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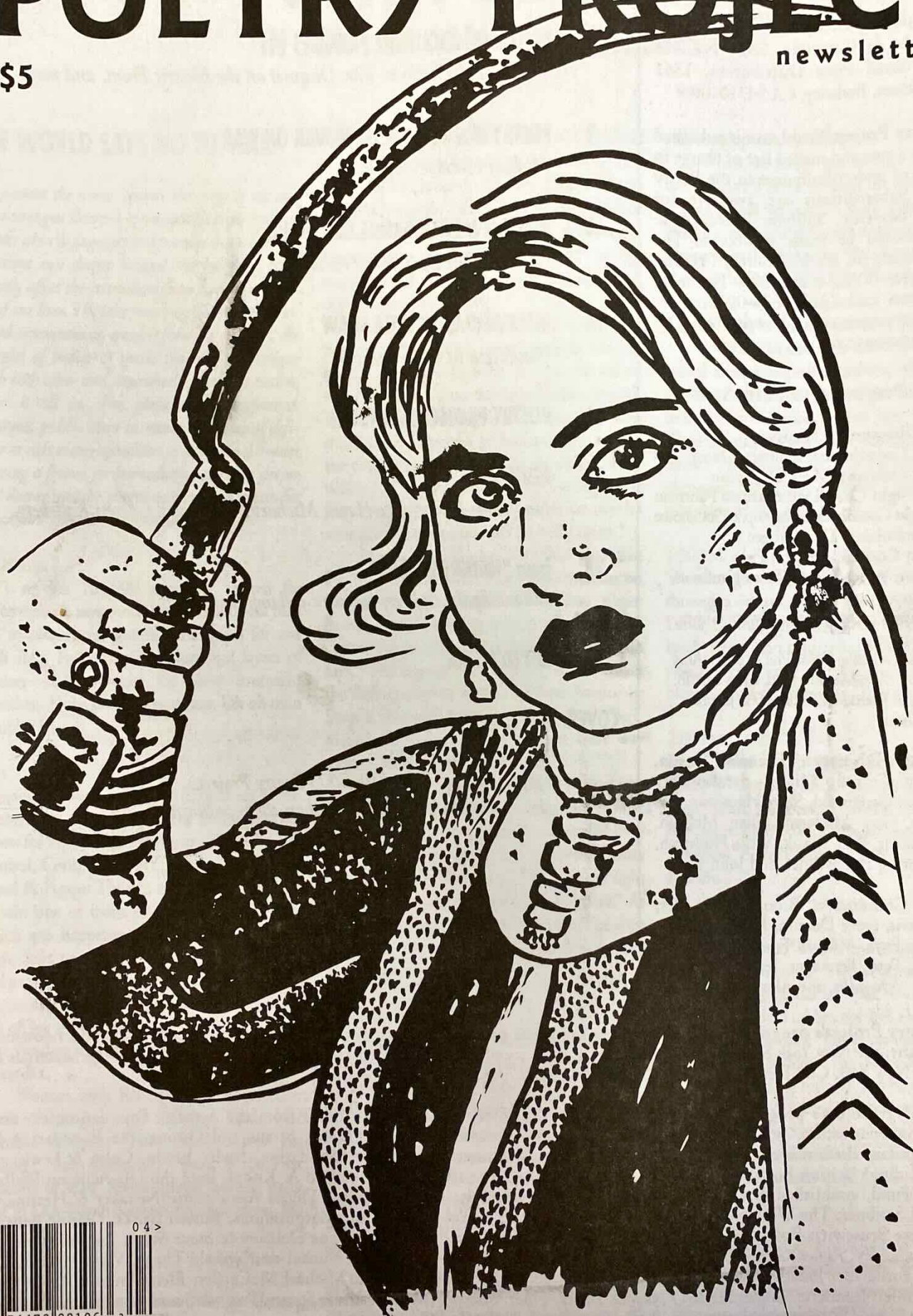
THE

April ~ May 2003

# POETRY PROJECT

newsletter

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THE  
**POETRY PROJECT**  
April - May 2003

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# THE POETRY PROJECT IN . ON . OR ABOUT THE PREMISES

## THE WORLD SAYS NO TO WAR

*In protests the streets become the stage to act out our strongest desires—a site-specific participatory theater akin to pageants and parades but where the emotions run deeper because the intention is to directly affect the immediate future and the quality of our lives. The text: meaningful gestures, overheard conversations, speeches from the podium, the energies of bodies in space, placards in dialogue with each other and anyone who passes by, notices, takes it all in. The players: our heightened, enlarged, public selves in masks, costumes of defiance as rich as any characters in traditional theater creating a forum for immediacy, taking us deeper and deeper into the present moment—a means for education/reflection/transformation/change.*

11:20 P.M.

NY1 reports 100,000 expected, United for Peace website says more like 200,000 will turn out to protest our government's push for war with Iraq. Feel toasty in layers and layers of clothes—nice—forecast for snow overnight mistaken. Hope the skies stay clear. Uh oh train trouble.

12:15 P.M.

Running late—we make it to 57th Street & 5th Avenue. No sign of any of the feeder marches (Poets for Peace, Theaters Against War: THAW, Carnival Contingent, NY Labor Contingent, Bread & Puppet Theater, etc.). We had wanted to join one of them on the way to the rally which was happening on First Ave. above E. 49th. Start seeing people heading over though and groups by buses waiting. Talk to a girl from Dorchester for Peace from Mass. waiting for the rest of her group. As we go a little north then start heading east the crowd thickens on the sidewalks.

Woman with her two kids across 59th Street holding a sign: "Dump Bush Not Bombs." Others: "How Many Lives Per Gallon"; "Stop Bushism"; "Truth is the First Casualty of War." Several people holding small Not in Our Name banners: big blue globe, big blue Earth.

12:45 P.M.

Still crawling across to First Avenue. Banner

stretches across our heads, width of the whole street: huge white branching, blossoming tree on blue background. Chants start: "Whose streets? Our streets!" as it seems the cops are funneling us further away from our destination. Intermittent whoops and hollers rise up responding to passing helicopters circling and observing us from above.

Second Ave. and 61st Street—cops start putting up blockades—metal gates to keep us on the sidewalk—separate us from the others that have moved into the street and are impeding traffic—not telling us anything—no communication. Then an ambulance flies by and the protestors flood back into the street. A cop walking by me says, "Somebody's going to get hurt." A female cop says, "If you get run over by a car your grandmother will be really upset."

More signs: "Empty War Head Found in the White House" with Bush's head tottering on its side. Meet up with a digeridoo player friend—says he's going to stay there with the crowd and see if they'll let them over. One guy says, "This is great we're stopping traffic, what's the difference if we protest on First Avenue or Second Avenue!" Later run into a few experimental filmmakers trying to make their way over by different circuitous routes.

I ask a cop why we were being pushed further uptown and when we could go over to First Ave. and he said that it was too crowded over there so we had to go up to 72nd Street before crossing over. Someone said, "We can see right over to First Ave. and there's no one there." At this point we were around 67th Street. The cops say they're there. So we're supposed to believe them, not our own eyes.

1:10 P.M.

A woman comes walking swiftly down the line of protestors inching further uptown and says, "They're about to close 68th street, hurry or you won't be able to get through there." So we run and are finally allowed to go east on 68th Street (the stage is set up around 51st Street). By this time one of my cohorts has given up and gone home. Wonder how many other people will be frustrated by the cops' containment methods and will do the same?

We hear the current speaker on "the people's sound system": portable radios and boomboxes tuned to a live radio broadcast of the

rally—snippets of Al Sharpton.

When we finally get to First Avenue, no one is there. There's no back up or overflow of people. What we see is a huge mass of people blocks away and a jumbotron video screen projecting the rally above the 59th Street Bridge by the tram to Roosevelt Island. I see a woman on screen but we're so far away I can't tell if it's Angela Davis or Susan Sarandon.

The cops let us trickle down till we meet a crowd then close the barricades so we can't cross over into the emptier space right in front of us until the crowd starts to boil over with anger. Then the cops create a tiny opening funneling us into the next section. This happens over and over again threatening to make a peaceful situation dangerous.

1:50 P.M.

We manage to scoot up to 2nd Avenue again through a side street to see if we can spot the NY Labor Contingent banner—no luck but have a brief Reno spotting with her ever-present pooch. "Hey how are you?" she says before blurring something angry at the cops.

2:00 P.M.

First Avenue and E. 65th, lone sign in a window: "We Support Bush." Holly Near's singing heard from the speakers on the corner. Little boy with sign: "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" Another: "Better Old Europe than New World Fascism."

2:10 P.M.

Harry Belafonte: "This is an historic day, they told us we don't exist." They've announced that we stretch 20 blocks up First Avenue, filling blocks and blocks up Second and Third Avenue as well. On a stroller: "Babies for Peace."

At E. 61st Street run into United Auto Workers, friends of my companion. They're trying to set-up a teachers' union at the New School. Onstage: Sarah Jones heard in her spectacular shifting voices/characters then, finally in her own voice, thanks us all for turning out.

2:30 P.M.

They announce half a million to a million are here. Sign: "Boys Against Bombs" speaker from RAAWA—Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan: "We need to strength-

en solidarity between peoples."

Sign: "We Need To Talk." Betty, singing in beautiful three-part harmony: "We're people, just people and we're broken ..."

2:50 P.M.

My toes start feeling numb. Temperature's in the 20s but luckily the snowstorm held off.

They open up a portion of the barricades and a flood of people push us through to the sidewalk. We hop into a pizza joint for food and a little warming up.

3:00 P.M.

Back on the street cop pushing woman—she resists and is pulled away. Another cop yells at the crowds in the pen.

3:05 P.M.

Too crushing in the protest pen, so we stay huddled in a doorway staring at the speakers on the Jumbotron. From the podium we hear something like "Just heard on the A.P. diplomats at the U.N. are working on softening the language of their resolution to remove the mention of the use of force." My eyes start to tear up until we're forced out of our doorway by the moving crowd. Signs: "Pre-emptive War Is Terrorism," "Read Between the Lines." Then Welfare Poets perform hip-hop revolution rap.

4:10 P.M.

Keep moving towards the stage. Run into a conga line. Then dancers on a huge red heart on a white cloth spread on street at 53rd.

4:12 P.M.

The barricades are up again. More chanting: "Let us through," and "Whose streets? Our streets!" Red Balloon: "More Candy Less War."

4:20 P.M.

Talking with a guy in a white foam core cage bounded in signs: "Democracy," "Liberty," and "Privacy." Someone hands us "No Blood for Oil" buttons.

"Kid for Peace" sign in window where a tiny kid sits sadly. We all wave to him and start chanting: "Kid for Peace, Kid for Peace." On the other side of the street another kid, another sign—simple and to the point: "No War."

4:30 P.M.

Spot mounted police. Then we finally see the actual stage up close (between 51st and 52nd) and the rally's over, speakers finished. Black female cop says, "They made them pull the plug early and say goodnight to you. They wouldn't let it go on."

But the peace revelers do go on. Waiting for the barriers to be removed, so we can go home, encounter a huge Native American

drum, dancers and chanters. Spot a vintage bus, with Vermont plates, bearing a huge sign: "Peacemaker."

Run into someone hawking a book. Stop, chat and realize it's a directory a friend helped edit: *Future 500: Youth Organizing and Activism in the United States* (Subway & Elevated Press)—bought one. (Available online at [www.newmouthfromthedirtysouth.com](http://www.newmouthfromthedirtysouth.com) or [www.Future500.com](http://www.Future500.com) or send \$12 per book to: New Mouth from the Dirty South, P.O. Box 19742, New Orleans, LA 70179.)

Backpack and pockets full of handouts for future demos we finally get out of the pen—marching through the side streets with the sound of the drum.

