that pretty quick
by showing an interest in their existences. The best way
to keep from feeling sorry for yourself is to get interested
in someone else; you know that. I certainly still know that,
in fact it's exactly what I'm doing right now.
Yes, of course you're right, but I just don't seem to be in the mood.
Don't be truculent, you're not young enough anymore. There's
John Ashbery, now go over and say hello. It's thirty years later
and I'm still getting you invited to parties, but this
is the last time. You're on your own for the rest of this saga, baby,
as Siegfried said to Brunhilde on the way up to Valhalla,
I'm going to get a drink!

—Tony Towle

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Helen Adam, 1909-1993

If the term "wild women/women who run with the wolves" is back in vogue, there is certainly no one more deserving of or more accurately described by that expression than the poet and composer of Scottish ballads, Helen Adam. Because to see and hear her read her work was like being loosed into another realm where fierce raw winds whipped clothes and face and spray from her. "The white surf at the world's end" crashed in great waves drenching one to the bone. All conventional agreements of what could and couldn't happen were rent asunder and one was cast suddenly on a wide and desolate plain full of howling and nervous hoofbeats, or into a labyrinthian maze that bent this way and then that and from which it was clear from the start, no one would be escaping.

She would step onto the podium looking like an eccentrically dressed neighbor (with a rather strange glint in her eye), and become transformed as if in some magic ritual that took place before the very eyes of the audience. A leaping fire, a deep glade mist would engulf her, she would dance and sway to the music of her own brogue flinging her hat into the air. There was a Lear madness in her; her eerie intonations wrenched the listener from the secure comfort of room and chair, and reminded them that myth is just real life moving invisibly in the background. A master of the Scottish ballad, she wrote in that meter and read in a song-like snatching of each word made music. She could make a contemporary audience believe in shape shifting and doom and then with her uncanny sense of humor cause the scene to be awash with satire and completely hilarious. In short, she managed to send chills up the spine and terrify while taking irony's backseat to the fray and letting the listener in on the joke of it all, and having that somehow be innocent and funny. Her ballads were a world of symmetry and destiny and unavoidable retribution. Her work championed the terror of the inexplicable, the unexplainable. In a song like rhythm the fate of the innocent would be sealed. A fate for decisions made for the wrong reasons; material gain; the loss of one's soul; absolute judgement passed; the fatal error; the unforgiveable selfish act. All played out in analogy between the mythological past and contemporary dailiness. Or contemporary daily situations set to ballad meter and laced

with the comedy of modern angst. Love's doom and danger. The danger of love and the doom of loving.

Love and death.

The most modern of themes.

She lived with her sister Pat (before her sister's death in 1988) for years on the upper East side and it was great and slightly chilling to be invited there for dinner. A typical New York apartment, a sort of "angled" railroad configuration of rooms. Books lined the narrow hallway two rows deep. Making it almost impassable. Books flooded the bedroom floor and it appeared as though the bed itself was held up with books. Statues of Anubis, the jackal god of the Necropolis, and Thoth, measurer of time, inventor of numbers, and other mysterious Egyptian goddesses and gods crisscrossed the walls and stood among the tiers of books along the halls. Dinner was set on a small card table that had no legs, but rested on the laps of the eaters as they sat in a square; tho I seem to recall part of the table had books holding it up too. A lot of wonderful large portions of food were served. A tremendous generosity prevailed. After the complete feast in Medieval style, Helen offered to read your Tarot cards, if you so desired. When she shuffled the deck and began, a spell was cast over all. She was the real thing. No turning back. No kidding. It was genuinely scary and fraught with danger to hear her Tarot insights and predictions. Tho she went about it with utter cheerfulness, one was chilled to the bone by the possibilities of what the cards might turn up. She was definitely magic. Truly a real power. Even as she made light of the reading to calm the recipient, it was too late. One knew everything she had foretold would happen and there would be no getting around it.

She was a poet out of time, stretched. Out of a dark visceral realm. Every cell of her body wrote ballads, every cell of her body chanted them. The eerie quality of her verse made the hair on your toes stand stiff. She could scare the pants off God. A simple night nursery rhyme in her hands could stop your heart cold. Each poem beginning with a lilting ballad loveliness and then slowly it starts to take a turn, a dark turn, a chilling turn and the listener or reader is caught in a vortex, spiralling in.

—Maureen Owen

Helen's voice. In 1958, I am walking down Grant Avenue during a street fair and there is a woman standing on a box, reading poems in her high, Scotch voice. Can't remember where I was going, but I was half an hour late. In September, 1993, I went to see Helen at the Carleton Nursing Home. She was gravely ill and barely recognizable and I'm not sure she knew who I was. The only words she spoke were "Good morning," but the voice was hers.

I can hear Helen, in her seventies, telling a high school audience, "Now I'm going to sing some songs and you must imagine me as a young sailor boy." And they did, of course. More music: Robert Duncan and I sitting hip to hip in the extraordinary clutter of the Adam apartment, obediently trying to sing lyrics from *San Francisco's Burning* to strains of Schubert while a beaming Helen, at the phonograph, conducted us. She was sure the lyrics fit the melodies perfectly. Wrong. That apartment! I remember Anne Waldman holding her chair high over her head, the only way someone could pass to get to the bathroom. And yet the meals cooked by Pat, Helen's sister, were invariable great hearty affairs, ending with gooey Scotch-sweet-tooth desserts. What made up the clutter? Hundreds of pictures, thousands of books, Helen's beloved polished stones. I once suggested to Pat that she counter by starting a collection of cement birdbaths. If Helen was in the mood, she'd tell your Tarot after dinner, giving the most cheerful interpretations to the most horrendous cards. After you left, she'd write up the reading and mail it to you.

In her last years, there was no more cheer for Helen. After Pat's death, Helen's world turned dark and fearful. She was sure she was going to prison, sure all her books and papers had been destroyed. She became silent and solitary, and turned from her friends. I believe she was ready to move on, to rejoin Pat and Duncan and others she loved. Donna sees white kittens in a strange garden and what are they tossing to and fro? The work remains—the play, the ghost stories, the incomparable ballads. Helen's voice.

—Bob Hershon

Her books include:

Turn Again to Me and Other Poems, Kulchur 1977.

San Francisco's Burning, Hanging Loose Press

from The Peripheral Space of Photography by Murat Nemet-Nejat

V. The Democratic Pose/Space in Gustave Le Gray

Gustave Le Gray's "Group near the Mill at Petit-Mourmelon, 1857" (66) * is one of the most exciting pictures in the exhibition. The stunning tension of this photograph has to do with questions it asks about posing. The picture is infused with the uncertainty of how to pose, the different subjects' not knowing how to present themselves before the lens. A group on the right, mostly dressed in home-spun black, mostly male, are looking straight at the lens, mugging in front of the camera. In fact, two men, like odalisks, their arms supporting their heads, are reclined in front of the group. The group is a wonderful chaos of poses, as if, for this group, the language of how to present oneself in front of a camera is not yet invented, and everyone is trying to find his or her own.

On the left there is another group of lean, smartly dressed people, shaded in white/gray. In profile, their hands in their pockets, they have the sophisticated, "deshabille," "artistic" look of the upper class, the Talbot look of the "painterly," who already assume, "as artists," they know the language of the photograph: ignoring the camera. The focus of the lens is not on either of the groups but on a wedge exactly in between. This choice completely neutralizes the camera as a taker of sides, but lets each side, each poser speak for himself/herself/itself. The pose is the language the subject (human or not) chooses to create the dialogue—with the viewer, instead of the photographer. On the right of the photograph there is a pastoral landscape (a pond, trees); but that pond (and the trees surrounding it) is an "intrusion" in the photograph, the way kids wave their hands at the peripheries in the evening news. There is a claustrophobia in this photograph's space; the space is bursting at the seams, at the frame because there is an excess of language (that of Barbizon landscape of the right, of the dark-hued group in the middle and the light-hued group in the left) clamoring for recognition. The tension in the photograph is the lack of balance, recognition among these three voices. The lens takes no side. The photographic frame is destroyed because each subject asserts its claim. The photograph is about different subjects' struggle for recognition. Balance is replaced by excess.

The pond on the right, the trees, are part of the struggle. Will they be subsumed to the symmetries of the old order, as in Baldus's photograph, or elbow themselves a new place. This photograph reminds me of a shove into the New York subway during rush hour.

The write-up says that the photograph is an outcome of a pose between the villagers and the upper echelon intruders. "Here, perhaps on a Sunday afternoon, a few officers and their wives have shed military discipline for a relaxed encounter with the local populace of Petit-Mourmelon" (*The Waking Dream*, p.289). The encounter is anything but relaxed. The photograph lets the tensions speak for themselves by letting each group enunciate its own language, or grope for one, as pose.

Undermining the language of power, of authority, as "pose," "convention," seems to be the meaning of Gustave Le Gray as a photographer. In his work one sees pose not as a conventional

*The first number in parenthesis after each photograph refers to its catalogue number and the second to its plate number (if any) in the book, *The Waking Dream: Photography's First Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).

gesture, but as a way of the "unnoticed," unheard subject to assert itself. He sees this medium in a completely new way, anti-painterly. His photographic space is not an aesthetic field where beauty can express itself, but a social field where new democratic forces can take over. His space is subversive.

Take his photograph of military maneuvers, "Cavalry Maneuvers, Camp de Chalons, 1857" (65, 58). The delicate balance between the cavalry on the right and the scattered horsemen on the left appears to have the minimalist elegance, balance of an "object of beauty" like Baldus's photography of the flood. Except here the ground seems to tilt downwards as it moves right. The effect is to undermine the whole concept of elegance (and the photograph's official function) the shot seems to celebrate. The elegance is out of balance the way in the other photograph the poses are in excess. Gray erodes the public language, photographic rhetoric, by seeming to copy it. He is, in that sense, a redefiner of transparent image, transparent space.

His "Mediterranean Sea at Sete" (64,64), once again, is a rewriting of the language, "pose," of the sunset as "balance." In the given language of sunset, the lens makes a focus choice between the sky and the sea. One is focused, and the other "shaded." Le Gray "democratizes" this process. In this seascape two photographs, one focused on the sky and the other on the sea, are joined. The result is a seascape, a horizon, where the sea and sky are joined with equal stress. The process, which parallels the focus on the white wedge between two groups in the Mourmelon photograph, has two consequences. The double gaze neutralizes the photographer's focus by eliminating choice (a double focus is the same as no focus). The second, this "trompe d'œil" introduces, once again, the element of excess, as opposed to balance. The effect is that of a denied voice (shaded, either sky or sea) asserting, elbowing itself into the dialogue. Hierarchy, balance (traditional, one-sided power concepts of art) are replaced by equality, excess, a completely new arrangement.