8:30 P.M.

Before a film screening at Millennium Film Workshop each person who comes into the lobby asks, "Did you go to the rally? How far did you get? Did you get to First Avenue?" as if it were some gigantic board game where everyone is moved from square to square with the goal making it to First Avenue as close to the stage as possible.

Someone says they struggled to get to First Avenue and once they did the rally hadn't started yet and they felt ill and had to leave.

Hear stories of witnessing protesters being beaten and cops on horses rushing the crowd. Someone says, "Then they brought in the horses, it was like something out of the Russian Revolution. We must have seen at least 2 or 3 people being pulled out of the pens onto the sidewalks and probably arrested." Talk to a poet later who says that she went to her favorite restaurant for dinner and heard one of the waiters had been arrested at the rally.

One guy says he doubted it would get good press coverage and so we should ask the filmmaker showing her films if we could tell our stories to the audience before the screening. A woman says no, she went home and saw coverage on Channel 7 News, so it was getting covered by the major networks.

The French Canadian filmmaker having her first N.Y. one-person screening that evening lives in Boston now. She speaks a little bit about the rally before starting to talk about her films. She says she's always thought of New Yorkers as rather hardened and apathetic but being at the rally definitely changed her mind about that and was wonderful to see.

It seems the same thing was happening all over the world—a performance of urgency—a pageant for peace.

#### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS:

Millions in over 600 cities and towns across the globe were in the streets. In NYC probably over 400,000 (all ages, races and religions) showed

up, a million in Rome, 750,000 in London, 200,000 in Australia, not to mention France, Germany, Israel, and on and on and on.

—Wanda Phipps

## IMPROV NOTES

**From *Civil Disobedience*, Henry David Thoreau:**

*How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today? I answer that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it.*

*... Legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders serve the State chiefly with their heads; and they rarely make any moral distinctions. They are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense ... serve the State with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it, and are treated as enemies.*

**From *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau:**

*As a sufficient distance over the woods this sound (the distant bells of Concord) acquires a certain vibratory hue, as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept. All sound heard at a great distance produces one and the same effect, a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by the azure tint it imparts to it.*

On February 15th, the East Village was as quiet as it ever is on a Saturday morning. Around 10:00 A.M. I met friends at the Café Pick Me Up. Already the tones of calm excitement in people's voices were building in the air as protesters compared notes and shared information in the café and on the street. Walking to the subway, every visible human being seemed to be decked out and heading for a peace rally that turned out to be the largest in New York City since the Vietnam war (500,000 is now the upward estimate).

The space of the uptown 6 train at Astor Place was packed with sign-wielding, excited, pissed-off New Yorkers whose mixing voices sounded with focused excitement, hope, and communal purpose. We got off the train at 59th street and began walking East. This was still possible because we were early and the police hadn't yet begun cutting off crosstown movement in their attempt to divide and dispirit their fellow citizens. Islands of policemen began appearing on corners around 2nd Ave. As the sloping vista of 1st Ave opened the veal-pen barricades set up by the city could be seen arraigned on every block: as if it wasn't already clear that we are being seen by the powers that be as food.

The Poets for Peace were being held in one of these pens between 58th and 59th, after being told they couldn't assemble on the public sidewalk. Poets of all sorts were gathering under the Guernica banner, already fighting the shocking bitterly cold win-

ter air. The air had a dampening effect on the overall sound this day—a kind of natural mute which rounded the tones of the crowd and befitted the calm and lyrical energy of the people.

For some reason the police at 58th St. decided to let us move into the mostly empty pens south of us, and I overheard an exasperated cop say “this is ridiculous—why are we letting these people move,” with a tone of voice you might expect from a child who doesn’t understand why his little brother is being allowed to stay up late when he never was. Around 11:45 our slow-motion southern trek ended at 55th St., where the poets joined a solid ocean of bodies filling the space all the way down to the main stage at 49th Street.

As the speakers began to talk, a giant video screen hydraulically lifted itself up and rotated towards us. Because of the tinniness of the PA system and our distance from it, it was hard to hear the speeches unless the speakers were really projecting. The speakers were earnest but often unfocused, with the notable exception being Desmond Tutu, who also had a spirit of joyousness about him that contrasted with the nervous tone of many of the other speakers.

New York City is surely one of Earth’s most provocatively beautiful resonating chambers. There were several fusing layers of sounds that pulsed through the spaces of New York that afternoon. The sounds of the presentation were one layer—but of course no PA system could ever accommodate the hundreds of thousands of people there. The sounds of protesters were another layer—cheering, clapping and yelling, generating spontaneous chants and songs, laughing and lightening the mood with jokes. There was also the bassy menacing throb of the several helicopters hovering above the crowd—the sound of the system, of power. All these things mixed and swept though the space of 1st Ave., and hinted at the vastness of the crowd stretching to 72nd street and well past Lexington. The air of the city held and absorbed these sounds, as we hoped the world would begin to hold and absorb the actual wishes of its population. —Drew Gardner

## DISQUIET ON THE ELECTRIC FRONT

**B**logaholism continues to claim victims among the unwitting poetry community, with the roster—international, avant-garde, new formalist, new vineyardist, skanky, Spanish and English—ever growing for the fashionable poetaster’s blogroll. Keep one eye on your prose as you dawdle among: **Chaxblog** (Charles Alexander), **For the Health of It** (Tom Bell), **Equanimity and Million Poems** (Jordan Davis), **Overlap** (Drew Gardner), **Ululate** (Nada Gordon), **HG Poetics** (Henry Gould), **Lester’s Flogspot** (Patrick Herron), **Pantaloons** (Jack Kimball), **Ineluctable Maps**

(Anastasios Kozaitis), **Jonathan Mayhew’s Blog**, **Ich Bin Ein Iraqi** (Camille Roy), **Possum Pouch** (Dale Smith), **Mike Snider’s Formal Blog**, **Elsewhere** (Gary Sullivan), **WinePoetics** (Eileen Tabios), **Laurable Dot Com**, **The Tijuana Bible of Poetics** (Heriberto Yopez), **SpokenWORD** (Komninos Zervos).

A few of these predate **Silliman’s Blog**, one or two even predate Katherine “the blog queen” Parrish’s **squish**, but several are mere pups. I will spare you the URLs, but a clickable, up-to-date list can be found at Kasey Silem Mohammad’s **limetree**, **limetree.blogspot.com**. Soon, no poet will be able to read holding a piece of paper because of the stealthily deleterious effects of carpal tunnel syndrome, a brand of disease leading to crooked, John Merrick-esque postures that—like a model’s slumped shoulders in the more swish NYC bars or Orson Welles’ citizen’s paunch that seems to have taken hold of the UK’s sound poetry community—will be imitated by any sensible poseur desirous of seeming of the crowd that “took down Language writing” (Vendler).

Like shrooms after April’s swich licóur, metablogs—blogs that respond to the phenomenon of blogs like Spinal Tap to heavy metal—are beginning to sprout. Contact the folks at **mainstreampoeetry.blogspot.com** to partake in the literary sensation that’s sweeping the world: **Mainstream Poetry**. (So that *Fence* thing was smoke and mirrors?) Be one of the grant-funded freshwater bass who write “Through Jello Moulds Of Christian Science Walruses.”

With some trepidation I hope to further the trend with the introduction of another multi-author blog **Circulars**, **www.arras.net/circulars**, which has a mandate to register in persuasive but concise prose the poetry community’s opposition to the U.S. government’s war policy. As the propaganda states:

“CIRCULARS intends to focus some of the disparate energy by poets and literary critics to enunciate a response to U.S. foreign policy, most significantly the move to war with Iraq. CIRCULARS intends to critique and/or augment some conventional modes of expressing political views that are either entirely analytical, ironic or humanistic. These are all valuable approaches, of course, and not unwelcome on CIRCULARS, but our hope is to create a dynamic, persuasive idiom that can work in a public sphere, mingling elements of rhetoric and stylistics associated with the aforementioned modes—analytical, ironic or humanistic. CIRCULARS is, in this sense, a workshop—a place to explore strategies.”

By the time you read this, the war may be several weeks old, and my guess is that the site—the joint creation of several authors acting both as editors and writers—will reflect, for now and for the record, changes in the poetry community’s political priorities, sentiments and activities as they occur.

**Beehive**, **beehive.temporalimage.com**, edited by Talan Memmott, has just put up its fifth issue, featuring work by Bill Marsh, Juliet Ann Martin, Marianne Shaneen, Millie Niss, Alan Sondheim and others. Good to see names not previously associated with digipo in the mix—Marianne was lugging around a gaffer-taped Bolex on Roebling St. when last I saw her—but I’m also pleased to see Juliet Ann Martin, whose “ooxxxxooo” (**julietmartin.com**) was revelatory for its time, grabbing some spotlight. **The Iowa Review Web**, **www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/tirwebhome.htm**, also has a new issue, featuring a new piece by William Poundstone, “3 Proposals for Bottle Imps,” an interview with Motomichi Nakamura by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, and my interview with John Cayley, suggestively titled “From Byte to Inscription” (kind of like a James Bond film—or maybe Justin Bond).

Free stuff? Well, you can try the new **/ubu** (“slash ubu,” found at **ubu.com/ubu**) series of e-books, featuring titles by Kevin Davies, Deanna Ferguson, Richard Foreman, Madeline Gins, Jessica Grim, Peter Manson, Michael Scharf, Ron Silliman, Juliana Spahr, Hannah Weiner, Mac Wellman, and Darren Wershler-Henry (sorry, a touch of Lisztomania there ...). Go to the recently revamped Duration Press, **duration-press.com**, for even more free e-books by the likes of Patrick Durgin, Rachel Levitsky, Brian Strang, Elizabeth Treadwell, Rick Snyder and Marcella Durand—really just the tip of the rapidly deepening iceberg (er ...), countering the forces of ecological entropy that’s rendering even Antarctica’s historical Borchgrevink’s hut a pile of stinking guano. Kudos to Jerrold Shiroma for putting together such an amazing site.

For those who don’t go much for reading, there are the digital anti-war bumper stickers at **Masturbate for Peace**, **masturbateforpeace.org**, with minimalist offerings such as “Touch Your Sack, Not Iraq,” and “My Bush Doesn’t Declare War!” And if that’s too much for your impoverished lexicalism, then it doesn’t get much lighter than this page of **Japanese Emoticons**, **club.pep.ne.jp/~hiroette/en/facemarks/index.html**, including such classics of the industry as:

"Here you are, the tea."

and

"He sends you a kiss  
with a sound effect."

[Unfortunately, the emoticons themselves are unreproducible with our limited typefaces. —Eds.] Ok, it's not the *Cantos*, or even Eisenstein's *Film Sense*, but it's an easy in for those of you who are responding to Eliot Weinberger's call ([arras.net/circulars/archives/000130.html](http://arras.net/circulars/archives/000130.html)) to learn the names of more Asian poets—I think this one's called Hiroette.

—Brian Kim Stefans

## PAUL CHAN IN BAGHDAD

Video and conceptual artist Paul Chan recently returned from a month in Baghdad with the Iraq Peace Team and Voices in the Wilderness.

Here is my paraphrasing of what he told me about his experiences in Iraq ...

CHILDREN DANCING. THAT'S WHAT I REMEMBER ABOUT IRAQ. These people who are devastated by sanctions, live under a dictator and under threat of war, throw impromptu dance parties at every opportunity.

Instead of photographing devastation, destruction, anguish and suffering, Paul chose to capture images of Iraqis at weddings, celebrating, working, making art, going on family outings to the Baghdad amusement park, called LUNA PARK (!!!).