What is this new art, what is Gustave Gray's post-modern modernity? A photograph ceases to be an object, particularly an object of art, with a clear, consciously defined frame; it becomes a piece of paper (feeling like soft cardboard), with no clear edges, a continuum, through which social forces and light and shadow act themselves out. Photography basically is not a plastic (or even visual) but contemplative (reflective) art, intimately related to language, turns to language. In movies, where images turn to movements, words are inside the frame. In photography words are attached to it, are propagated by it. That is the reason for the compulsive need to add write-ups, captions. In movies the instinct of images is to turn to movements; in photography the instinct of images is to turn into words, contemplations about time, mortality, eroticism, silence, social change, etc. Photography is based on an essential pun on the word reflection: reflection as reflection of light and reflection as meditation. The first elicits the other. The visual experience of a photograph is not plastic, defined by the aesthetic frame of the object, but inescapably moves away from the object, from its central focus. For instance, before everything else, a photograph is an epitaph, a thought very rarely on the photographer's mind. As I already mentioned, the photographic experience resides in the dialogue (in language) between who/what is in front of the lens, in the process of defining itself/herself/himself through "poses," forgetful of their mortality, and the observer, contemplator of the photograph. The photographer is an intrusion. This thought has important consequences.

The prevalent, orthodox assumption is that what elevates a photograph to the level of art is the focus, the frame he/she chooses from which to "see" the event, what the artist "focuses on." In this approach "frame," the photographer's, is the backbone of value. This is the opposite of what happens. What is most relevant in a photograph is not what the photographer focuses on, but what he/she ignores. In the case of a self-conscious artist like Le Gray, this "ignorance" may be intentional (by the lens focusing on a "white" wedge or refusing to make a choice, "Mormoulet" and "Seascape") or it may be, as in the case of a lot of stirring photography in the world, including amateur photography, accidental. Either way, the center of power of the photograph moves away from its "focus" to its peripheries. The most powerful space in a photograph resides in its peripheral space and the blank space, the glow, extending around, beyond the frame. This is the space of accidents, "failures," social movement, contemplation. It is in the peripheral space that image turns into language, the dialogue between the subject and the observer of the picture occurs and the "frame" of the photograph is demolished. It is the presence of peripheral space that turns the photograph from an "art object," de-emotionalizing that concept, into a "medium," a piece of paper of "reflexion," as light and as meditation. This pun contains the essence of photography. Photography explores the relationship between light and society, "words." Words, like pearls in an oyster, are the consequence of sickness, friction, imperfection, the failure of light to create a perfect image. Photography is a double reflection, not a copy or reproduction. The process of reflection is always imperfect, slanted because it involves a change of medium. If, spatially, the peripheries of a photograph collect its emotional power; linguistically, images turn into words when the process of reflection from photographic subject to object is impure, the reflective progression of light is somewhat thwarted.

Here we have the reversal of the assumed aesthetic and linguistic hierarchy: the "focus" of the photographer is replaced (by being "neutralized," by what it "ignores") by the "gaze" of the subject. This reversal liberates the photographic space and pushes it into the peripheries. It replaces the link between photography and balance (visual/plastic art of painting) with the link between photography and language by eliminating the photographer and creating a dialogue between the subject and the observer. It establishes the pun on "reflection" in the photographic language.

I would like, here, to point out one of the most frustrating aspects of the Met exhib-

it; I begin to realize its baffling impact on me despite the great number of interesting photographs. Except for the ones which appear in books or broadsides, all the photographs in the exhibits are carefully, obsessively framed. In fact, they give the impression of being cropped though they may not be. Unless in a book, no photograph is given the "empty" space around itself to breathe. The exhibition, by aggressively framing the end of each photograph (by a white cardboard), focuses compulsively on the photographer's focus. The implicit aesthetic in the exhibition is that what makes photography an "art" is the photographer's choice of "frame." By focusing insistently on this frame, the exhibition is saying repeatedly, "look at this work of art, look at the individual choice the photograph makes in this shot, look at 'Art' with a capital letter." Whereas, as I have said, photography finds its true nature by liberating itself from the photographic focus/frame, by moving to the photograph's peripheries and beyond, where images turn into language.

To me the power of many pictures in the exhibition derives from their environments when those environments are permitted to stand. For instance, Henry Rohrer's "View of Cincinnati, 1865-66" (146, 98) is displayed as a foldout flyer attached to the middle of a book on Cincinnati. The wonderful pathos of this photograph derives, for me, from the folding creases in the photograph as though the paper could not sustain all the material, vista it has to include. Half of a bridge zooms at the lens, and the city of Cincinnati, in the process of its expansion, extends on both sides of the bridge. The write up to the picture reveals a surprising fact. This is not one picture, but four. Those were not folding creases but the places where the four are attached. In Henry Rohrer's picture we have something similar to Le Gray's seascape where the sky and sea are equally focused. The photographic subject, in Rohrer's case Cincinnati, asserts itself and overwhelms the photographic focus, frame. "View of Cincinnati, 1865-66" is a clear example of the "pose" of an inanimate object. If this photograph were taken out of the book and flattened and framed like most of the other pictures, this intrusion of the photographic subject into the frame, the tension between the photographic focus and the focus of the photographic subject would have been lost. The original surrounding "eliminates" the photographer and makes "View of Cincinnati" a dialogue between the viewer and the expansive assertion of the photographic subject. "View of Cincinnati, 1865-66" is about Cincinnati, its manic growth, in a way that Baldus's "Lyons During the Floods of 1856" (70,55)

is not about Lyons, its flood. Baldus's work is more a pseudo-academic painting, of Versailles, than a photograph.

The wonderful pathos of John Dillwyn Llewelyn's "Thereza, ca. 1853" (15, 16) is there because it is in a book: a woman looking through a microscope. The tension between the "masculinity" of that pursuit and the "femininity" of the flowers surrounding the oval image is made apparent because they both stand in an open space surrounded by the leisurely space of the page. It turns this affectionate, loving photograph, into the "unconscious," "accidental" gesture of a document: a piece of Victorian paradox, a comment on love and time and society.

VI. 19th Century Light

"Light," the light "reproduced," the "white," in a 19th century photograph is like nothing else. It does not appear like a "reflection" but a "glow," the feeling that the light has been trapped in and is directly emanating, not reflected, from the photographic material. Light in 19th century photographs is spiritual because it is not transparent, but "impure." It permeates like an "aura" the "white" spaces, the negatives turned into positives, of the photographs. Like birthmarks of kinship, yes, even nobility, photographs of completely different characters share it; William Marsh's "Abraham Lincoln, 1860" (129, 104) has it, Henry Victor Regnault's "Gardens of Saint-Cloud" (53, 49) has it, John Murray's "The Taj Mahal from the Bank of the River, Agra, 1858" (102, 80) has it, Robert Macpherson's "The Theater of Marcellus, from the Piazza Montanara, 1858" (82, 74) has it, the white of the buildings in Edward-Denis Baldus's "Lyons During the Floods of 1856" (70, 55) has it, etc., etc., etc.

This "glow," opacity has nothing to do with the photographer's intentions. In fact, 19th century photography can be seen as a constant struggle in technique to make the photographic image "transparent," from paper negatives to glass negatives, from salted paper prints to albumen silver prints, etc. The glow is the result of the medium's "failure" to achieve perfect transparency. This "failure" materializes the light, makes it something inherent in the material, emanating from it. This "blurring" is not intentional, but exists at the very edge of technique.**

**Though of very high quality, the plates in *The Waking Dream* do not quite project the substantiality of the light, the subtle variations, imperfections present in the prints themselves. Yet, in one photograph in the catalogue this substantiality is very real: the one (cont'd)

Certain photographers, sensing this quality of the photographic light of their time, tried to retain, "accent" it. For instance, in his early period, Gustave Le Gray tried to develop a technique using waxed paper negative in order to blur details into light blocks to create "artistic," painterly, Barbizon effects. But these attempts are irrelevant. Le Gray's radical work occurred later, using glass negatives, when he revolutionized "the pose," photographic space and framing. In these later photographs the light (glow, white) is used ironically, as the sky in "Cavalry Maneuvers, Camp de Chalons" or in the trompe d'œil of "Mediterranean Sea at Sete." In "Group near the Mill at Petit-Mourmelon," the white light is at the core of the photograph, the heart of the camera's focus. (If there is one painter that photography reminds me of it is Manet. Manet is the first painter who uses the photographic stare in his work. His paintings are photographic, snapshots in oil. That's where their power lies.)

of the back of the woman, on the cover of the catalogue and also projected on a cloth screen in the opening room of the exhibition. There is a large blotch, an amoeba, next to the woman's glowing hair.

The white glow of the 19th century photographs has nothing to do with painterly effects (the reverse is true) or Romantic medievalism. It is an integral part of the history of "transparency," the transparent image, and its relation to reproduction, reflection. This white glow, the opacity of clarity, is the result of the dialectic between light and the medium to reproduce it. It is the sign of the insufficiency of the medium. This insufficiency defines it. The glow is a combination of lack and excess, lack because the reflection from the medium (the negative) is not perfect, and excess, the excess of light, glow, trapped in, emanating from the print. These photographs all seem, to my 20th century eyes, even the most technically accomplished, slightly or on the verge of being overexposed. This excess is their constant source of power: a light the medium cannot completely hold, integrate, in excess of the medium. This oxymoron has other ramifications: a blurring, a failure creating an excess of sadness, turning the photographic object, a piece of paper, like a bottle holding the light of a hundred years ago, into an object of meditation of time, on mortality, the sadness of light surviving the object from which it emanated; the image, in this production of excess, turning, spilling into language.

Photography is the medium of edges: edge of frame (turning images into words); edge of technique (turning reflected light into glow).

VII. Words in a photograph

Words in an old photograph, for instance, a sign giving the name of a street already altered, are infinitely thrilling to me. Why? Because the experience of looking at a photograph always involves language, words, beyond the image, and the experience of seeing words in a photograph makes the looker feel that the photograph has come alive and is directly speaking to him/her.

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Dirt by Gillian McCain

Ten-year-old Anna Lee Kaye came up to me at the Paul Williams/ Cindy Lee Berryhill reading and said, "Don't you usually wear crushed velvet?" "Yeah," I said, "But I'm into leather now." "Oh," she replied. She sounded so disappointed that I wanted to rush home and change. Dad Lenny was there giving support to Paul, who he told me afterwards had more impact on his rock writing than anyone, and to Cindy, whose second album, *Naked Movie Star* he produced. Cindy sang some amazing songs, and Paul was the human jukebox asking for requests from his book, *The One Hundred Best Singles*. It was a great evening, and Cindy and Paul are the best; if everyone in California is as nice as them maybe it's time I went out there. Speaking of Californians, Ray Manzarek and Michael McClure opened for Lenny Kaye and Jim Carroll at the Bottom Line in October. McClure and Manzarek performed the exact same show that they gave at NYU about four years back, and plugged Michael's new book, their new CD (even giving directions to Tower Records which is practically across the street) and of course, their alliance with that "genius" poet Jim Morrison. A drunk girl at the next table was showing her friends her locket filled with dirt from Morrison's grave. Thank God for Lenny and Jim. Jim read a hilarious story that's going to appear in his upcoming

book published by Penguin, and knocked me out with a poem called "Why I Am Not Kurt Schwitters." Lenny and Jim performed a song called "Still Life" that was just beautiful. Those two should be recording an album together. At the Epiphany Albums: The Record That Changed My Life reading at Fez Carl Watson read his brilliant Janis Joplin piece with the classic phrase, "Hank Williams-Patsy Cline gestalt." Jose Padua read his equally brilliant piece on The Silver Convention's Fly Robin Fly. Kim France gave a great reading with a brilliant line about the "archival tendencies of the male rock critic." Jordan Davis read a piece naming every record that didn't change his life, every record that may have changed his life, and every record that definitely changed his life. Ed Friedman read a piece comparing the effect of Mr. Tambourine Man on his life with a dog barking on David Berkowitz's life. He also sang a song called Kung Fu Beach with that amazingly sweet voice of his, and it was news to me that he used to play with The Love of Life Orchestra. By the way, the second issue of MILK will be out by December, and the theme is The Record That Changed My Life—with monumental works by Ed, Carl, Jose, Lenny Kaye, Aurelie Sheehan, Ann Rower, Silvia Sanza and more. Speaking of Silvia Sanza, her second novel on Serpent's

Tail, *Twice Real*, has recently hit the book stores and it's just as much a masterpiece as her debut, *Alex Wants to Call it Love*. I love that she continues on with some of the first novel's characters. I just wish she could write faster, because I'd like to live in Silvia's world as much as possible. What is BLAM! you ask? BLAM! is the first endeavor of *NecroEnemaAmalgamated*, a company consisting of writer, hypermedia designer, junk-mail producer and victim surrogacy proponent Eric Swenson and *ArtForum* writer Keith Seward. Its a hyper-media art & literature magazine that is going to be released on CD Rom in November, so look for it everywhere. Contributors include: Janice Johnson, Tom Metzger, George Bataille, Kim Gordon, Lydia Lunch, and more. The Friday Night Events series will be hosting an evening of Blam on Jan. 28; some of the contributors will read their works and then discuss the impact of hyper-media on the literary community—also, a BLAM demo will be set up in some corner of the parish hall. Greg Masters tells me that Simon Pettet has a beautiful corn husk hanging on his door. Is it true that the *Unbearables* are boycotting No Bar? Rumor has it that Darius James' *Negrophobia* might be produced as a play in California. A flake of dirt: N.Y.U. is holding a Beat Writing conference in the spring. What is the MTV Spoken Word Tour? I think Steve Levine wants DIRT to be nastier; he told me at the Towle/ North reading that it's a puff piece. Sparrow

tells me that his *Translations of New Yorker Poems into Plain English* has really taken off—Eileen Myles gave it to her writing students as an assignment. Sparrow will be heading a sit-in at *The New Yorker* sometime in November. Meanwhile, the *One Size Fits All Movement*—the first movement in history that absolutely everyone can join (as all that is required is one's name and shoe size)—continues to grow. Allen Ginsberg became a member, writing: "My hopes for the One Size Fits All Movement are infinite as space itself." Hal Sirowitz spread the doctrine in Scotland and Paris, and Sparrow met with Clergy for Peace in Jerusalem, an organization attempting a rapprochement between Jews and Palestinians. Five weeks after he explained One Size Fits All to them, there was a monumental breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli peace talks! For further information contact Sparrow at 475-5312. Sweet P.J. Mark dropped off the first issue of his literary mag (*Feed*) which I haven't had a chance to read yet but it looks amazing—an absolutely great photo spread called *I Don't Feel So Good* by Steve Wiley is the highlight for me so far. Written work by Michael J. Mintz, Pamela Hughes, David Roby and more. Please get a hold of Elizabeth Cohen's book of poems *Impossible Furniture* (Nightshade Press, PO Box 76, Troy, Maine 04987). Beautiful poems that make you jump right back into kid-dom again. The best chapbook of the year award goes to

(continued on page 21)

Hauntings of a Knewer Gun:

A Report from the Buffalo Festival of New Poetry, by Tony Door

For those of you who do not have a copy of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* Oct./Nov. 93 Vol. #151 handy, & were just as startled by the abrupt ending of this account (due to lack of space) as I; let me briefly recapture the "feel" of that note worthy gathering, in a local which some less generous have termed—the "mistake on lake."

Upon last writing, I had sought (much as Charles Darwin might have sought upon first reaching his archipelago galapagos) to look about me, thinking to categorize & observe.

In short, those present did not resemble that mass of people who reek "poetry," but are interested in none but their own, whom you might see on any given night at the mul-

titude of abysmal Open Mike abominations that abound in this abrasive & truculent city. Also absent were those Neo-Beats & other Street-Wise types who are found to congregate at the *Nuyorican* on any given Thursday, in any given year. Nor were there many in attendance that you would regularly encounter at *St. Marks* in the hipster crowds who frequent that venue on Monday or Friday. Nor even those of the Wednesday night *John Yau* reduced size crowd that you get to see full blown at the occasional 92nd Street Why. Much more so, these poets were non-specifically cut from the fabric of a Rob Fitterman-run Saturday afternoon at the *Ear Inn*. This is not to say everyone from the

Ear went, just that if you went to the *Ear* you would not be surprised to see any one of them. & almost without exception, those people whom I did know who attended *Bluffalot*, I have met at the *Ear*.

Then I began, as any member of the Z/D Generation might, a short list of those moments when the participants stood out in high relief against the background of their ideas. These moments stand in my mind like beacons: Iconographic representations, if you will, of the larger arguments which have yet to be formulated & judgment passed on. For the events themselves let this description stand as a partial listing of the shape of

(continued on page 21)

PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES RECEIVED

BOOKS

Selected Poems of Alice Notley; Talisman House, 1993. 137 pages, \$11.95 paper.

Earthlight, André Breton, tr. by Bill Zavatsky & Zack Rogow; Sun & Moon, 1993. 213 pages, \$12.95 paper.

The Lorca Variations, Jerome Rothenberg; New Directions, 1993. 90 pages, \$10.95 paper.

Way West, Ed Dorn; Black Sparrow, 1993. 281 pages, \$14 paper.

Me & My Mom, Marianne Hauser; Sun & Moon, 1993. 69 pages, \$9.95 paper.

Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry & Prose, Eds. Art Lange & Nathaniel Mackey; Coffee House Press, 1993. 365 pages. \$17.50 paper.

Women of the Red Plain, an Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Women's Poetry, tr. by Julia C. Lin; Penguin, 1993. 162 pages, \$10 paper.

Danger and Beauty, Jessica Hagedorn; Penguin, 1993. 209 pages. \$14 paper.

A Visit From St. Alphabet, Dave Morice; a cappella books, 1993. \$5.95 paper.

We Are the Young Magicians, Ruth Forman; Beacon/Farrar/Barnard New Women Poets, 1993. 112 pages. \$12 paper.

Kidstuff, William Talcott; Norton Coker Press, 1992. 49 pages. \$4.95 paper.

The Rebirth of the Older Child, Brita Bergland; Burning Deck, 1993. 64 pages. \$8 paper.

Not a Balancing Act, Claire Needell; Burning Deck, 1993. 64 pages. \$8 paper.

Varieties of Religious Experience, Ray Ragosta; Burning Deck, 1993. 80 pages. \$8 paper.

The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987-1992, Audre Lorde; Norton, 1993. 60 pages. \$18.95 cloth.

Weasel in the Turkey Pen, Marie Harris; Hanging Loose, 1993. 80 pages. \$10 paper.

People Live, They Have Lives, Hugh Seidman; Miami U. Press, 1993. 67 pages.

Sesame, Jack Marshall; Coffee House Press, 1993. 94 pages. \$11.95 paper.

Unfinished Building, Toby Olson; Coffee House Press, 1993. 106 pages. \$11.95 paper.

The Book of Medicines, Linda Hogan; Coffee House Press, 1993. 87 pages. \$11.95 paper.

A Book of Psalms, Selected & Adapted from the Hebrew by Stephen Mitchell; HarperCollins, 1993. 87 pages. \$17.50 cloth.

My Tokyo, Frederick Seidel; Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993. 50 pages. \$18 cloth.

WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

Language as Choice

Taught by Murat Nemet-Nejat. Thursdays at 7 pm (January 20–March 10). The workshop will concentrate on each participant's options for achieving the desired purpose of her/his work. Assigned texts and workshop participants' writings will be read and challenged; perhaps some writing will be done. In discussing *Language as Option*, Murat Nemet-Nejat writes, "I am *not* interested in establishing yet another set of standards for what constitutes good writing. The quest for each poet will be finding for her/himself what necessitates the development of a style—what choices must one make in ambushing, wresting from neutrality, an essentially recalcitrant language." **Murat Nemet-Nejat** is a poet, translator and essayist. His books of poetry include *The Bridge*, and his translations include the Turkish poet Orhan Veli's *I, Orhan Veli*.

Poetry Workshop

Taught by Barbara Barg. Fridays at 7 pm (January 21—March 11) It's got a backbeat, you can't lose it. A workshop for poets, songwriters, and the rhythmically challenged. Concentration on percussive explorations of the linguistic instrument. Features performances by guest musicians and poets, polyrhythmic dithyrambs and orchestral hyperbole. (This is not a sound poetry workshop, though Ms. Barg is reasonably sane.) **Barbara Barg** is a singer / songwriter / drummer with the band Homer Erotic. Her books of poetry and prose include *Obeying the Chemicals* and *Origin of the Species*.