American pop culture thrives in Baghdad; the main movie theater in town was showing Demi Moore in *STRIPEASE*. Paul absurdly watched a screening of *RAMBO*, heard Missy Elliot ... Iraqis LOVE Celine Dion. (We want to start a letter writing campaign telling Celine Dion how much she's loved in Iraq and get her to make anti-war movement public service announcements.)

Re: cruise missiles in the densely populated city of Baghdad: HOW WILL THEY CONTAIN CIVILIAN DEATHS? WHERE WILL THE PEOPLE GO? Very few people have the resources to leave Baghdad.

"WE'LL BE GIVING THEM LIBERTY AND DEATH IN ONE FATAL BLOW."

The hotel that CNN and other reporters stayed in has a giant mosaic of BUSH SR. on its floor that's titled "WAR CRIMINAL."

All over Iraq Paul saw glam pics of Saddam holding the symbolically significant British rifle that Iraqis used to fight against the Brits with.

Iraq has the largest art market and more galleries than anywhere else in the Arab world, despite threat of war, sanctions-induced poverty, lack of clean water and resources, etc. and people still manage to make a living making art (mostly portraiture, for the tourist market). He's not so surprised by

Iraqi artists loving Giacometti, but was thrilled to see how much they are into PAUL KLEE! "The fact that people in Iraq can survive by making art is something I find intensely sublime ..."

"I've had more conversations with people about SAMUEL BECKETT in Baghdad than I've ever had in my life ..." and Iraqis read lots of Joyce (and, from Brit colonialism days, Eliot). Baghdad has a still-thriving booksellers' row—although it's devastating to see people coming there in desperation to sell off their libraries. (Books are banned from being brought into Iraq because of sanctions.) On New Year's Eve he went to a party where Iraq's only HEAVY METAL BAND, THE BLACK SCORPIONS, played—but the people wanted to hear Iraqi folk songs, so that's what they played.

You don't eat vegetables in Iraq because of the DEPLETED URANIUM. Everyone called Paul Jackie Chan. He regrets having missed his big chance to meet with the group of Iraqi Satanists. Iraqis call white people "Michael Jackson."

Some of the Voices in the Wilderness activists who'd been planting themselves in Iraq (some for many years), and members of the IPT: a man who'd once been a pro golfer, a woman who could recite long passages of Camus alongside biting political facts and statistics, an old woman who pours ram's blood on missile silos ...

Paul said that part of his motivation for going to Iraq was, frankly, his fascination with and love for the marginalized and "crazy" (these incredible activists that humbled him with their intensity of dedication, most people in this country would likely call "crazy").

He spoke with fondness and awe of these activists, that they were the most intense, most deeply committed people he'd ever met—and contrasted them with "posers" like himself who went there to "take pictures" ...

Paul said that he constantly observed a kind of "shutting down" that would happen when reporters would ask Iraqis typical questions about their suffering, etc.—that in answering, they would sort of go on "auto pilot" and give statistics and rote responses; whereas Paul instead chose to try to open up dialogue with people by talking with them on a different level, in terms of the commonality that they could communicate, with references to pop culture, for example, and wanted to experience them as people, not as a devastated population.

Among the things I appreciate about Paul's attitude is his desire to come from a place of levity, humor, absurdity, as a way of generating openness, dialogue, freshness and joy—rather than from a place of severity and statistics. He found himself being a countering voice to the heavily Christian radicals, as well as to the Ramsey Clark, et al., activist dialogue, which, necessary as that is, is often too lacking in that which INSPIRES.

At the same time, however, he finds

himself often in situations among artists (and with himself as an artist and a person of privilege, and at moments during the Poetry Project gathering for example), where he feels an intense urge to express what will really SCARE THE HELL OUT OF PEOPLE to move us to action.

These awkward and problematic positionings inherent in defining himself in this context as an "artist." "I went to Iraq as an artist to diversify the language," he says.

I am organizing two events that will feature the work of Paul Chan: An evening in which Paul Chan will give a talk, slide show and fundraiser for Voices in the Wilderness and the Iraq Peace Team at Galapagos Art Space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn on April 6; and an evening of Paul's artwork, his amazing video piece based on Darger and Fourier, and other pieces, at The Robert Beck Memorial Cinema on April 8.

Please take a look at Paul Chan's website: [www.nationalphilistine.com](http://www.nationalphilistine.com).

—Marianne Shanteen

## CIRCUS OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE or CHALLENGE OF THE MODERN TIME CAPSULE, MARCHERS THAT COULDN'T AND SHOWS I HAVEN'T SEEN YET

Last weekend, I read aloud June Jordan's "A Poem About My Rights" to an architecture class of outreach students at Cooper Union. Once I'd finished, the presence of the poem stood like an attentive elephant in the small space. Before my arrival, they had been discussing the elements or forms that make apparent a space's functions. And then here comes Ms. Jordan and her poem about the impact geographically, nationally and politically defined (and redefined) spaces have on personal (physical and psychological) spaces. Where in Rilke, "there is no place which does not see you," in Jordan there is no place which, seeing you, does not seek to name you and, in naming you, does not claim to know you. And knowing is always about making (including up or out). The political impacts the personal, and the personal can sometimes explain (or fuck with or be fucked over by) the political. This idea is a part of the language and aesthetic of both recent anti-war protests (in ways that it might not have been as few as ten years ago despite having long been a part of the poetry landscape) and recent art exhibits (of works from the early half of the twentieth century and of contemporary work).

PROTEST SIGNS BOX: *Bush Gives Pray A Bad Name*  
*Bush Gives Cock A Bad Name*  
*Real Men Pull Out In Time*

JORDAN BOX: penetrating into Namibia penetrating into/ Angola and does that mean I mean how do you know if/ Pretoria ejaculates what will the evidence look like the/ proof of the monster jackboot ejaculation on Blackland ...

The work in Art-in-General's "Time Capsule: Archaeology in Contemporary Art" critiques the "concept of archeology, a practice saddled with issues of identity, property, and heritage" in as much as the (old) objects that occupy (the ground beneath) a space are dug out and coded as signifiers of the place's (more often in the past, "mankind's") history. Appropriation and interpretation of the object lead to appropriation and interpretation (re: production) of history. The tone and thrust of the exhibit is set in "Don't Fuck with the Past, You Might Get Pregnant," the first piece you see on entering the gallery. In the video and video stills that comprise "Don't Fuck," Mexican artist Silvia Gruner is seen handling an object that resembles an ancient fertility figure, a fetish. In one of the videos, *In Situ*, there is a close up of Gruner's face. She holds the object, lengthwise (erect) in her open mouth, between her teeth. She teases and tongues the figure, affectionately, fervently, and certainly grotesquely. She cannot close her mouth. History is brought into discomfiting contact with the post-colonial body, and there are consequences.

In works from the earlier part of the twentieth century, history (again as mediated through the interpretation of objects) is important in reimagining black bodies. In the Studio Museum of Harlem's "Challenge of the Modern: African-American Artists 1925-1945," many of the works grow out of contact with African cultural artifacts. Works like Edna Manley's "The Negro Aroused," a remarkable bronze sculpture, look to African forms to visually assert and examine historical connections between blacks outside of Africa and Africa. The stylistic changes demand a reimagining of the black body. Divided into four sections: From Primitivism to Abstraction; Location and Self-Image; The Black Body; and The Black Church and Modernism, the exhibit suggests processes (aesthetic, political, and personal) of object interpretation that at the start of the twentieth-first century are necessary objects of critique. Time Capsule closes March 15th and Challenge ends April 6th.

YET BOX: At the Guggenheim until June 11, 2003: Matthew Barney's *The Cremaster Cycle*—"five feature-length films that explore the processes of creation. ... Its conceptual departure point is the male cremaster muscle, which controls testicular contractions in response to external stimuli."

At the American Folk Art Museum until May 18, 2003: St. Adolf-Giant-Creation: The Art of Adolf Wolfli—An artist in the tradition of *art brut*, Wolfli spent more than half of his life confined in a mental asylum. He created tens of thou-

sands of pages of text, musical compositions, and drawings.

ALSO YET BOX: Ace Gallery (275Hudson)—David Hammons.  
—Tonya Foster

## RESPONSES TO LAST ISSUE'S FORUM

I am writing in response to the "Forum: 'The Blank Generation?'" that appeared in the February-March 2003 issue.

I will not—and cannot—speak for Ron Silliman here. I myself do not believe (and obviously didn't say, though Leslie Scalapino seems to think that I did) that writers younger than I are all "depoliticized"—nor that they are apolitical. (I would note, by the way, that Ron speaks of the depolitical, not the apolitical, which is a very different thing.) The hegemonic capitalist powers whose goal it is to depoliticize all of us—through dispiriting and enraging strategies that leave us exhausted with anger rather than invigorated with hope—have been relentless; in addition, wealth has become not only less and less evenly distributed but indeed hardly distributed at all, and as a result of these factors it has become very, very difficult to find time and energy for the forms of political activity that we (not an exclusive group, despite John Yau's misreading of it as such, but simply writers of my generation, i.e., born in the 1940s) saw in the late 1960s and 1970s. Ron Silliman refers (albeit in seemingly negative terms) to what he calls "a politics ... of cynicism and disgust." To my mind that is indeed a politics; it is one of the multiple forms in which political thinking is continuing in the face of capitalism's current heyday. Sianne Ngai's wonderful essay "Raw Matter: A Poetics of Disgust" (published in *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics* of the 1990s. Eds. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks) examines theoretical and practical applications of such a politics, and I recommend it to your readers (and to Ron, if he hasn't already read it). There is no reason that a politics can't be developed and enacted that lacks "utopian vision." Engagement with the dystopias of the 21st century is political too; it is producing some of the many different types of writing that Lytle Shaw talks about under the rubric of "site-specific" writing—works whose "sites" are social in the most diverse senses of that word—diversely framed, diversely identified, diversely occupied, diversely negotiated, diversely pictured and depicted.

The remarks I made for the *Rain Taxi* interview were a very brief summary of ideas I developed at greater length in my essay "Barbarism" (it's included in *The Language of Inquiry*, UC Press, 2000). The question posed to me there was not about politics but about Language writing. My comments as they appear in the "Forum: The Blank Generation?" got contextualized in terms of Ron's remarks and seem as a result to have been misread by some.

The points I wanted to make about Language writing are easy to repeat.

The first is that Language writing isn't a style. That should be obvious to anyone who reads work by any two of the authors associated historically with the movement. The various individual Language works look the way they do for reasons, and those reasons are more than simply aesthetic. The devices were "motivated" and in very particular ways.

The second point follows logically from the first: stylistic imitations (by formerly mainstream as well as younger writers) do not produce Language writing. This second point was not intended as a condemnation of younger poets, most of whom don't want to be called Language writers anyway—and for good reason. They have their own movements to develop, their own devices to deploy (many of them grounded in narrative strategies whose uses I can only envy). Laura Elrick, in her excellent response, names persons and places where some of the brilliant results can readily be seen. Strong material and social affinities exist, but Language writing should not aspire to coopt this work. Indeed, we should all resist the coopting and reifying strategies of capital.

Opening such questions to discussion as you have done is one element in a general strategy that can sustain that kind of resistance. Despite the (predictable) attack from John Yau and the (unpredictable) one from Leslie Scalapino, I very much appreciated the "Forum."  
—Lyn Hejinian

RESPONSE TO REG E. GAINES

Yes, too seldom do we find among the popular poet language and discourse used to deconstruct the myth, to disentangle the spirit and one's internal drives from the lure of having it all. All for ourselves. So inured have we become to the SPEAKER engaged in a staged, pseudo-deconstructionist drama, which raises nothing more than the elocutionist's profile, (conferring legitimacy) and bank account balance (conferring virtue), spawning endless imitations of the same, that we seek them out only as a form of in-person reality-TV type of entertainment. Numbing mind candy indeed.

Moreover, seldom do we expect to see a poet whose voice speaks with a genuine urge toward raising the consciousness of, and provoking the will to dissent among, those in the listening audience. A cursory glance may find one caught up in the rapture of "a movement" that seems substantive, but in the end leaves one with the same stupefied incredulousness one experiences after speaking to the local drug dealer who lays down his five-year scheme for dealing (saving up his small fortune, and getting out—not to be confused with all those suckers who get caught up in using their own smack, only to become addicted to it, and end up, like the very suckers he sells to, wasted).

You walk away wondering if the ironies and contradictions inherent in such a plot are really beyond the grasp of the speaker, or if he's hard-selling you in hopes that you will not lay bare the holes in his scheme, because, really, he's just a guy trying to do what he's got to do to survive. —Kim Horne

#### "AN OLDER POET'S RESPONSE"

Among the responses of the younger poets, a sentence by Ammiel Alcalay—a defensive and offensive gesture on his part—resonates in multiple ways for me, more than anything else: "... an unwillingness to deal with narrative allows dominant narratives more space to function and take hold. Writers and intellectuals bear great responsibility for this ..."

One must acknowledge that major avant-garde ideas or styles of the twentieth century, surrealism, collage, Zen, on-the-edge-croticism—not to say anything of the deconstructive techniques of "innovative" poetics in the last twenty-five years—have become part of the vocabulary of modern advertising. Yoked to visual images, the anti-narrative techniques of modernism have become tools to create vignettes, narratives of persuasion. The true "poet craftsmen" of our time are not, as one might assume, the Iowa or any other poetic mainstream, but the advertising copy writers, Reagan's, Clinton's, Bush's speechwriters. This cooption is much more serious than and part and parcel of Allen Ginsberg's appearing in a Gap ad.

Historically, literature is a branch of rhetoric. In other words, persuasion is at the heart of literature, especially political poetry. When Ginsberg read "Howl" in front of a Bay Area audience, the narrative of a car trip across America, liberation through acid trips and sex, radical suspicion of government with CIA as its evil arm, were behind it.

When a poetics actively debunks narrative without reinventing it, it leaves fallow ground for hostile takeover. Can a political poetry have persuasion without an active narrative, if only implicit or in the process of being created?

Ron Silliman and Lyn Hejinian, two key language poets, claim that while their generation created a revolutionary poetry, the younger one has lost touch in its work with social conditions, and their critique. Ammiel Alcalay hints at the problems with such an assertion, saying even further that language poets' claims for revolutionary avant-garde actually silenced, de-legitimized political movements and poetic activities—in this country and abroad. Analyzed objectively, not only did that poetry lack persuasion, therefore was soft for cooption; but, in its innocent faith in the primacy of its literary achievement, actively silenced often through ignoring (the quintessential American way of censure) many other voices whose politics embodied overt, non-ironic narratives or unfashionable styles.

How are new forms, a rhetoric of persuasion possible? Are the powers of the spirit and propaganda inevitably split? Though seeded in the past, the

conditions today are very different from those of forty years ago, basically a quantum jump revealing its silhouette in the last ten years. Only its analysis—a re-arranged nexus of the political and individual unit—would make the activities and concerns of some of the younger poets comprehensible.

The American poet can no longer write as the citizen of a nation but an empire, a fact with endless implications. The narrative of crossing (the ocean or the country) is dead; replaced maybe by a mad pursuit in the seven seas. In globalism, as companies (cadres of executives and the government they elect) cross national lines, so do inevitably the disenfranchised interests and sympathies of the citizenry. The Unites States being the imperial capitalist power, American English—in its brutal, deceptive simplicity—has become the tool of political cooption. A haiku:

Bush Cheney Rice Powell  
Weapons Of Mass Deception.

(A poster in the march against the war in Iraq in New York; notice the disappearance of racial and sexual dichotomies.)

The American poet feels it in his/her bones that English is basically a foreign, alien medium (an Imperial language) s/he as a subject must use. In an empire every citizen is a circumference (an "elsewhere") of which the center is Kafka's Great Wall of China, so alien that the nature of the news changes—cooption—by the time it reaches the capital, and vice versa. Poetry (particularly political poetry) in our time must be a space where "I" and "elsewhere" are one; not a Rimbaud-like personal derangement of the senses, but a derangement of political space, where every consciousness is a circumference to an alien center—a poetry intensely local (subjective) and also intensely other. This is only possible by the creation of accents, which alters the imperial tongue through gashes, turning, as I said on another occasion, a stepmother tongue into a mother tongue.

How can accent (finally an intensely personal thing) gain persuasion, speak to, be the voice of elsewhere? The extension of accent is alien rhetorical, artistic forms—the *gazel*, *khasida*, *koshma*, the sinuousness of *eda*, *duende*, Brazilian soap, Bollywood lyric, rap—within the subjectivity of each that language sounds true, natural, replete with its narrative. How does an American poet speak to an Iraqi or Bangladeshi? Speaking in tongues, in the language of birds, ingesting, assimilating the cultural forms of Mars, denuding his/her own. Accent is repeated gashes by the weak into the stepmother tongue; not as an act of multi-culturalism but to turn Imperial English into a subjective tool, for the consciousness of the politically subject, for unheard melodies. At his best, Jordan Davis's poetry is a wounded language, at the edge of uselessness, letting go of Ashbery and all; Gary Sullivan's continuous blogs on Indian movies are acts of absorption. It is this gesture of the subjective towards the vast that Silliman and Hejinian seem to miss.

—Murat Nemet-Nejat

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Poetry Project will be hiring a new Program Coordinator. Job to begin in August. A full job description will be available in mid-April. Contact us by e-mail or snail-mail for details.

We're also looking for volunteers to help us catalogue the Poetry Project's documents archive. Experience with data-entry and Macintosh computers is required. We need this help immediately. Call us for details: 212-674-0910.

### GRANARY BOOKS EXHIBITION

The University of California/San Diego's Mandeville Special Collections Library will present a retrospective exhibition entitled "Publishing Granary's Books: A Conversation in the Margins" from April 26, 2003-June 27, 2003.

The exhibition will include all of Granary's books to date, 115 titles divided into eight categories: Collaborations, Anthologies, Poetry, Prose, Memorybooks, Typographic Works, Book Objects and Scholarly Publications. The show will bring attention to the role that a publisher can play as facilitator/collaborator in various book projects. To loosely paraphrase something our friend Johanna Drucker recently said: The physical book itself can be almost incidental; it is a freeze frame of a process that continues both backwards and forwards through time—the book as communal theater of experience and instrument for action. A matrix of ideas form around a book and this synergy is a profoundly collaborative process.

The exhibition's emphasis will be on the Collaborations, highlighting the nexus created by writer, artist, printer, binder, designer, editor and publisher. The limited edition books in this category will be displayed in eight vitrine tables distributed through the gallery space. Each book will be accompanied by an extensive selection of material from Granary's archive including: proofs, page spreads, drafts, mock-ups, e-mails and letters. The archival substance will be augmented by new/news reports from the various collaborators detailing the lives their books have gone on to have—updates on collaborations that may have come out of their Granary books, fan letters from readers, experiences that these books have gone on to bring into people's lives. The show will open on April 26th with a big-bash reception from 4:00-6:00 P.M. at The University of California Mandeville Special Collections Library, 9500 Gilman Drive, San Diego. Please look for an invite/poster from Granary Books on the exhibition, as well as, e-mail updates as the opening of the show grows closer. Or visit our website at [www.granarybooks.com](http://www.granarybooks.com) for more information.

Anne Waldman, introduced at St. Mark's Church as "dangerous times" as the continued: "If [the events of] categorized as absurdity, urgency for dissent, saying accountable by future beings?" Waldman closed logic atmosphere would and co-organizer and participant because we were disturbed discourse." In his opening "Who do I know that those lines to interested came into my head as pieces are accessible, ways to connect them

Alcalay continued Arabic ethnicity who insulted by jail guard then beaten badly in the holding facility to recommended that accounts, of which Alcalay went on to Saadi Yousef. One Haydari poem: "The Lincoln/ or give us the need for a modern American writers"

These ideas served as an approach Khoury's comment but also a person by the United States largely addressed. He compared state of present with military culture remarkable for garner sympathy. Obviously eliciting long-standing itself that it damned neither concerns: prob



MICHAEL MAHONEY

# POETRY IS NEWS: POETRY'S WAR ON WAR

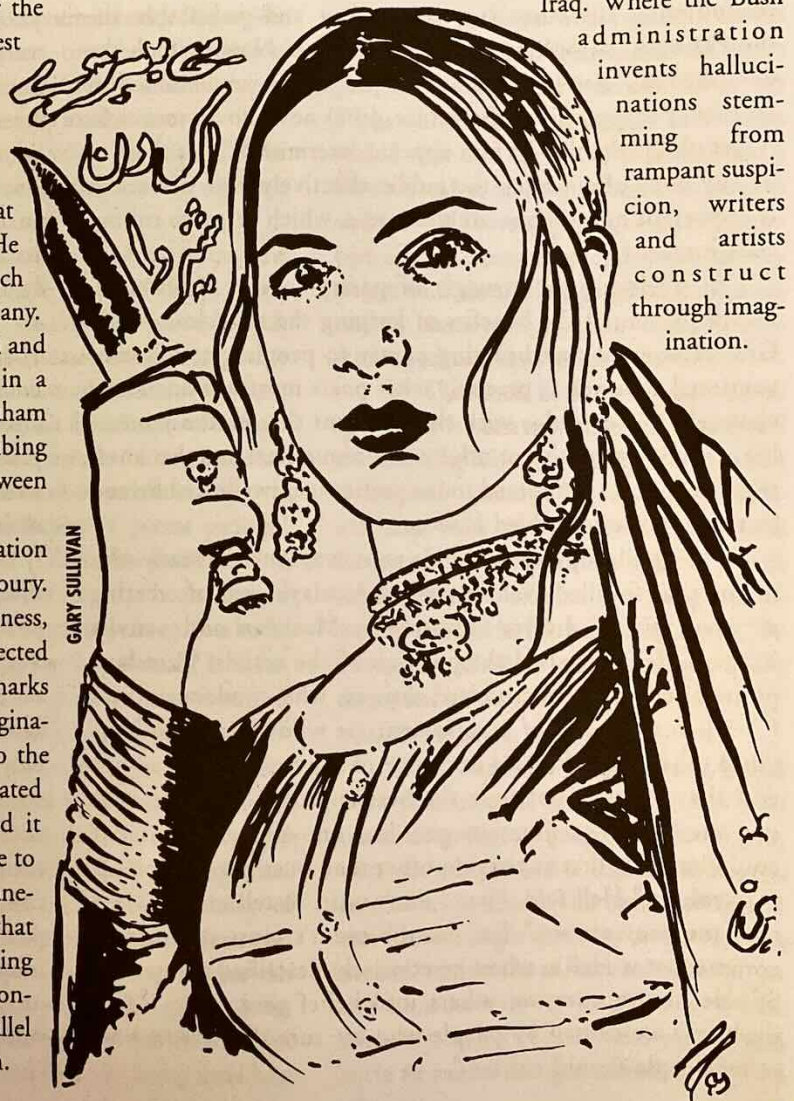
Anne Waldman, introducing the Poetry is News symposium held at St. Mark's Church on February 1, 2003 cited "grave and dangerous times" as the cause of this "investigative event." She continued: "If [the events of the times] weren't so scary, they could be categorized as absurdist." She went on to explain the humanistic urgency for dissent, saying, "We have to remember, we will be held accountable by future generations: 'Where were we as human beings?'" Waldman closed her remarks citing her hope that a dialogic atmosphere would be sustained from the event, saying she and co-organizer and poet Ammiel Alcalay "launched this coalition because we were disturbed by the on-again, off-again nature of this discourse." In his opening remarks, Alcalay reiterated this point. "Who do I know that isn't talking to each other? How can I get those lines to intersect?" The image of putting a puzzle together came into my head as he spoke: a situation in which all of the pieces are accessible, it's just a matter of figuring out the best ways to connect them.