Editing The World

Taught by Lewis Warsh. Saturday at noon (October through the end of April). The workshop will collaborate on editing and producing three issues of *The World*, the literary magazine of the Poetry Project. **This workshop is currently closed to new participants.**

Registration Fees

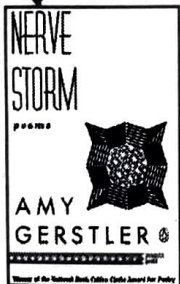
Registration for Poetry Project workshop costs \$100 a year for Project members. Annual membership in the Poetry Project costs \$50. Register, in person, at the Poetry Project office or by mail.

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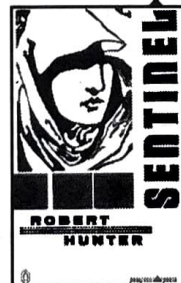
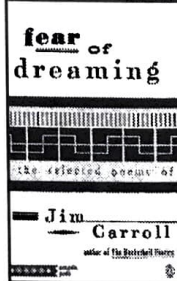
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FEAR OF DREAMING

Jim Carroll



SENTINEL
Robert Hunter

LIFE AND DEATH

Joe Soap's Canoe. Last page says "The End": the last issue? Violi interview with selected poems, and other genial items including Roy Fisher poems, "Holiday Depression" by Tony Towle, "Extreme Vindaloo" by Ron Padgett.

El-e-phant. Guest on Waldman, Messerli on *Angels In America*, and a gossip column! Charles Bernstein's "The Throat" runs a beautiful parallel poetry to Peter Straub's novel of the same name. Bernstein's best work since "The Only Utopia Is In A Now."

Talisman. Okay, it's the Michael Heller issue. Stephen Paul Miller's "All Visual Materials Emit Countless Cartoon Bubbles" is fascinating, North, Corbett & Warsh are all caught at good angles, and Alice Notley's *Désamère* sequence is a logical sequel to the fast rapture of *Alette*.

Situation. Bernstein again. This time, in "A Test of Poetry," he faces a Chinese translator of his work.

Avec. More Bernstein! Looks like a concordance to Frost. Michael Palmer's "Untitled for D.S." is fine, and used to effect next to Rae Armentrout's "A Story," which ends, "When names perform a function, / that's fiction."

Lingo. Big names, big production, huge success. Always, always love a magazine that inaugurates with a Bernadette Mayer interview.

New American Writing. Palmer again, untitled again (three times), fine again. Padgett's "The Benefit of Doubt" is excellent. Elm-slie, Welish and Lauterbach are here, and a "Song of the Andoumboulou" from Nathaniel Mackey. Strange preface by editor Hoover promoting *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* claims the magazine is part of "the important literature of our time." Smile when you say that.

Exquisite Corpse. Murat Nemet-Nejat's essay "Questions of Accent" is causing trouble. It bears reading. It bears re-reading. I like best his take on the Jabès phenomenon. Also, Justin Avery's self-destruct-but-ton poems, and "Seattle" by Willie Smith. Gerald Burns in the Body Bag.

The World. Eileen Myles' "No Poems" got Deadheads at the Rex Foundation benefit to read during that "have a good time" song. Baraka rips Lee. Dennis Moritz's play "Quick, Fast and in a Hurry" will have to do until someone collects his work.

Skylab. As the *Newsletter* went to print, *Skylab* did not yet exist. Slat-
ed for issue zero were David Shapiro, Ron Padgett and Kenneth Koch.

Best American Poetry 1993. Some of the above mentioned are here. As is Charles Bukowski, who turned up, with an asterisk, in the last *Poetry* magazine. Wang Ping's in, with a piece from *The World*. Unrelated aside: is there a "page bar?"

Not a magazine: "Jade" and "Poem for a Poem" bring Tory Dent's amazing book *What Silence Equals* to a crucial, bitter halt.

—Jordan Davis

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THE POETRY PROJECT

THE CALENDAR OF

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DECEMBER

1 DAY WITHOUT ART

3 POEMS ON ARTISTS

Jordan Davis on Jan Vermeer, Pamela Grossman on Nan Goldin, Bart Plantenga on Andy Warhol, Ed Friedman on Henri Matisse, Greg Masters on Jean-Michel Basquiat, Eve Packer on Nancy Spero, Vincent Katz on Narina Karella and many more **Friday, 10:30 p.m**

5 JIM BRODEY TRIBUTE

Jim Brodey (1942-1993) was an important link between "The New York Poets" and the Poetry Project scene. Reminiscences, tapes of Brodey reading, readings of his poems, plus catered food, including such Brodey delights as the breathburger, etc. **Sunday, 4-7 p.m**

6 OPEN READING

Hosted by Wanda Phipps. Sign-up 7:30. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

8 ERICA HUNT & LEE ANN BROWN

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3 OPEN READING

Hosted by Wanda Phipps. Sign-up 7:30. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

5 MARK PAWLAK & BOB HERSHON

Mark Pawlak's most recent book is *SPECIAL HANDLING: New and Selected Newspaper Poems, 1981-1991* (Hanging Loose Press). Bob Hershon is the author of ten books of poetry, including *Into a Punchline: Poems 1984-1994*. **Wed., 8 p.m.**

7 GUYS ON FILM

The author of *Bleed* (Hanuman), Nick Zedd is the auteur behind such Lower East Side classics as *Police State*, *Whoregasm* and *Go To Hell*. Geoffrey O'Brien's most recent book is *The Phantom Empire* (Norton), a work which examines the impact of movies in the mind of the 20th century. **Friday, 10:30 p.m**

10 CASEY SCOTT & CAROL DIEHL

Casey Scott is the singer/ writer behind *Creep City* (a record) and *Quarter Moth Moon* (a play). She will be reading from *Thirty Thousand Cigarettes*. Carol Diehl is a painter and a contributing editor to *Art & Antiques*. **Mon., 8 p.m.**

12 KIMBERLY LYONS & MICHAEL GIZZI

Kimberly Lyons is the author of *In Padua* and *Oxygen*. Her work has appeared in *Sentience*, *Black Bread*, *Out of This World* and will appear in *o.blek*. Michael Gizzi's books include *Just Like a Real Italian Kid* (The Figures), and with

6 OPEN READING

Hosted by Wanda Phipps. Sign-up 7:30. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

8 ERICA HUNT & LEE ANN BROWN

Erica Hunt's poetry and essays on poetry's connection to politics, gender and history have appeared in small magazines and anthologies. Harryette Mullen writes on Hunt's first book, *Local History* (Roof Books), "this work reads like a coolly oracular yet undeniably urgent communication from a sibyl who makes language a virtual reality." Lee Ann Brown's poetry is included in recent issues of *Hyena*, *Black Bread*, and *o*blek*, and in *Out of This World* (Crown). Her three chapbooks are *Cultivate* (Tender Buttons), *Crush* (Leave Books) and *a museume* (Boog Literature). She received a 1991-92 NYFA fellowship in poetry and is the editor of *Tender Buttons*, an independent press featuring experimental women's writing. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

10 LINGO MAGAZINE READING

To celebrate the second issue—Tom Carey, Bernadette Mayer, Larry Fagin, Michael Gizzi, Susan Levin, Marjorie Welish, William Corbett, Eileen Myles, Lisa Jamot & 12 more **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

13 JESSICA WILLIS & JOSE PADUA

A native of Massachusetts, Jessica Willis moved to NYC two years ago. She is a regular contributor to *New York Press* and *Roller Derby*. Her stories have appeared in *Perkins Press*. Jose Padua's book of poems, *The Complete Failure of Everything*, is published by Apathy Press. He will be reading from his novel-in-progress, *The End of the World*. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

15 BRUCE ANDREWS & ALLEN FISHER

Bruce Andrews is the author of over a dozen books of poetry. He will be reading from two brand new works, *Tizzy Boost* and *Moebius*. Allen Fisher is a British poet, artist, art historian and publisher whose upcoming books include *Civic Crime*, *Breadboard*, *SCRAM* and *Dispossession and Cure: the book*. Included in his reading will be selections from his long work *Gravity as a consequence of shape*, named by the British Press as "sparky and spiky." **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

20 STEPHEN SAID & PETER STAMPFEL

Heir apparent to the great folk singers, Stephan Said sings the voice of time and a-time. A champion appalachian fiddler, Said shares in the mnemonic art of world traditional music and spiritual hoochie koochie. He will sing original and traditional works in several tongues while playing violin, banjo, dobro and singing saw. Peter Stampfel is a singer-songwriter who was originally with the Holy Modal Rounders, and now is with the Bottle Caps. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

10 CASEY SCOTT & CAROL DIEHL

Casey Scott is the singer/ writer behind *Creep City* (a record) and *Quarter Moth Moon* (a play). She will be reading from *Thirty Thousand Cigarettes*. Carol Diehl is a painter and a contributing editor to *Art & Antiques*. **Mon., 8 p.m.**

12 KIMBERLY LYONS & MICHAEL GIZZI

Kimberly Lyons is the author of *In Padua* and *Oxygen*. Her work has appeared in *Sentience*, *Black Bread*, *Out of This World* and will appear in *o.blek*. Michael Gizzi's books include *Just Like a Real Italian Kid* (The Figures), and with Clark Coolidge and John Yau, *Lowell Connector* (Hard Press). **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

14 NEW YORK STORIES

Fiction set in the sin sick city: Randy Mastin, Tana Polansky Maurer, Judy Lopatin, Tyrus Coursi and Liza Bear **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

17 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BIRTHDAY READING

Dael Orlandersmith, Kathy Price, Evert Eden, Gloria Williams, Hattie Gossett, Willie Perdomo, Bob Holman & more. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

19 JOHN FARRIS & DIANE BURNS

John Farris is the author of *It's Not About Time* (Fly By Night Press). From Minnesota, Diane Burns is a poet and painter whose art has been shown in American Indian museums nationwide. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

21 THE HYSTERICAL MALE

Women rewrite Freudian discourse: Barbara Barg, Valerie Harms, Lisa Blauschild and more **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

24 ANDY ALPER & DOUGLAS ROTHSCHILD

Andy Alper, SWP, 25 years-old and a day, seeks audience for super-safe, super-discreet fun. Douglas Rothschild is currently working on a project entitled *Bruce Andrews: America's Best Loved Poet*. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

26 JACK COLLOM & HARRIS SCHIFF

Jack Collom's most recent books are *8-Ball* (Dead Metaphor Press) and forthcoming from Teachers & Writers, a book of children's poetry and essays for teachers called *Poetry Everywhere*. Harris Schiff is the author of many books of poetry including *In the Heart of the Empire* (United Artists). **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

28 BLAM!

The editors and producers of *BLAM!*, a new hyper-media CD-ROM journal, along with various contributors, will present *BLAM!* Contributors include Jim Goad, Kim Gordon, Th. Metzger, G. Bataille & Erect Scumson **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

31 INITIATION: THE SACRED PROSTITUTE

A performance poem by Bevy Rosten. *Initiation: The Sacred Prostitute* tells the story of Gilgamesh from the point of view of a character who appears only briefly in the myth, & is about spiritual initiation through sexuality. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

JANUARY

REVIEWS

ALICE NOTLEY

Selected Poems

Talisman Editions, 128 pp., \$13.95 paper.

In 1979, I was a poetry immigrant arriving in steerage from "the land where they make the shirts": New Jersey. My poetry cronies and I—all graduates from a sad state institution called William Paterson College (the initials, WPC, were thought to stand for "We Party Constantly") had spent the last couple of years experiencing the poetry famine in the Garden State. We'd attend local poetry clubs where members would introduce themselves, typically, by declaring: "I studied with Galway Kinnell and David Ignatow! Who did you study with?" And like some leftover habit of the radical sixties, the available poets were aligned with one group or another—the range went from the "Lunch Poets" (not out of hunger or Frank O'Hara, but after a mimeo magazine published out of Fairleigh Dickinson University) to the Chaucer Society—Allen Ginsberg's dad was a founding member of this group. My friends and I decided to call ourselves "The Nungesser Poets" after the little honky-tonk strip by my house where bus routes terminated and the local White Castle (#9) dealt in "sliders" on a clockless schedule.

If the Jersey poetry scene was run by a series of odd and arbitrary rules, then our own prosody was built up by rumor and misreading. My friend Mike would

• • •

On the Crosstown Bus

You going to Sixth Avenue, Kenny?
Yeh.

Wake me up at Sixth Avenue.
You going to fall asleep that fast.
Yeh, I think so.

No problem.

—Greg Masters

reveal to us that Robert Lowell rewrote each poem in *Life Studies* a hundred times. From this, he developed the notion that no poem was really "finished" until one rewrote it "at least twenty

times." Ed misread Olson's "Projective Verse" essay to the point of aggravating his asthma by truly observing how breath influences the poetic line. When we expressed concern about his condition, he cheerfully replied, "Don't worry, I'm getting my breath units together!" then would cough up a clammer. We haunted used book shops and came up with an odd collection of dollar-a-book poets that we'd adopt as models to emulate. I remember buying the *Selected Cantos* of Ezra Pound in the austere New Directions paperbook for eighty-six cents and feeling completely stupid and uneducated. Ah, I thought, why did I while away the hours at the Willy Pee pub, when I could have been learning Occitain and Anglo-Saxon! Ez's fierce Fuck-You scowl on the cover seemed reserved for his contempt of me: "Thought you could understand me, hey Jewboy! Good luck!"

One night, I reviewed all of my poetry and decided it all looked like white pigeon meat. I needed help. Fortunately, at the same period of dark Jersey clouds, I went to see Alice Notley read at the Ear Inn. In conversation after the reading, she mentioned she was running a year-long poetry workshop in the Fall and that I should join up.

I did end up taking the workshop and it did end up as the door which through I proceeded on my own journey as a poet. Who was in that class? I remember Bob Rosenthal, Peggy De Coursey, Shelly Kraut, Greg Masters, Steve Levine, Ruth Altman, Bill Kushner and Ann Kriegal as some of the people who were in and out of those Friday night classes. For those recent to the Project community, the workshops at the time were no-cost and free-floating—something to do with generosity of literary grants in those years. We had poets whose home addresses were the Third Street Men's Shelter and others who arrived in rather unlisted conditions.

Despite the mild frame of anarchy, Alice's workshop was the best workshop I was ever involved in. I say this as the holder of a Creative Writing MA from CCNY, a Naropa attendee and member of other Poetry Project workshops. Alice eschewed the moldy fig verities of received roundtable workshop wisdom—all those ideas of finely-hewn poetic object, style as content, and the inevitable query posed by the Iowa Writing School drone: "Has s/he earned that last line, class?" Alice (who did get her MFA at Iowa, but avoided the mis-education that seems part of the program) would propose that we put our poetic selves on the line, to take risks, to be adventurous and to challenge our own notions of what poetry was and could be. "Better to take a chance and write a terrible poem, then to play it safe and write a 'normal' poem": this wisdom from Alice jotted into my notebook and transferred into my brain pan.

Almost important as her stance towards poetry was the small academy of genius she introduced to us. Poets who are part of my personal canon—Philip Whalen, John Wieners, Tom Raworth, among many—were introduced to me via Alice's workshops. In addition, I received valuable lessons in how one conducts oneself as a poet and how one treats poetry and other poets.

So, the publication of the *Selected Poems* of Alice Notley is a great event, and an overdue occasion, at that. So many of these poems in here are works that I had the pleasure and astonishment of hearing read soon after their writing; works that I grew into and learned from. And, rereading, am pleased to see how these earlier works have stood up and can still delight.

No book since Philip Whalen's *On Bear's Head* can serve as useful a baedeker to the many ways of making a contemporary poem. And the range presented in this collection is not demonstration of facile skill, it seems to be a deeper reading of Olson's understanding of the relation between form and content. And there is so much crucial material in here that it's a little hard to pick out samples for the imaginary museum of poetry.

Some little quibbles to be declared here: I would have liked to see more work from the early, and very hard to

find, mimeo books. And there is nothing from her first book, 165 Meeting House Lane, a collection of sonnets that had much influence on a generation of younger poets. But, as Alice assembled this collection, I'll respect the frame in which she would like the reader to review her achievement at this point.

It's hard to imagine her residing in Paris, these days; it has less to do with her former active Manhattan presence (which I really do miss), than with what her work is all about. It's an American accomplishment, but less in the manner of the political and geo-political vision of an Olson, Ken Irby or Ed Dorn. These poems are built from all available materials and are both heroic and revolutionary—a rare condition in today's currents. Going back to my college days at WPC, I remember that my gang was particularly impressed by this blurb on Thomas Pynchon's massive *Gravity's Rainbow*: "thousands of trees were felled to print this novel. Don't mourn the trees, read the book!" I think I'll borrow that non-ecological sentiment to urge the reader to work overtime, borrow from your parents or sell your shoes to get hold of the *Selected Poems* of Alice Notley. And thank you Ed Foster for committing your time, energy and mazuma to this project. Notary Sojac.

—Joel Lewis

WALTER K. LEW
**EXCERPTS FROM ΔIKTH/ DIKTE
for DICTEE (1982)**

Yeul Eum Publishers, 1992, 118 pp. \$17.95

BRUCE ANDREWS
**I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut
Up (or, Social Romanticism)**

Sun & Moon Press, 1992, 309 pp. \$13.95.

Walter K. Lew's "critical collage" *EXCERPTS FROM ΔIKTH/ DIKTE for DICTEE (1982)*, about the Korean American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's last completed work, the book *DICTEE*, is an engaging, often difficult homage and critical response to Cha's entire oeuvre, for it continues her exploration into the by-ways that exist between the various "arts," respecting their separate traditions while at the same time attempting to link them. Cha herself created at least one highly experimental critical text, "Commentaire," which she included in the book of essays about film she edited, *Apparatus*, which

also includes writings by Roland Barthes, Maya Deren and Dziga Vertov. Cha's essay, in significant contrast to the others, is composed of only a handful of French and English words printed one at a time (often repeated later in a different script) either against a white background, a black background, or on a page that is white except for a half-inch (or so) of black border. Occasionally there would be an image (of a brick wall, for instance) to take up the area of two facing pages.

As the complete title of Lew's book suggests, *EXCERPTS* also exists, linguistically, somewhere between a number of cultures (the cover photo of waves remind one of the oceans dividing them) and even somewhere between epochs. Like "Commentaire," it is also surprisingly spare of diction, and most of the reproduced images run entirely to the edge of the page. *EXCERPTS* is a far more complex work, however, as it seems to operate on a principle that is more elusive, perhaps because it is more scholarly (even including footnotes). Derrida's idea of the "gram," an "interweaving [that] results in each element... being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system," could be of some use here, since Lew's intentions are not to make direct references to elements of Cha's text (thus maintaining a "sign" to "signified" dichotomy) but to let his book communicate through precise resonances with Cha's, to the point that it even becomes absorbed in it. Though *EXCERPTS* contains many images, for instance, none are taken directly from *DICTEE*, nor is there any explicit parallel relationship between Lew's images and those of *DICTEE* (no photograph of Lew's mother, for instance). Some of the images of *EXCERPTS* are: an old hand-drawn map of Korea (it looks like a primitive sketch of a cerebellum), the table of contents from a French book *Coreenes* (placed where one would expect Lew's table of contents to be), several photos by Toni Nicolini from the book *Necropoli dell'Italia Antica*, reproductions from a comic strip narration about the Korean revolutionary Yu-Kwan-sun (with captions added from another text, "Apocalypses Eleusiniennes" by Claude Berard), pages from Lew's own notebook with notes taken while watching Carl Dreyer's *Le Passion de Jeanne D'Arc*, and xeroxes (most of the images are xeroxed reproductions)

of the back covers of two copies of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Fires* with what appear to be a number of purposeful and accidental erasures of many of the words.