Alcalay continued with an account of one student of Arabic ethnicity who was taken into custody, only to be insulted by jail guards (he was called a "fucking terrorist") then beaten badly enough to leave welts. Alcalay made clear that the holding facility that housed this atrocity is in Manhattan. He recommended that poets precede their future readings with such accounts, of which, he assured the audience, there are many. Alcalay went on to read work by Iraqi poets Buland al-Haydari and Saadi Yousef. One line that struck me in particular was in a Haydari poem: "Take Saddam Hussein/ and give us Abraham Lincoln/ or give us no one." He ended his reading by describing the need for a more constant and maintained discourse between American writers and those of the Arab world.

These ideas of solidarity and multi-faceted communication served as an appropriate segue for Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury. Khoury's comments were those of not only an objective witness, but also a person whose personal life has been profoundly affected by the United States' conduct in the Middle East. Khoury's remarks largely addressed the relationship between memory and imagination. He compared the Warsaw ghettos of World War II to the state of present-day Palestine, describing it as a place permeated with military checkpoints and devastating violence. I found it remarkable for a person affiliated with either Israel or Palestine to garner sympathy for his or her respective region while simultaneously eliciting empathy for the opposing region. So often in that long-standing war, either side gets so wrapped up in defending itself that it focuses on demonizing the other. Khoury condemned neither side of the matter, and doing so revealed parallel concerns: problems of memory and the power of imagination.

"Tyrants, fascists erase memory... they are the makers of forgetfulness." Khoury cited writers and poets as the ideal combatants of this, saying, "Literature incarnates the antidote to amnesia; memory is an active act to the future." He identified writers and artists as the couriers of imagination, saying they "enlarge human experience with their ability to imagine... they enlarge reality and give it new dimensions." He differentiated the creativity of the writer and the poet from the agenda of the ruler when he said, "Imagination has nothing to do with the hallucinations of tyrants." In the cyclone of single-minded rhetoric, selective perception, and fact-doctoring that the United States' war campaign has become, at the forefront of dissent both foreign and domestic is that many people, from civilians to political leaders, doubt the existence of what the Bush administration cites as the major reasons to attack

Iraq. Where the Bush administration invents hallucinations stemming from rampant suspicion, writers and artists construct through imagination.



With much of the media presenting these hallucinations of Foreign Evil and Domestic Righteousness as fact, the manner in which the poet engages with mass culture is vastly important. Gabrielle David, writer and founder/editor of *phar'itude*—a magazine featuring widely diverse, multi-cultural work—focused on the place of the poet in a media-infused, capitalistic society. “You can make more money flipping burgers than you can being a poet in America,” she said with complete seriousness. She spoke of her struggle to keep *phar'itude* going while trying to increase its readership. She was offered a buy-out (she didn't say who offered) which she declined, citing her belief that “multi-cultural” has become a catchphrase and saying she would rather be a prominent figure in a struggling publication than the symbolic figurehead of a successful one. Since denying this buy-out, she has filed bankruptcy. She believes that, in terms of America's expectations of poets, writing about the world at hand and writing what people want are not necessarily the same thing. What I gathered she was saying was that the struggle of the poet to engage the public may never rise above the struggle itself, but it is nonetheless of great importance. Her closing advice: “You have to think in a capitalistic way, without selling out, to get your stuff across.”

On the same panel was Alan Gilbert, poet, critic, and editor of *NYFA Quarterly*. He presented an alternative point to this issue: according to Gilbert, the main culprit behind the confounding discourse between poetry and politics is the increasingly complicated nature of the Now, which he described as, “Barely torn from the past at the same moment it erratically staggers into the future, (the) now moves so quickly, yet obliquely, that its blur appears determined.” For there to be any hope of engaging the public effectively, says Gilbert, it is important not to “emulate the media, which caters to ruling-class interests.”

In depicting the struggle of poetry in the mainstream, David promoted the benefits of keeping the two close, while Gilbert asserted that bringing poetry to people through conventional channels is precisely what poets must not do. These channels already bulge with slick content that evades remembrance; any subversive or otherwise unique elements that enter these channels are doomed to insignificance, swallowed by and lost within the scrambled Now.

This philosophical disagreement was one of many elements that fulfilled Waldman's and Alcalay's goal of creating an ideologically diverse atmosphere. Musician and activist Richard Hell addressed the position of the activist in today's political climate. He criticized activists who condemn others for a perceived lack of involvement, or who attempt to convince others that they are in charge of subversive proceedings and that theirs is not only the best approach, but the only option. “When a situation gets bad enough, an argument could be made that any action other than outright opposition is frivolous,” Hell said, “but I don't want to tell others when that moment arrives.” For me the event's most memorable comment was Hell's, when he concisely described the results of one person coercing others into belief or action: “Most problems are caused by people who are sure they know how other people should behave.”

Similarly, public school teacher Rachel McKeen's segment focused on military recruitment in NYC schools that are primarily attended by working-class minority students. She spoke briefly, then gave the floor to two high school students, 18-year-old Angelica Payano and 16-year-old Jesus Gonzalez. Payano exuded skepticism at the military's offers of “opportunity” in the form of financial aid to students who otherwise would be unable to afford higher education. She introduced an important question: since when was higher education accepted as an opportunity instead of a basic assurance? She described the aggressive, ambivalent methods recruiting officers enacted—first insulting students' intelligence, and then trying to convince the students that their country needs them. She speculated that this ambivalence is a confusion tactic, utilized to knock students off-kilter and hinder their abilities to make lucid decisions.

Gonzalez spoke briefly of his involvement in anti-war protests, and then brought up the crucial way race affects one's outlook on the currently approaching war. What, he wanted to know, is this war about, and who stands to benefit from its being fought? It's difficult to answer that question with true certainty; what's all but confirmed is that this war will not be fought to benefit the inner-city public high school students that military recruiters are so rigorously attempting to recruit.

Payano and Gonzalez gave voice not only to youthful skepticism, but also to the doubts harbored by people of varying ethnicities in the United States. The debate surrounding “the poor man fighting the rich man's war” has been on this country's radar, with varying intensities, for more than a century. The students' expression of their views not only reminded attendees that the issue of poetry's place in contemporary society is by no means the most pressing issues of the day; they expanded the discourse socially, racially, and economically.

This segment effectively encapsulated the premise of the Poetry is News Symposium—the need to create a discourse of consolidated, focused, and comprehensive dissent—and it also touched upon a prospect with a much greater capacity for promising cultural growth. The United States is a country with a staggering amount of diversity, be it ethnic, economic, or ideological, and very seldom do these differences positively intersect for more than a brief moment. Now, a wide and diverse range of American citizens stands united in a need for peace. I am 20 years old, and I've never seen this country in a state of such diversified agreement for such a sustained period of time. While our government is encouraging citizens to look outwards with fear, hostility, and superiority, it's all too easy and far too dangerous to forget to look inwards at ourselves as a nation, and marvel at the growing unity that exists there in opposition to the loss of human life. Americans are communicating, we are supporting peace together, and if we can recognize this and build from it, we can create a network, powerful in its inclusiveness and diversity, that would remain long after this shroud of self-righteousness, xenophobia, and utter pessimism has been removed from the United States of America.

## INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL BOUCHARD

**BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER:** We've met several times now, but most of what I know—or think I know—about you still comes from your book, *Diminutive Revolutions*: you worked on a garbage truck, are a birdwatcher—have been to Paris, passed through Philadelphia, live in Boston—are Euroamerican, have no particular religious commitments—do political work, collect books (but also underline them!), are circum-spect about family and lovers, more voluble about friends—have an unsentimental regard for nature, an open disregard for governments and landlords—read a lot of history, follow the news with suspicion, admire Olson and Silliman—eat fish, love dogs ... How accurate is that picture?

**DANIEL BOUCHARD:** I almost want to give a response similar to that of Kent in *King Lear*. "I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust: to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise, and says little; to fear judgment; to fight when I cannot choose." If you substitute "poetry" for "him" it's workable. Kent also added "and to eat no fish," which means he is telling *Lear* he's not Catholic. As part of my recovery from Catholicism (eight years under the nuns, one year under the brothers and priests) I eat cheesesteaks on Fridays, and all throughout Lent, for almost twenty years without the slightest twinge of guilt or remorse. Too much is missing from the picture to list, but it's the accuracy of the picture that's important, and the selection of details.

**BF:** Say a little more, then, about composition, "selection of details." Is accuracy the ultimate aim? That is: are your methods of selection in service to something that exists independent of the poem (call it reality)—or are "accuracy" and "composition" separate issues that you hope to link together?

**DB:** Accuracy is easy I think: you simply don't misrepresent any details you may choose to include. I treat my poems as I would a personal relationship; if you lie, brag, and act deceitfully, it will come back at you in a negative way. But it's also adherence to the idea that "sincerity" goes a long way in art. Pound says it, others too. Some of the most scathing criticism I can think of is being called insincere in your poems. There are different ways of saying it. This doesn't, or shouldn't, preclude a strong imagination. I've been reading a lot of Coleridge lately. I find his imaginative poems like "Sea Mariner" and diary-like poems

such as "Frost at Midnight" both very powerful and compelling in their own way. But things like the personal details you list are only one example. That there are any personal details in my poems at all is incidental to composition. Or perhaps another way to say that would be I sometimes begin writing a poem with something specific in mind and after many drafts may forget what it was: an image, idea, feeling, or response to something I had read or seen. Other times I write with nothing in mind; notes and fragments, bits. Where will it end up? The poems I like best in that book are those that were composed over a period of time, thru many drafts and revisions, as opposed to the "back from Paris" poem you allude to. Sometimes they were drawn from notebooks I keep, sometimes to form a collage or montage.

**BF:** So accuracy is, in effect, respect for the dignity of your craft. Yet it's clear from what you've told me that craft isn't an end in its own right. Respect for the poem is modeled on respect for friends, neighbors, coworkers. Perhaps you could say something about the link between poetry as craft and poetry as social action.

**DB:** Maybe it's where the sea meets the rocks. Experience, imagination. Is that what you mean by "social action"?

**BF:** Well, for starters, aren't you offering the poem as a "diminutive revolution"? In "A Private History of Books," you draw attention to the book as material fact: not the characteristics of a signature style, but the dollar value of an author's signature; not poetic influence, but the influence of landlord practices on bookstore rents. In this way, intellectual autobiography becomes materialist history.

**DB:** This collection of poems packaged under the label of "Diminutive Revolutions" is now part of my private history of books. I gave a copy of the book a couple of years ago to a book-binder I was taking a class from. Actually, in his various professions, he was much more: former air force test pilot, patent-holder of blood technologies, flight school owner, part-time city detective, and general eccentric. I was learning the repair of old and new books at a very basic level. Anyway, I gave him my book and he thumbed through it and honed immediately on "A Private History of Books." And he read it right in front of me even though he was in the middle of a conversation with some people in his shop and it really got him going. Like I said, he's a bit eccentric and the poem got him very excited and he started raving about how

he would print a broadside of the poem on an enormous sheet of paper and distribute it "as a warning to the booksellers." A very gratifying response from someone who, I'm pretty sure, doesn't read very much poetry. He lost all interest after he closed the book. Talk about diminutive.

**BF:** That's a great story. And it makes me want to ask about audience and response. I'll start with the former. Do you have a vivid sense of your readership? I suppose I should put that in the plural, since surely your work goes out to a variety of overlapping or mutually oblivious groups—friends, family, coworkers, fellow poets, fledgling writers, students, working class heroes, CEOs, bomb-sniffing dogs ... I'm only partly joking since an imagined audience can be as enabling (or debilitating?) as a real one.

**DB:** The idea of someone who picks up my book without knowing me does give me a thrill, though I can't imagine who they might be. And I would rather not know. What I would be curious to know is how they came across the book, which goes back to your idea of materialist history. But if you ask whether I can imagine an audience while I write then the answer is "sometimes." I have a friend in mind or strangers, to whom I obviously feel I have something to say, or they are born after the centennial of my death. It's best not even to think about it. I have a good idea who has read my poems up to this point because I have a speaking relationship with most of them.

**BF:** That would be the twenty-third century. But why is it best not to think of that future? I mean, setting aside the unpleasant prospect of death—and granting that it's unfashionably ambitious these days to have designs on the future—doesn't the possibility that your work might survive you enter into your thoughts while writing? Robert Heinlein has a novel, *Beyond This Horizon*, in which an engineer escapes into a future that his own work helped to create. Can you imagine having such a fantasy?

**DB:** I would like to have children, but it's pretty pointless to be concerned with how your distant descendants are going to turn out. You can worry, do things, found a religion, etc., but you have no say in it at all. That contradicts the fact that I have thought about my poems surviving me and being read by an interested posterity. Not that this is much on my mind. It's very obvious, to me anyway, that I am not writing for the present in the sense of feeling an immediacy to get my

work published and establish a reputation and career and get a good seat on the gravy train. But if there's hope for the survival of my poems, what can I say about influencing the future? I could not guess even vaguely about what this might mean. What if Whitman could visit us today? We could take him to the nearest Starbucks, show him what we're doing to Iraq. What would he think? Maybe he would be thrilled. What would Blake think? Most of the greatest women poets are still alive, so I won't mention their names; I'll read their work.

BF: Are you saying that a past poet's greatness is measurable by the fact that you want to know what he or she would think of our present world?

DB: It's not a measure of their greatness so much as a continuity of dialogue, one involving a good deal of fantasy, Heinlein's novel inverted. But that's a lot of what poetry is: listening to the dead speak and writing poems for unknown eyes.

BF: I asked you about audience and your perspective slowly shifted from that of author to that of reader. Is this humility? You seem comfortable talking about yourself as a writer when the focus is firmly fixed on the poem, less so when we situate the poem in a larger historical field. Does that seem accurate to you? And if so, why do you think that is?

DB: Reading and writing: this is yin and yang. The players are still on the historical field and we have the disadvantage of living.

BF: The black humor of that last phrase is so typical! In "Wrackline," for instance, you come close to saying that civilization is garbage—and yet the feeling of your poem is far from misanthropic. Are we living, as you suggest, in a "garden / grown with seeds gathered from wrecked ships"?

DB: In "Wrackline" I would want to say that civilization is compost more than garbage.

BF: Let me ask about another poem. In "Hesiod's Notebook" you say, "A critique of capitalism is not a blueprint for society." I take it, however, that you find such a blueprint necessary. Is this something poetry can provide?

DB: I don't think poetry can be a good blueprint nor a blueprint good poetry. Poets make better cartographers than engineers. Poetry can cover the range from stimulant to critique to ethics. Critiques are necessary. Disclosure: that particular sentence is Bertram Wolf's.

BF: Speaking of critiques: I'd like to ask about "In the Company of Good Dogs." Did you intend the poem as an allegory? It's one of your more forgiving.

DB: I didn't intend the poem as an allegory but by the time I was finishing it I was aware of the possibility of that reading. A satisfying coincidence. I wish I had placed more of the emotive, humanlike, expressions of their canine faces into the poem. One of my "more forgiving poems." This is

an ominous assessment. Am I too judgmental, as I confess in the poem?

BF: Not at all. But you are a moralist—this is one of the most appealing and most particular qualities of your work—and this implies both a strong sense of right and wrong, and a strong sense of your own authority in making the distinction. At the same time, your poems do not construct an image of you as outside the fray. You're part of the world you judge, and not as a neutral observer—let alone role model.

DB: No, I'm certainly not outside it and to construct a poem giving that impression would be a skewed picture to say the least. Being a part of "the fray" may constitute an emotional reaction to something.

BF: You have a recent poem for Juvenal ("Knives of the Poets") that gives a free reign to your very effective powers of vituperation. I gather your interest in satire is its truth-telling function. I ask because satire appeals to many these days for its ability to undermine all claims to authority, including the satirist's own.

DB: Juvenal is the first mole in that poem I take a whack at, but the poem is really, as Jennifer Moxley dedicated her first book, for "my contemporaries." If a reader finds my vituperation humorous AND thoughtful then I may have some effective satire. Satire is the art of evading bitterness in the face of things you despair over: hypocrisy, lies, greed.

BF: That description applies equally well to "Hesiod's Notebook": evading bitterness in the face of things you despair over. Yet the Hesiod and Juvenal poems are very different. How would you compare them? And why the classical tags?

DB: I use the authors as points of departure, "classical" because they are among the first in their fields, and also because they seem to allow more room for poetic imagination, poetic knowledge, in bouncing ideas around and off one another. "Hesiod's Notebook" is a compilation of notes, as the title suggests, and can be disparate in trying simply to make observations, leaving the reader to make the most significant connections; "Knives of the Poets" is more of a narrative along the lines of "The Lives of the Saints," with all the connotation of biography, trials, anguishes, and morality suggested. The lines here are deliberately sharper in their commentary. I cannot read Greek or Latin, but even in translation I find reading these antiquarian authors extremely enjoyable and useful. Pound was right about Tacitus.

BF: What did he say?

DB: Well after first saying that genius does not translate well from Latin to English he says as long you are writing poetry and not prose then Tacitus is good for stirring up your belief in compression and compactness. "The force of phrase, and of the single line."

BF: I'd like to go back to your comment about "Good Dogs." I proposed the poem as an allegory, and you accepted that, at least as a possibility of reading, but I find your own description, "a satisfying coincidence," more interesting insofar as it suggests that your methods of composition are more important for the poem than your intentions when it comes to generating meaning. Is that true? How much of what you write is planned out?

DB: I don't plan much but I revise a great deal. This is true especially of my shorter poems. Let's say I began writing "Good Dogs" simply by describing what was going on around me. Subsequent revisions reveal the very reading you describe, an allegory. However, I cannot imagine wanting to write an allegory never mind planning one. Frank O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter" keeps occurring to me while thinking about this. Hmm, sardines, very nice. But then the sardines are gone. One of the things I truly love about writing poetry is that I really do not know what's going to come out as I sit writing. I don't mean that in a clairvoyant sense of course. Once it's on paper I knew it was there all along. But the act of writing method if you like, often opens me in ways I didn't think possible.

BF: That would explain the ending of "Audubon Days," a delightful bit of hortatory wordplay that arrives seemingly out of the blue.

Exasperation is the gaseous bag we're stuck with and cannot properly pin stick. Exoneration is something Authority is careful for. Lynchpin is the excuse we use after forethought falls like a brick.

How did you get to this by way of Audubon?

DB: Audubon was simply my regimen while working that season. I had one of those one-a-day square calendars with birds on it. I typed on the back of them, filling one a day. What's important I think, to focus on your query of method, is the high gear you find yourself in after persisting in this type of thing for a certain amount of time. But I have no formulas for it. When it's working, like being in a good groove, it can work very well.

BF: Thinking of your poem "Pact," I once jokingly called you "the thinking man's Ron Silliman"—an unfair gibe at Ron that made you flinch. Behind the comment was a fairly simple observation: that your long poems have the tonal quality of Ron's, but seem to be strung together much more deliberately—seem to rely much less than Ron's on arbitrary juxtaposition.

DB: Well that's a fair response then because "Pact" is intended jokingly too. I once wrote a letter to Ron expressing admiration for his poetry and also

confessing that in my bungled attempts at imitating him I was coming up with some satisfactory poetry. I mean one could argue that Silliman is the thinking man's Bouchard for the very opposite reason of what you say. I could say I have failed to be less deliberate. I think I also wrote to Ron that his poetry reminded me of what would happen if you crossed the earlier poetry of Williams (*Spring and All*) with the long philosophical poems of Kenneth Rexroth (*The Phoenix and the Tortoise*), which is a way of putting things that doesn't make me flinch. I had just read *What* when this occurred to me, a book that is important to me.

BF: What other books have been important to you? No need to limit your response to poetry.

DB: So many, I thought I would list authors instead. But that would be too long also, so I will list ten books in no particular order: *The World, Its Streets, Places*, by Larry Eigner; *A Midwinter Day*, by Bernadette Mayer; *The Dragon and the Unicorn* by Kenneth Rexroth; *Nationalism and Culture* by Rudolph Rucker; *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* by Alexander Berkman; Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*; Joyce's *Ulysses*; Thoreau's *Journal* (slowly, slowly being brought out in toto by Princeton University Press); *The Sense Record* by Jennifer Moxley; and *Circadium* by Larry Price. That doesn't scratch the surface, as you can imagine but these are books that immediately come to mind as things I want to read time and time again or, in the case of Thoreau, maybe just twice if ever completely once. This is a recommendation list.

BF: It's hard not to take this list as a map of your sensibility. If I do, the central figure appears to be Thoreau, simply that he unifies the disparate themes and approaches of the other nine: poetic artifice, prosaic introspection, politics and nature, respect for the everyday, cognizance of history. What he lacks is humor and—a less obvious virtue—vulgarity.

DB: Thoreau actually has a lot of humor in his writing. *Cape Cod* is the best example, with humorous comments and asides upon the people and customs he comes across peppered throughout the narrative. He has a sardonic humor in other places too, as in the "Economy" chapter of *Walden* where he responds to his neighbor who derides vegetarianism. I'll quote it: "One farmer says to me, 'You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with'; and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle." I find this rip-roaringly funny.

BF: No question, he's sardonic—but rip-roaringly funny? He's certainly not a humorist like

Twain (one of your other ten figures). But your comment makes me see something else: the centrality of wit in your work. I myself think of wit as a self-historicizing form of intelligence—as something that embraces contingency and rejects universality as a matter of principle. Do you see something like this afoot in your own work?

DB: I do find him funny. You're right to call me on "rip-roaring." No, it's not that. And when you compare him to Twain he's not much in outright Laughter. However, something like the passage I quoted goes a long way in Thoreau. Vulgarity, it's true, is repressed, tho I've heard of an incident he wrote in his journal that only the new scholarly edition prints: he is in the woods and stumbles upon a particularly phallic mushroom. His sense of decency is affronted for the vulgarity of Nature as well as the deeper, "vulgar" response he feels in himself. Well, you can be a prude and still be a great writer.

BF: This winter you inaugurated a new magazine, *The Poker*. What was your inspiration? And how did you manage to get such good work from your contributors?

DB: I was inspired by the piles of like magazines I have, from *Kalchur* to *Sulfur*, that have left a mark. I think the community I care about needs such a venue. I did nothing special to elicit "good" work from contributors, I just asked people whose writing I believe in. And I said, don't send crap to me.

BF: You voted Green Party in the 2000. How do you feel about the end result?

DB: I have a feeling we ain't seen nothing yet. Since its first slithering into DC the current regime has been banging the war drum against Iraq, significantly louder than the last gang but they were hitting it too. That they will use 9/11 to speed up the rush to slaughter just shows how disgusting they really are. Only paid liars and idiots will deny it. How much will they get away with?

BF: This brings to mind your lines in "White Death This Exit":

A leader elected, steeped in oil, its politics,  
education, a polity, wanting severe, civility,  
*the education president*, schooled at Yale,  
he said of King Philip "we cannot

reward an aggressor" and gathered allies.  
potential allies, Xtian converts at Natick,  
praying Arabs. This is Increase Mather  
speaking: "it will not stand."