This eclectic grouping attempts to define a region surrounding *DICTEE*, or which surrounded it as it was being created, but in a manner that permits the reader/viewer to become actively engaged with the text in way that simply "reading" a book (or "watching" a movie) does not usually provoke. The last image mentioned, of the back covers of *Fires* (a book important to Cha), relates to a number of passages in *DICTEE*, most importantly those that have to do with "voiding" language:

*Pages and pages a little nearer
to movement
line
after line
void to the left to the right.
Void the words.
Void the silence.*

DICTEE contains many passages, often very dramatic, that describe Cha's dilemma in learning to speak English, passages that are meticulous to an obsessive degree in their analysis (reminiscent of Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*). She takes her narrative so far as to include a page of simplified medical diagrams of the vocal chords, esophagus and lungs, and her struggle seems to lead her to the injunction to "Void the words." Lew's images of defaced texts, in which some of the words appear to be erased by arbitrary strokes and others by a mildly perverse will to destroy, mimics, and thereby contains "traces" of, this particular violence (the violence of vomiting). This is just one of the levels on which *EXCERPTS*, an unusual and oddly beautiful work of criticism, oper-

• • •

Sad Events of Summer 1993

Four year old Beth takes a fall on the sliding pond and hits her chin and cries

Squash bores in Lorna's garden ruin this season's squash plants

—Greg Masters

ates, and it is only a shame that *DICTEE* is taking so long to go back into print.



Bruce Andrews' *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up* (or, *Social Romanticism*) is three hundred pages of prose poems of a little under three pages each in length. The titles of the poems are taken from their first lines, and are arranged alphabetically, thus detracting from the emphasis usually placed on the titles of poems. Many of the titles are, nonetheless, provocative; "All My Friends are Dead", "America Shops", "Am I Alive?", "Animal Dicks in Bed", and "Anti-Enlightenment" are the first five. This confrontational attitude is generally characteristic of the text of *Shut Up*, and yet the titles do not begin to hint at the nature of the delirious, vicious, irresolute, irritating and irritated poems that follow them.

Shut Up may be the apotheosis of the last possible mode of socio-critical poetry available to those of the "avant-garde," or at least to those who do not think that simplified reiterations of the major themes (or iterations along the major themes) of "progressive" social discourse are legitimate avenues of expression. In many ways *Shut Up* is also the elaboration of a persona, though the definition of "persona" would have to be modified to include "anything that speaks," meaning that one needn't attribute the voice to a historical or fictional being (Bertran de Born in Pound's "Sestina Altaforte", for instance) but can attribute it, instead, to a mode of discourse. An initial characterization of Andrews' persona in *Shut Up* could begin with Charles Bernstein's definition (cited in Marjorie Perloff's *Radical Artifice*) of "imagabsorption" as "the im-position of the image on the mind' from without." Baudrillard's idea of the "ecstasy of communication," in which "the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network," our time being a "narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication," is also valuable here. In any case, in *Shut Up* there is a voice being elaborated, one that seems as much governed by the barrage of images, words and rhythms (often originating from the impersonal, merciless realm of mass media) that compose its

speech as it is by the momentary caprices of the poet's personality. Thus *Shut Up* is a drama of sorts, though with no protagonist.

The following is from "If Pods Could Talk":

If pods could talk — so how about a sperm-a-thon? Liz's Dick thank your fluke journey to the forbidden dish. Invest in the retarded, such intelligent anti-intellectualism for a change; the upturned nose of the politically incorrect. Feet are pinned with light pertinent torts on an exuberant scale more of a mess than who can grow the most organs without any desire to keep them? Let Europe & the Middle East just stew in their juice. (Donner party picnic baskets & a Nuremberg coatrack.) Hardy Boys save the Third World in the comfort of their home. . . bald flag does not warm up. Sponsorable mush 1/2 mental insect sorority; flagellant ribbon chill my crack. God treats us like we were felons. Quality is depressing.

If there is comedy here, it is not so much in the individual phrases (many of which seem tasteless in-jokes, like those uttered by the over-drunk at parties) but in the fact that it just doesn't stop. Many of the phrases can be read as fairly self-conscious comments on the text itself: "so how/ about a sperm-a-thon?" (a wry note of the "literature-as-masturbation" theme), and "Quality is depressing," (meaning that the gracious is something hypocritical) are most apparent. "Chill my crack" sounds like something kids would yell to an elder they are trying to offend; "Hardy Boys save the Third World in the comfort of their own home" sounds like a headline, but is also an acrid commentary on the phenomenon of the "bourgeois liberal." "Invest in the retarded" also sounds like something from a newspaper, but the clause following places it somewhere within the realm of some academic discourse. Even the linking of the word "invest," which has connotations of money, with such a phrase as "the retarded" resonates to encompass notions of present-day practises of, for instance, obtaining cheap labor under the guise of philanthropy. *Shut Up* is relentless and often

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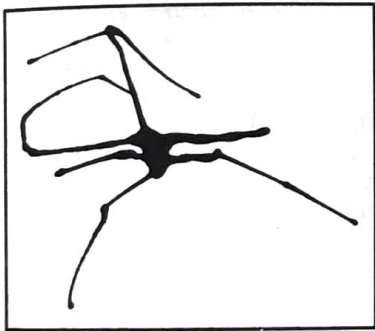


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brutal, and may even be thought of as a study of end-of-the century misanthropy. Its virtue, however, besides the richness of the language and imagery, is that it is not hermetic, and in fact exhibits a terrific appetite for the "real," abstract as its expression may be. It is an unusual and rich book, and will no doubt be talked about for years to come.

—B. Kim Stefans

JOHN FARRIS **It's Not About Time**

Fly by Night Press, 64 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Ask John Farris what's essential to a study as one writes poetry, and he'll list Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, H.L. Mencken, Philip Church-Ward's "The Esoteric Meaning of the Alphabet," Carl Jung's *Symbols and Dreams*, compendiums of mythology, and fairy tales. Add a smattering of Greeks—from Sappho to Ritsos—Romans including Catullus and Virgil, and moderns Rilke, Bunting, and O'Hara...just for starters. His list is light on women, but loaded with fascinating, rigorous studies of how language works, followed by brilliant examples of how it is made into poetry.

Examples of his own are spread throughout this book—his first. *It's Not About Time* contains 31 poems, one scene from a play, two short excerpts from his unpublished novel, and two short stories. Although he's been writing for many years, all but four of these poems were written between January and April, 1993.

His work reveals sharp eyes, sharper wit, and the strength of a survivor. In "Bridges," he speaks matter-of-factly of his aging:

...I have begun to shake; not
hands—limbs.

*My eyes are weak, too; I can't see the
world without
flattening it; the muscles droop like
this year's tulips. I don't hear
the horses of my youth. All the apple
trees are gone. I can't climb them.
The peach trees are gone (no more of
that)...*

but as death darkens the scene, he
turns on a dime:



...All my musician
friends are dying:
Diz, Miles, Clifford
Jordan, Philip Wil-

son; Sun Ra is in Alabama
helpless with a stroke (O black
world, I had never imagined this
life without Sun, without the stride
piano; his sequined dance).

Once I joined your sequined dance
(your
mother was there).

There are other changes of key. The
initial charm and simplicity of "Love"—

*It's happened again: when I think of
you nibbling
its edges, watercress
becomes beautiful: nasturtium with
its pale white petals
found in supermarkets...*

—is exploded in the last lines:

...I'd prostrate
myself to the panther, to his yellow
fangs, his red eye.

His subjects are drawn from every-
day experiences—observations from his
window or on the street, falling for a
Chinese take-out girl on Houston, visit-
ing the music store on Third Avenue—
as well as from the jazz he loves,
mythology, and history. Keeping alive
the memory of the Ick culture in East
Africa [displaced and disintegrated in
1967] he writes in "Icietot,"

*I cough up teeth,
feathers, bones,
viscera, traces
of heart. something's
missing: read*

*a book. I need
a book to describe
what's missing
in me; cough up
liver, read that: "Baraz,
baraz," it says, which*

*in Icietot means,
"Tomorrow, tomorrow."*

It's Not About Time is about John Far-
ris's vision, today. The poetry is clear
and immediate; the prose, clearly fan-
tastical—and all, by turns innocent, jad-

ed, and streetwise.

—Carolyn Peyser

BURT KIMMELMAN

Musaics

Spyten Duyvil, 1993, 52 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Burt Kimmelman wants to assume that there's more than measure and space, so how do we deal with Pound, whose eyes, in Gaudier-Brzeska's version, "look at no one?" Or so *Musaics* says. The Heiratic Head, encountered in the Tate, is "mute stone." But would it have seemed that way the year the work was made? To whom must the stone be "mute?"

In *Musaics* Kimmelman moves from object to person, form to possibility. Paintings and museums alternate with encounters with members of his family; the final poem is "Waiting For Diane At The Klee Show / Museum of Modern Art."

What after all, do we ever really do but wait, although supposing more? He tells his daughter,

*listen. there is
the empty street[.]*

William Bronk, as truthful as any poet we have ever had, is echoed here, as in Kimmelman's "The End of Nature":

*I tell you death, expect no smile of
pride
from me. I bring you nothing in my
empty hands.*

To which Kimmelman says,

*This grammar of sinew and bone is
still our only language.*

The only one, and nothing to hold with it. But Kimmelman wants things to

This Week in Baseball

Melito Perez still looking strong in the 6th inning gives up a 3-run shot to Juan Gonzalez quieting the pennant-fevered stadium. On the replay we see Rangers reacting to the crack of the bat stepping up out of the dugout not to see if but how far

—Greg Masters

be conditional.

*as if
we're all alone,
each of us.*

In "Musée Rodin 8.1.86," he says that because Rodin

*... was unafraid of myth he knew how
to translate the torment we see
in sinuous vein and flesh
into something
wild.*

And so? But Pound, presumably, remains mute.

Well, that depends, of course, and Kimmelman knows it, writing in "First Year" of "the turn back into the soil of what's passed."

He can not stop at the hardness of stone. he wants always to be "beyond / any form," and this is what *Musaics*, in its exacting way, attempts to measure. And so we have desire. *Musaics* is an exceptionally intelligent and necessary book.

—Ed Foster

PAUL VIOLI

The Curious Builder

Hanging Loose Press, 1993; 80 pp., \$18 cloth, \$10 paper.

In the first four poems of *The Curious Builder*, Paul Violi does the personas of a carnival barker, a telethon host, a Japanese Mafioso and a Jerome Rothenberg Noble Savage par excellence. As in his other books, he introduces new poetic forms (See "Police Blotter," "From Provender Books," "Boxcar Crossing," "Catalogue of the New Wonderment," and "Errata.") Everywhere in this new collection, as in the five that precede it, Violi dances with, punches out, wrestles down, and jogs alongside language. It's as if words were flowers for Violi. He can't help picking them, arranging them. "Haitian Quatrains" is a list of names, yes, but lovingly ordered and chosen. "Scatter" does end with twenty common phrases and names that include "seven," but Violi knows enough to keep "7-Up" for last. On rare occasions, as he grabs up the homonyms and puns that lie about him, Violi may not know what to throw away (For some reason, "Omit

'paws' add 'pause.' Or: omit 'claws,' add 'clause.' is more than I can take.), but these excesses result from his virtues.