Why Increase Mather? What makes his voice appealing to you, or appealing to appropriate?

DB: Increase Mather because he presided as chief propagandist, or church leader if you will, of the major war with Native Americans in late-

17th-century New England. The voice itself of course is an American president, late summer 1990. I found the comparison of how these two leaders used their position as would-be moralists extremely interesting. The comparisons are limited, and limiting, but I wanted to write about people who are being killed today, unnecessarily, and by "my" government. So why not begin exactly where I am standing and explore what went on around here and see what I can learn.

BF: I thought the connection between Iraq and King Philip's war was the oil driving your tour of the battle sites, hence the title "White Death Next Exit." Is that too literal?

DB: It's not what I had in mind but it's out of my hands now. It's a bit one sided too. Many of the battle sites of three hundred years ago in New England are now pretty public parks. On the other side, today, are the spent radioactive munitions (made in America). In ten thousand years, let alone a few hundred, this metal will still be radioactive, deadly.

BF: This brings us back to the question of posterity, which we touched on earlier. What else will your future readers uncover? I'm thinking in particular of non-poetic writings. Do you keep a journal? Do you write a lot of letters? Do you save your email?

DB: Yes, yes, and yes. And I'm a pack rat in the extreme. I really enjoy reading other people's journals (i.e., published) and that's what inspired me to begin my own journal a few years ago. John Adams's journal was grand and tedious all at once; what else could represent a project spanning 60 or so years? But forget posterity for the moment. My journals have turned out to be extremely useful to me. I read back even only a couple of years and am taken by surprise at what I've forgotten. In this sense I've already turned out to be my own posterity.

BF: What about your next book? How much of it is written? Do you have a working title?

DB: It's just about finished. I have no title. I have no plans for it, so I'm not rushing anything.

BF: When we started this interview, I asked how you were surviving the war on terrorism. You said, "I'm going to get married. We plan to have children." Now you are married, and the war is about to spill over into Iraq: Are children on the way? And how are you surviving now?

DB: It's too obscene to talk about my own metaphorical survival with the inevitable non-survival of so many in the coming war. We demonstrate, we protest, and even if the actions have a slight impact in slowing the approach of war, ardently desired by a handful of people, the war still comes. Meanwhile poets or critics you admire say nothing you are doing matters anyway. I'm trying to keep my sanity together with my humanity.



# from AN INTERVIEW WITH LYTLE SHAW

GARY SULLIVAN: Reading your work over the last couple of years, I've noticed that, despite the impressive range of what I guess I'd call "formal approach," that a number of preoccupations do continue to make themselves manifest. The most compelling, for me, is your ongoing inquiry into what we might call "human geography"—emphasis on "human" (as opposed to "natural" geography, very little of which "purely" exists anymore). I want to start with three of your books, *Low Level Bureaucratic Structures: A Novel*, *Principles of the Emeryville Shellmound* and *Cable Factory 20*.

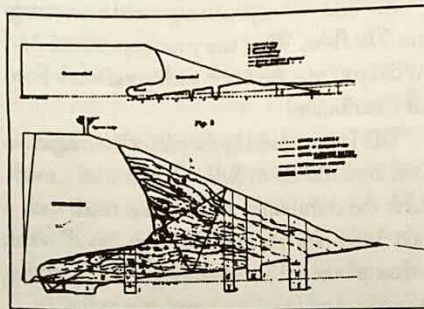
You've described *Low Level Bureaucratic Structures* in part as an attempt to re-occupy that space wherein one "learns to draw"—learns, let's say, the bureaucracy of various kinds of representational art (figurative drawing, mapping, schematic drawings, etc.). The book is laid out in panels, very much like a comic book, with "primitive" drawings of your own and pasted-in maps, photographs of architecture, etc. The language of the piece itself seems to come out, also, of a kind of consideration of the mind being shaped, fairly early on, by what I'd call the "given": one line that stands out in particular for me, "Or trade a disturbing piece of your lunch" ... which is funny, of course, but also really sent me back to that situation, of being a very young person, being both curious about and confronted with manifestations of the "bureaucratic" or "adult" world. I think one of the most palpable, disturbing early memories that I have is of my first lunch in a pre-school cafeteria, of various mostly undesirable "food"-stuffs, arranged in (or really slotted into) a kind of combination plate/tray.

Moving along to *Emeryville Shellmound*, we get the voice of an adult, doing a kind of Olsonian or at any rate more-or-less "from the hip" geographical inquiry. It ends with the paragraph:

*As I floated in this space the horizon flipped ninety degrees and light seemed to vanish accordingly. Sheets of mollusk names spun before my eyes. Small land animals—perhaps raccoons—broke shells and extracted food; a worn club functioned as a line break between conch*

*phrases. The mound's depth was an archive of expanding species knowledge, a generation's record of the name embalmed, and its height grew proportionally from there. It was in this angled position, then, that I discovered the now well known principles of mound construction that I reproduce below.*

And beneath that, of course, is a detailed technical drawing, presumably of the principles of mound construction:



It's an hilarious moment, and one where I'd say a kind of bureaucratic attention or focus makes itself palpably manifest: as though the book ends, on one level, in the consummation of space and bureaucracy.

This "question" is going on too long. I wanted to drag *Cable Factory 20* into this first question, but probably I should just hold off here, and we can move into that after. Anyway, what I'm getting at is what we briefly talked about a couple of months ago, of how I see you constantly coming back to these two realms: space and bureaucracy. I had also wanted to drag in earlier examples of poets working with these ideas, in particular d.a. levy and Daniel Davidson—though, again, maybe we can bring them up as this goes along further. For now, I'd be particularly interested in reading what you'd have to say about space and bureaucracy, how you're thinking about them as you put these books together, what sorts of discoveries you find yourself making about them as you continue to write ...

LYTLE SHAW: Gary, you notice a parallel between the 6-panel layout of the pages in *Low Level Bureaucratic Structures: A Novel* and

the school lunch plate. I hadn't thought of it in such a direct way, but I like the link: both operate as givens that structure what one is forced to internalize and be transformed by—the student drawer seeks to mimic the "mature," technological forms of the grown-up world (cars, airplanes, architecture) just as he swallows the grids of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and brown betty.

This parallel also highlights at least two senses of what a bureaucratic structure might be (an intentionally vague term): first, an abstract method or formula—a procedure that's followed in an office somewhere ... (where procedure itself is the goal); second, a literal thing—like, say, a white enamel cube by Sol LeWitt, or a six-part cartoon panel, or a plastic tray. So a conceptual and a concrete, material sense.

At first I was attracted to calling this book a novel because I thought of a low level bureaucratic structure as an absurdly extreme opposite of narrative—the inverse of the heroic, romanticized desire one encounters in much fiction. Bureaucracy frustrates desire, channeling it into horizontal loops lacking hierarchy and consequence, dissipating energy and interest. Insignificant, low level structures do this in the most mundane way possible, so that there's not even the drama of high-stakes failed desire—say, the crash of an unsuccessful romantic liaison, or the pathos of a genius losing his powers to dog race gambling, or heroin, in the milieu of 60s Manhattan, nineteenth century Paris—or in any loaded, beautiful context. Instead, one imagines depersonalized paper processing in a temporary trailer. Vast warehouse floors of new government issue protective glass booths for national DMVs arranged in long grids. Here, though, we're starting to get a little exciting (as the minimalists knew). But then again fiction can only work in time: for a novel to go on, something, of course, does have to block desire. So there's this other way in which fiction can't escape a bureaucratic component: the sending of a request, the waiting to see what will happen.

And this way that desire is waiting in fiction—necessarily diverted and delayed—

connects up with another sense that bureaucracy takes on in novels, especially the bildungsroman, the genre most about formation of subjects through education. In the classic examples, like Goethe, the bildungsroman narrative chronicles a process in which the wild, disruptive energies of youth get channeled into usable (more conservative) forms of sociality. Goethe then tries to generalize and moralize about this process, as though it should always happen. This is what's vaguely sinister, in a corporate training video sort of way, about Wilhelm Meister (and even about parts of the autobiography) especially in their relation to the storm and stress explosions of energy and desire of Werther. The "voice" in Low Level sort of came out of this problem, the omniscient instructional tone that gets filtered back onto youth, and onto one of its forms: the cartoon, a palpably visible narrative form designed, at least at times, for kids learning things adults want them to (much in the way that religious painting has done this historically). But there's a rough split between the voice we might associate with the drawings—clunkily trying to master the objects of the world—and the voice of Mastery speaking "down" to him (it's important that this subject is a male, coming to identify with cars and fashioning his bodily bearing after kung fu masters) as he goes about his apprentice work. There's this eager consciousness out to learn and reproduce the world and a masterful, older one telling it how to do so. But of course this pedagogical circuit gets derailed frequently, here, partly as a possibility latent in the graphic novel: the side associations and narratives that can always emerge from the emphatic particularity of drawn or copied objects. What do we make of this bad sketch of a 72 Chevy Impala? That solemn middle-part black belt demonstrating the punch block? And inasmuch as the (very poem-like) novel plays with these gaps between the images and their supposedly pedagogical commentaries, bureaucracy gets sort of held off. Kept back in the sense that bureaucracy here would mean the total triumph of Method over the particularities, the singularities, of a situation or view.

This hooks up with the problem you notice of the researcher's underwater reef epiphany immediately getting contained as a blurry graph at the conclusion of *Principles of the Emeryville Shellmound*. There's a chapter toward the end of *Walden* when

Thoreau, who's been living in his shed there now for almost two years and is about to leave, awakens one night troubled by an unanswered question that's somehow fundamental to the pond and to the his larger research project there. So he spends several days measuring the pond, very precisely, and eventually has this graphic epiphany, where he invents this Principle (very much like Poe or Goethe) that the pond, despite its radically irregular contour and almost uniform depth, is at its deepest in the exact, exact center.

The neatness of this Principle of course rewards Thoreau's hours (years) of empirical scrutiny—hanging out at the pond. It somehow converts all of this time spent noticing details (which god forbid he'd wasted in parallel, multiple or uncontained speculations), into an elegantly reduced System. Now I realize that scientists do make sudden breakthroughs, and I'm actually tired of a kind of bland, righteous postmodern attitude toward science in which all attempts at scientific systematicity are, a priori, oppressive constructions. And yet, I'm also in love with this problem that happens when the sciences are imported to literature (including literary criticism and theory) as a way to clean up after messy aesthetic speculation that might otherwise head off toward singularities. At the end of Principles, though, the self-contained clarity of the graph is not exactly clear—there is, instead, a disturbing proliferation of info: two sections cut through the mound with idealized geometrical diagrams superimposed; an animal list; statistics on the frequency of mound objects; two blow-ups of specimens presumably unearthed in the mound; and one blurry, word-covered pond diagram. This moment relies on some sense that we're supposed to know about these discoveries: as if the principles were canonical within the scientific community, and the piece is a kind of memoir, like Claude Lévi Strauss recalling a trip in Peru in which he came up with one of his most famous kinship models—whose graphs anthropologists (like ourselves) had seen reproduced thousands of times.

In the case of my book, however, it's important that the writer is—like Goethe, or Poe, or Thoreau, or some mild-mannered bureaucratic hobby scientist living in suburban California in the 60s, and performing experiments in his basement and research at the available local libraries—an amateur scientist. I'm interested in the figure of the ama-

teur: the one who comes to science through other fields, especially writing. Though he can't "claim expertise," he can, with faux humility, make his "small contributions known." In Goethe's case these started taking up considerable shelf space. This sort of accounts for the amateur tone of the first part of that book, even the generic science pamphlet look, with courier font and grainy, re-xeroxed reproductions.