For some years, much has been made of the fact that Violi's poems are funny, punny and wild, but this should not count against them. It makes them no less real or crafted than some somber tome. While "Police Blotter" causes laughter, it also evokes perfectly the community of my teenage years, where there was rarely more for the police to do than dispose of bats who had gotten into recreation rooms. (Our neighbor asked, "Are you going to shoot it in my basement?" "No lady," was the weary response, "I'm going to hit it with a broom and take it away in a shoe box.") "Wet Bread and Roasted Pearls" does have a crosspuzzle interwoven into its stanzas, but, somehow, all the acrosses and downs culminate in love, with love's inevitable quarrels along the way.

*The Grapefruit
the one you thought I'd aimed at you
just because it punctured the wall
next to your ear.
the glaring, almost magical fact of it,
a grapefruit stuck in sheetrock.*

Paul Violi can make what actually happens sound absolutely bizarre, but so few people truly acknowledge "facts," much less their "magical quality," that I cannot help but appreciate how these poems make me not only stop and smell the roses but wake up and smell the coffee.

I guess the primary lesson remains the one Ken Mikolowski taught me years ago: "Anything can be poetry/ Not everything is." Paul Violi is one curious builder, and thanks to him:

*We never suffer from untimely zeal,
nor lack stones to throw
at an endless supply of ancestors and
ghosts.
Nor, thanks to this authoritarian
intangibility we fondly designate as
Lord King,
do we lack anything—a bucket, a
stingray,
a shoe, a clam shell, half a yam, a
dead bird
—anything we can wear for a hat.*

Hats off to Paul Violi!

—Donna Brook

ED SANDERS

Hymn to the Rebel Café

Black Sparrow, 1993, \$13.95 paper, 194 pp.

Hymn to the Rebel Café presents a pan-history that reads more like pinhole-history; a paper box apertured with a plastic lens recording folksy, fish-eye intimacies of the conspiracy-theorized rehearsal spaces, crash pads and berry-laden copses 60s poets-who-care haunt. Ed Sanders writes in the tradition of the great historiographical poets of "our" time, Pound and Olson, but applies his authorship to his history in a troublingly difficult way. Pound detonated his way from the T'ang dynasty to Thomas Jefferson using the explosive will of his own Idahoan translator's ego; a re-writer's double bladed "I," sharpening itself on the corpses of texts it cut up to cannibalize, wasting nothing. Olson built houses on top of economies. Their Jungian anterooms and cellars reached back to Tyre (and back to Pangaea) from Gloucester as naturally as New England farmhouses reach back toward their barns. His history is as well constructed and site-specific as the gulf stream, which passes moisture from Franz Josefland to Tallahassee through its imperviously scripted current. In *In the American Grain* Williams transcribed our Am. Hist. Textbooks into the most beautiful, modernist music money can buy.

This book applies the outlook of a particular American "lifestyle" (and I guess the quotes imply a certain pejorative spine-tingling that word begets), that of the 60s generation-poet-activist, to historical situations relevant to members of that same lifestyle. *Café* is not an "investigative" book, which by Sanders' own definition (in *The Z-D Generation*) operates:

with the *PRECISE, IMMEDIATE*
application of *DATA*
of *Historical Reality, of Encyclopedic*
Wisdom
in its own time
AS IT HAPPENS,
in correcting
the drift of a particular civilization

though it treats its subjects with the same political urgency. The clash that ensues, when that urgency is lain on soft poetic forms and nostalgic reminiscences (rather than on "PRECISE DATA") leaves a bad taste in the mind. I call one set of such conjunctions "Pastoralus Interruptus," where scenes from Sanders' wooded Woodstock are

stunned by technological incursions, as in these sections from "Images of Miriam" and "At Century's End":

*up the hill
the mound
of sweet feed
& the green apple*

*Miriam left
for the
gimpfooted
yearling*

*as we leave
for NYC
to purchase a
Laptop*

and: "FAXes/ at midnight// crickets/ at dawn". And in section 16 of "At Century's End," Sanders writes:

*The black shiny
ant that
just ran
across the
folder from which
I write
this morn,
sitting crosslegged
on the lawn
beneath the dogwood*

*is more important
than George Bush*

This statement seems so blatantly untrue to today's media generated human nature, that it reveals the desperation with which the politics and history, and *relevance* are holding onto Sanders' ditties. The presence of George Bush in the poem disproves its own allegation. Those two little words, George Bush, outweigh the ten lines of description that supposedly eclipse them in "importance." Sanders seems trapped here between two of the greatest urges in this century's American poetics: the aggrandizement of banal occurrence through the power of simple utterance (à la Imagism), and the re-registering of grand history through a single poet's map of ways and gestures (as spoken about previously). The result renders concerns we



sense he takes seriously, such as the perverse juxtapositions of nature and technology, trite and unbelievable.

Belief is rarely an important quality of poetry reading. But *Hymn to the Rebel Café* begs further questions of what the hell to do with this book. "The Ocean Etude" features a pilgrimage to Jim Morrison's grave in Père Lachaise. Sanders visits Chopin and Béranger first, but we feel Morrison tugging from the 6th Division, and, despite the Chopin-originated title, it is Morrison's grave that gets the pilgrims' attention. Lists of its graffiti are chronicled, loose-leaf, spiralling on the page like Olson's "Curriculum of the Soul." But just when the pilgrimage seems over, and the poem begins to seem investigative (exhaustive, documentary), Sanders writes:

*So long, lizard legs
I said
as we walked
up the hill
to leave a little book of verse
by the tall stone
of Apollinaire*

What to do with *this* book of verse, the reader wonders, which wants to chronicle while being votive? I'd take it down the hill and leave it on Gertrude Stein's grave, who wrote so decisively of historical poetry:

*Do you see any connection between
yes and yesterday, I
will repeat this, do you see any con-
nection between yes and
yesterday?
There is a way of recording an arbi-
trary collision but in
inventing barbed wire and in invent-
ing puzzles there is no arbitrary
connection. Not at all.*

• • •

A Reminder

In 1964 George Maciunas picketed a Stockhausen performance of *Originals* in Judson Hall, NYC accusing Fluxus participants of social climbing and Stockhausen of racism and cultural imperialism for his rejection of jazz

—Greg Masters

THE WORLD 48

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and

*Twenty years after, as much as twenty
years after in as much as
twenty years after, after twenty years
and so on.
It is it is it is it is.*

—Tim Davis

A Few Words

About Schuyler's Collected

In an otherwise unremarkable letter to his friend Matisse, Pierre Bonnard noted that on his daily walks with his wife, new species of little flowers seemed to appear in steady succession. He commented, "on s'intéresse plus aux objets qu'à la construction de l'univers" ("we are more interested in objects than in the structure of the universe"). Except for the painter's failure to identify the flowers, it's the kind of attentive observation that reminds me of James Schuyler.

The *Collected Poems* abound with the most vivid, insistent objects in contemporary poetry: a stone knife, a blue towel, milk bottled and cartoned and flavored with Ovaltine, apples crisp in bags, splendid urinals "like Roman steles," "leaves and flowers and weather" limned particularly. Roses are leading characters, Georg Arends their star. In an interview conducted by Carl Little and published in *AGNI* 37, Schuyler is quoted: "In a sense, I reject the symbolic value of things in preference for the reality of things. I'm not, for instance, interested in the idea of the rose as it occurs on and on throughout literature, I'm interested in roses, in Georg Arends, and a new rose, Peggy Lee!"

Schuyler's friend Fairfield Porter wrote that, "if you write about how same and boring the lives of commuters are, you write as a statistician, because you are right only in general terms and not in the individual case." James Schuyler's poems return one to one's surrounds; awaken, aesthetize (or de-anesthetize) one to what's going on in the immediate vicinity; though his imagination cavorts freely in unpredictable directions, the context of the poem is evident. Only the inspiration remains miraculous.

Now anyone who so desires can have all the poems that Schuyler chose to publish, plus a group of 28 "Last

Poems," in a volume convenient for travel or exile. I'm grateful to the trio of editors for preparing a book that is pleasing to hold and read. Seeing these poems together, I was struck by how the poet's seven books combine into one sustained laud of creation. Almost as if the Marvell of "The Garden" or young Coleridge had the visual sophistication of Gautier. For all the torment and grief of a trying life, Schuyler's sense of wonder at the extraordinary character of the world in both its material and spirited aspects isn't overwhelmed. It's particularly inspiring to discover how strong the "Last Poems" are, especially "Horse-Chestnut Trees and Roses," "Over the hills," and "Let's All Hear It For Mildred Bailey!"

As several prominent critics have demonstrated, it's difficult to apply standard analytic procedures to poems of such singular radiance and grace without seeming stuffy or perplexed. The eloquent John Ashbery falls back upon "simply the best we have." I'm reminded of something Magic Johnson said about Michael Jordan: "Others can leap as high, but only he can walk in the air."

—Gary Lenhart

This poem was omitted from Schuyler's *Selected Poems* (1988) because he felt "There were too many dates." To my mind it's quintessential Schuyler, which means as beautiful as poems are likely to get.

Dec. 28, 1974

*The plants against the light
which shines in (it's four o'clock)
right on my chair: I'm in my chair:
are silhouettes, barely green,
growing black as my eyes move right,
right to where the sun is.
I am blinded by a fiery circle:
I can't see what I write. A man
comes down iron stairs (I
don't look up) and picks up brushes
which, against a sonata of Scriabin's,
rattle like wind in a bamboo clump.
A wooden sound, and purposeful foot-
steps
softened by a drop-cloth-covered floor.
To be encubed in flaming splendor,
one foot on a Chinese rug, while
the mad emotive music
tears at my heart. Rip it open:*

I want to cleanse it in an icy wind.
 And what kind of tripe is that?
 Still, last night I did wish—
 no, that's my business and I
 don't wish it now. "Your poems,"
 a clunkhead said, "have grown
 more open." I don't want to be open,
 merely to say, to see and say, things
 as they are. That at my elbow
 there is a wicker table. Hortus
 Second says a book. The fields
 beyond the feeding sparrows are
 brown, palely brown yet with an
 inward glow
 like that of someone of a frank good
 nature
 whom you trust. I want to hear the
 music
 hanging in the air and drink my
 Coca-Cola. The sun is off me now,
 the sky begins to color up, the air
 in here is filled with wildly flying
 notes.
 Yes, the sun moves off to the right
 and prepares to sink, setting,
 beyond the dunes, an ocean on fire.

There's still some talk around about the short poem, whether or not it's still valid, still capable of the surprises poetry (on those rare occasions) can generate. One of the greatest pleasures of the *Collected* is that it makes Schuyler's short poems, early middle and late, available to everyone, regardless of race, color, sex, or preoccupations with validity. The remarkable long poems are here too. What a pearl of a *Collected Poems* to have around to remind one what poetry is, particularly now that Schuyler's other books are close to falling apart from being read over and over.

—Charles North

Of all the poetic lines his are the most something, maybe correct, the best, the

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crystal lithium poem—quite gone when christened, maybe best when compared never. As exact as in pencil motionless among the sphere of all stuff & nouns that want to be nouns, nouns that are full of admiration for a particular time, a pretty inevitable as Zukofsky arms us for, Jamesful Schuyfills fulfills all the criteria in Z's test of poetry: grace & energy & sound measure & meaning, impact content & inevitability, emotion conviction and perception. And both having the flower-loving too. It seemed to us he invented the thinking of everything starting with morning swinging able past sleep to the nonviolent necessary, i love you necessary, and he is kept exempt, to write to happen as we are all beholders and constrictions never matter, on a page a lot of letters lie in bed walking around or seasons stopping in today to advise us to imitate him.

—Bernadette Mayer

Letter to the Editor

(Continued from page 3)

snide, patronizing reference to "his reputation for casually tossing off his funny, urbane, boldly straight-from-the-heart 'I do this I do that' poems." Then thrown in as a clincher, this gratuitous comment: "The famous nonchalance now looks to have been deceptive."

Well, it's too bad Ted Berrigan and Jim Brodey aren't still around, hanging out in the St. Mark's area; they both loved Frank and would, I'm sure, set the record straight. But perhaps people from the old days who are presently part of the Poetry Project—Ron Padgett, Rudy Burckhardt, Paul Schmidt, Morris Golde, and Tony Towle immediately come to mind—will let the current crop of younger poets know what Frank O'Hara was really like.

Sincerely,

Joe LeSueur



DIRT

(Continued from page 9)

Larry Fagin and Clark Coolidge for *On The*

Pumice of Moron. They put **Maya Angelou's** *On The Pulse of Morning: The Inaugural Poem* through an Oulipo exercise and then **Geoff Young** of *The Figures* designed it EXACTLY like Random House's edition of the poem. My favorite lines: "Lift up your heart diseases/ Each new housecoat holds new champions/ For a new behavior./ Do not be wedded forever/ To feathers, yoked eternally/ To bubble gum." Yes! *On The Pumice of Moron* is available from Small Press Distribution for a measly five bucks, but act fast because it's a limited edition. Please, anyone who is interested in being involved in a Friday Night reading, send me your work—poems, fiction, journals, autobiography. Thanks, and don't forget to show up here for the **New Year's Marathon** (it's my birthday).

HAUNTINGS

(Continued from page 9)

things to come:

John Byrum, Miekal And, Liz Was & Liaison, made poetry humor, process & participation. If Helen Keller made a joke in the forest & no one were around to hear it, would it be a poem about sound?

Chris Stroffolino reached the highest heights attainable during the conference at a panel discussion on *Word & World*, when he suddenly insisted that he was himself baseless & groundless. The poet, troubled by the giantesses from Toronto, found himself treed when he climbed onto his chair & crouched there, as proof that he was in fact not grounded. {Causing many to wonder: "Isn't there an electrical socket somewhere nearby?"}

The panel on *Reading & Refiguring* steadfastly refused to answer anyone's questions. This reticence seemed at first to be an attempt to refuse the refiguring implied by the questioning, & then it seemed a refusal to attempt a question which required refiguring. Finally, Melanie Neilson left everyone stunned & satisfied by completely refiguring herself & reading the audience.

The most useful piece of information to come out of the whole meeting was an observation made during the discussion



on the *Ethics of Small Press Publishing* made by Wisten Cornell, a visiting lecturer from New Zealand. He suggested that if a book or magazine sold only 1,000 copies, this did not represent a segment of the public interested in reading poetry, but was instead a mailing list of people who might be known.

Eventually, things began to get a bit weird. The best talk given by someone who was not actually invited was given by the *Barscheit Nation*. Who with an almost imperceptible nonchalance, & an astoundingly imperialist {& they aren't even American.} swager, just short of walked right in & took over. Brought about by an event whose causes ran parallel to this invasion, the best reading of the conference was given at the very end by someone who wasn't even there.

One panelist, having only moments before called for "a new imaginary tense" blasted away at the only one of the poets at the conference who even seemed to have come close to making that new tense real. The splendor blaster of the incendiary, pyro-classical verbotage of tense, an individual who had so thoroughly reworked the language that the meanings of such simple & yet rigidly defined words as *combustible* took on whole new meanings when issuing from his mouth. My question finally is, "How can you be sure you disagree with someone when you can't actually be sure he is saying the same thing you think you hear?"

Which brings to mind some of the most important things about this conference, the conversations one was able to either get into or even just overhear. Unfortunately these existed merely as a residue of the structure of the conference more than as an element of its design. {There were too many Panels & Readings & not nearly enough "down time" during the day.}

So much so was this true that, one might never have gotten the chance to speak with those to whom one really wanted to talk. From my perspective the people most likely to be stood in line in order to be talked to at this conference were Peter Gizzi, Steve Evans & Ben Fried-

lander. However, there were many pleasant surprises. It is possible that Rod Smith does not ever actually sleep, but if you were still up at 3:00 AM it was well worth your time to stay up the rest of the night with him. {Because if nothing else, he told the funniest stories about other people you might ever hear.} Quite unexpected were the appearance of two women from George Mason College, who have studied with Carolyn Forché. Lacking any formal ties to either this particular "poetic movement" or any of the individuals involved, & providing an especially irreverent & insightful point of view, they claimed to have actually enjoyed themselves, & even found the poetry to be for the most part of

some interest.

Of overheard conversation, one of the very few "established" poets who came to the confu-gence, {ostensibly to "see what was happening"} was caught marveling, as if having been just visited by those from outer space, "Last night these people went to a party & after having already listened to poetry for three days, organized a reading *at the party!* & except for a few people who were in the kitchen, everyone sat quietly & listened. But what was really amazing was that when the people in the kitchen got a little loud, everyone turned around & told them to be quiet."

Oddly for such a pessimistic profession, (& such a pessimistic group individually), there was a feeling of optimism & well being overlaid by a strange sense of reverence, all embodied in the answer to the question, "Divine emanation or Earthly paramour?" which was Robert Kocih. To speak with the man was to be as if one speaking in a dream.

i hope that in the future i find myself interested enough in finding out what's going on to take a couple of days off work & go upstate to have me a look around. There was for all its posture & lack of pre-science, something uplifting about this controversy of poets, which occurred early last April near a still frozen lake.

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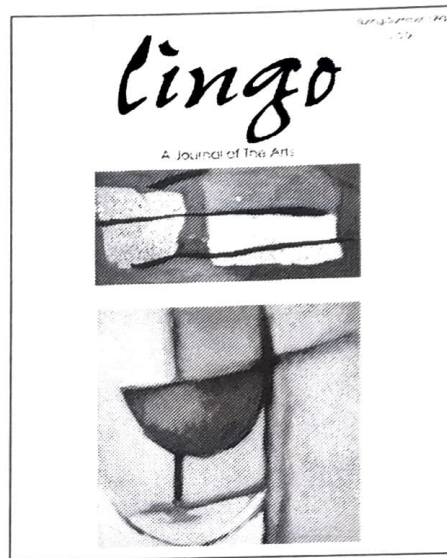
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A Journal of the Arts

A feature interview with Bernadette Mayer plus an excerpt from her forthcoming book *The Desires Of Mothers To Please Others In Letters*. A selection from *My Life In The Early Nineties* by Lyn Hejinian. A selection from Clark Coolidge's *City in Regard*. Poetry and photos from *Reconstruction* by Fanny Howe and Ben Watkins. Plus new work by Rosmarie Waldrop, John Ashbery, Eileen Myles, William Corbett and others.

Translations include: the complete text of Edmond Jabès' *A Foreigner Carrying In The Crook Of His Arm A Tiny Book*; a selection from Arkadii Dragomoshchenko's *Phosphor*. New translations of Jacques Roubaud, Elke Erb, Dominique Fourcade, Peter Waterhouse, and Pierre Martory.

Essays include: "Jazz on Video" by Peter Occhiogrosso and Geoffrey Young on Kenneth Goldsmith's text art. A 16-page color portfolio including Win Knowlton, Reginald Madison, Jim Youngerman, and Strombotne.



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Fall 1993

A feature interview with John Ashbery. James Schuyler's letters. *Guston's Nixon* by William Corbett (drawings by Philip Guston). Poems by Bernadette Mayer, Barbara Guest, Clark Coolidge, Rosmarie Waldrop, Michael Gizzi, Marjorie Welish, David Shapiro and many more. In translation: Edmond Jabès, Marcel Cohen, Jean Frémon, Elke Erb and others.

A color portfolio including Trevor Winkfield, Darragh Park, and Barbieo Barros Gizzi. Photos and poetry from *The Berlin Book* by John Yau and Bill Barrette. Essays on music, art and film including more "Jazz on Video" and an interview with Leroy Jenkins by Peter Occhiogrosso. Ron Padgett on Trevor Winkfield, and Gus Blaisdell on Carroll Dunham.

Lowell Connector \$12.95

By Clark Coolidge, Michael Gizzi, and John Yau. Photographs by Bill Barrette and Celia Coolidge.

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

October 1993

The Desires Of Mothers To Please Others In Letters

\$12.95

By Bernadette Mayer



A monumental St. Bernadette to the initiates, this work has achieved something like the status of "Manuscript Classic." An epistolary text which takes as its formal parameters the nine months of Ms. Mayer's last pregnancy — an augury by bee sting — and writes the reader's psyche to the fences. "She is a consummate poet no matter what's for supper or who eats it. Would that all genius were as generous." — Robert Creeley. By the author of *The Bernadette Mayer Reader*, *Sonnets*, and *Studying Hunger*.

February 1994

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