Another feature I like about educational scientific writing in particular is the rhetorical problems it encounters when it wants to be practical. The moments when it addresses you as an average reader, snuggling its models up to your everyday desires and epistemological horizons: "Most of us are interested in the world around us." I think science writing invented this awkward form, intended as a "more democratic" universalism (saying "most" instead of "all"). But it conjures a weird remainder audience: the vegetal unconcerned; the others it hadn't quite meant to evoke. I remember a teacher in high school introducing topics with "Now most of you may or may not have heard of this."

But actually, the amateur researcher in Principles has just the opposite problem. Everyone he encounters wants to operate as a scientist: joggers try to work his ear about the tidal patterns; sports fishers lure him into seeing collections of fake specimens; older librarians, totally unprompted, moralize knee-jerk eco-aphorisms in his general direction. Being an aesthete with high standards of evidence and argumentation, these intrusions chap him. Which goes back to the horizontal loops characteristic of bureaucracy in a way, since what often gets idealized as "the archive"—the would-be frictionless space of research leading to Knowledge—actually winds up becoming a bizarre, over-populated social space with people (including the protagonist) acting out their pathologies, and projecting them into their work.

This place-based research—and the institutions, weirdos, generalized frictions—it encounters, might get us toward site-specificity, and how space, more basically, relates to bureaucracy. But that would pull us toward *Cable Factory 20*, so I'll cool out here for a minute.

*This is the first question and answer from a longer interview, conducted in 2001 by e-mail, originally planned for the now-defunct webzine Readme.*



# POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 2, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Harryette Mullen and Rod Smith**  
 Harryette Mullen is the author of six poetry books, most recently *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (University of California, 2002), which was nominated for a National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award. She teaches creative writing, American poetry, and African American literature at UCLA. Rod Smith is the author of *In Memory of My Theories* (O Books), *Protective Immediacy* (Roof), and *Music or Honesty* (forthcoming from Roof). He edits *Aerial* magazine, publishes Edge Books, & manages Bridge Street Books in Washington, DC.

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 4, FRIDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Fall Workshop Reading**  
 Participants from the four Fall Writing Workshops of Renee Gladman, Janet Hamill, Kristin Prevallet, and Anne Waldman, will read from their work. [10:00 p.m.]

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 7, MONDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Open Reading**  
 Sign-up begins at 7:45 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 9, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Kerouac Book of Haikus**  
 Hal Willner presents an evening of Jack Kerouac's *Book of Haikus* just out from Penguin. Willner has produced music for stage, film, television, and record. He has worked with Allen Ginsberg, Laurie Anderson, William Burroughs, Lou Reed, Dr. John, and Marianne Faithful, to name a few. Following in the tradition of Basho, Buson, Shiki, and other poets, Kerouac experimented with this centuries-old genre, taking it beyond strict syllable counts into what he believed was the form's essence. This volume has supplemented a core haiku manuscript from Kerouac's archives with a generous selection from both published and unpublished sources.

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 11, FRIDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Kristin Prevallet presents An Evening of Helen Adam Ballads**  
 Kristin Prevallet presents *Feel the Grue*: An evening of ballads by Helen Adam. Starring composer Reverend Al Carmine, playing piano and singing from his original score for Adam's *San Francisco's Burning*. With Lee Ann Brown, Eddie Berrigan, Nada Gordon, Wanda Phipps, Kristin Prevallet and other special guests singing their own renditions of Adam's ballads. Admission includes a discounted copy of *Feel the Grue*. Helen Adam's books that will be for sale. General admission \$10, \$2 Members, Festival Passholders free. [10:30 p.m.]

1992). Marianne Shanon is a fiction writer, poet and filmmaker living in Brooklyn, NY. Parts of her current novella-prose-poem *The Peckwood Theory* were featured in the most recent issue of *Suare* and "An Ornithology of War" can be found in the current issue of the *Beehive Hypertextual Literary Journal*. <http://beehive.temporalimage.com>.

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **MAY 21, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Dael Orlandersmith and Willie Perdermo**  
 Dael Orlandersmith won an OBIE Award for *Beauty's Daughter*, which she wrote and starred in at American Place Theatre. Dael has toured extensively with the Nuyorican Poets Café throughout the U.S., Europe and Australia. Vintage Books recently published a collection of her plays and she is currently finishing her first novel. A recipient of The Helen Merrill Emerging Playwrights Award, this year, she was a Pulitzer Prize Award finalist for *Yellowman*. Willie Perdermo is the author of *Where A Nickel Costs A Dime* (Norton, 1996) and *Postcards of El Barrio* (Isa Negra Press, 2002). His work has been included in several anthologies including *Poems of New York* (Everyman's Library Pocket Poets/Knopf, 2002).

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **MAY 26, MONDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Second Poetry Project 24 Hour Play Festival**  
 Here it is Again. Last year it was a blast. The process begins at 10:00 p.m. the night before the show, when a group of about fifty writers, directors, actors and musicians gather. After everyone has been briefed, the writers are left alone to each compose a ten-minute play. At 7:00 a.m., the directors return, read the plays, make their bids, and begin casting. The actors arrive at 8:00 a.m., meet with their respective writer/director teams and begin rehearsals promptly at 9:00 a.m. At 8:00 p.m., ink barely dry, the new plays are performed for a live audience. Featuring writers: Brendan Lorber, Anna Moschovakis, Matvei Yankelevich, Edwin Torres, Betsy Andrews and Cheryl B.

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **MAY 28, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Keith Abbott and Maureen Owen**  
 Keith Abbott is the author of *Downstream From Trout Fishing In America*, a memoir of Richard Brautigan, published to much acclaim in 1989 (French edition, 1991) and several short story collections. His novels include *Gush*, *Rhino Ritz*, *River and Monkeys of Mountain*. A ten year retrospective, *Common Zens*, and a solo show of Abbott's new art, *Steve Madaleno's* *After the Rain* will be featured at the event. Maureen Owen is the author of nine poetry titles, the most recent of which are *American Rush: Selected Poems* from Talisman House



BRENDAN LORBER

◆ ★ ☆ ☉ ★ **APRIL 30, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ☉ ☆ ★ ☆ ◆  
**Barbara Guest and Elaine Equi**  
 Barbara Guest has published 26 books, 23 of them volumes of poetry. Her titles include *The Confetti Trees* (Sun & Moon Press, 1999), *Rocks on a Platter: Notes on Literature* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), *Forces of Imagination: Selected Literary Essays* (Kelsey St. Press, 2003), a novel, *Seeking Air* (1996) and the biography *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (1984). In 1999 she was awarded the Robert Frost Medal for Distinguished Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Society of America. Elaine Equi's newest collection of poems is *The Cloud of Knowable Things* from Coffee House Press. Other books include *Surprise Mountain*, *Deep*, and *Love, China*. Equi won the San Francisco State Poetry Award.



presenters ree the Grue: An evening of ballads by Helen Adam. Starting composer Reverend Al Carmines, playing piano and singing from his original score for Adam's *San Francisco's Burning*. With Lee Ann Brown, Eddie Berrigan, Nada Gordon, Wanda Phipps, Kristin Prevaller and other special guests singing their own renditions of Adam's ballads. Admission includes a discounted coupon for copies of Helen Adam's books that will be for sale. General admission \$10, \$5 Members, Festival Passholders free. [10:30 P.m.]

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **APRIL 21, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Thomas Fink and Robert Mittenhal**

A Professor of English at the City University of New York-LaGuardia, Thomas Fink is the author of *Gossip: A Book of Poems* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2001), *Surprise Visit* (poems, Domestic Press, 1993), *A Different Sense of Power: Problems of Community in Late-Twentieth-Century U.S. Poetry* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), and *The Poetry of David Shapiro* (FDUP, 1993). Also a painter, his works hang in several collections. Robert Mittenhal is a Seattle-based poet and critic. He is author of *Marry Economy* (Sprang Texts) and *Ready Terms* (Tsunami Editions). He is a curator of the Subtext reading series at Hugo House.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **APRIL 23, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**An Evening of Rudy Burckhardt Films**

This special program of Burckhardt films will focus on his collaborations with poets, featuring readings and appearances by Edwin Denby, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett, and others. During the course of his career he made over 100 films, continually photographing and filming his friends—including many New York School artists—as well as myriad views of his adopted city. His films and photographs of distinctive New York cityscapes and escapades complete a picture of the city that these artists lived and worked in.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **APRIL 25, FRIDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**republic**

*republic* is a sonic vision of the darker side of America. Using fragments of personal confessions and private rants mined from the internet, Joe Diebes creates refrains and patterns that emerge with a dysfunctional logic that is more kaleidoscopic than linear. His works converge around the categories of concert music, sound installation, and conceptual art. Recent works include the opera, *Strange Birds*, and *presence*, a sixteen channel music installation for a phantom chamber orchestra. [10:30 P.m.]

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **APRIL 28, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Mariana Ruiz Fimat and Chris Martin**

Mariana Ruiz Fimat is originally from Southern California. Her poems have appeared in *Tool* ([toolmagazine.com](http://toolmagazine.com)), *6x6*, and *Poep*. Chris Martin is the co-editor of *Puppy Flowers*, an online journal, and Bench Press Books. A collaboration with kari edwards, *Gross Exaggerations*, has been published as an ebook by Xpress. A book of love poems co-authored by Caroline Miller, *This Is Going to Be a Long Courtship*, will be published by singlepress in 2003.

University Press, 1999), *Notes on Literature* (Westleyan Essays (Kelsey St. Press, 2003), a novel, *Seeking Air* (1996) and the biography *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (1984). In 1999 she was awarded the Robert Frost Medal for Distinguished Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Society of America. Elaine Equi's newest collection of poems is *The Cloud of Knowable Things* from Coffee House Press. Other books include *Surface Tension, Decey*, and *Voice-Over* which won the San Francisco State Poetry Award.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 5, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Open Reading**  
Sign-up begins at 7:45 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 7, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Carla Harryman and Ann Lauterbach**

Carla Harryman is the author of eleven books of poetry, prose plays, and essays. Her two experimental novels, *Gardener of Stars* (2002) and *The Words: after Carl Sandburg's Rootabaga Stories and Jean-Paul Sartre* (1999) are "explorations of the paradise and wastelands of utopian desire." She has collaborated with a number of visual artists and composers. Ann Lauterbach's first book, *Many Times, But Then, was published* in 1979 (Texas). She has since published *Before Recollection* (Princeton 1987), *Clamor* (1991), *And For Example* (1994), *On A Stair* (1997), and *If in Time, Selected Poems 1975-2000*, published in April 2001, all from Penguin.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 12, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Mary Ann Samyn and Jacqueline Waters**

Mary Ann Samyn is the author of *Rooms by the Sea, Captivity Narrative*, and *Inside the Yellow Dress*. Her poems have appeared in *Denver Quarterly, Verse, The Ohio Review* and elsewhere. She lives in West Virginia. Jacqueline Waters' book, *A Minute Without Danger*, was published by Adventures in Poetry in September 2001. More recent poems have appeared in *6x6* and *Boston Review*, with work forthcoming in *Insurance*.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 14, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Bob Perelman and Francie Shaw**

Francie Shaw and Bob Perelman are married and live in Philadelphia, where she is an artist and he teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. Shaw has exhibited her work in Philadelphia, San Francisco and New York; taken part in multimedia collaborations with Perelman and musician Larry Ochs; and created the cover art for books by numerous poets, including Lyn Hejinian, David Bromige, and Robert Grenier. Perelman is the author of numerous books of poems, most recently *Ten to One*, two critical books, and has edited two collections of poets' talks and *Hills* magazine. *Playing Bodies*, their painting-poem collaboration is forthcoming from Granary Books.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 19, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Stephen Paul Miller and Marianne Shaneen**

Stephen Paul Miller is the author of *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Duke University Press, 1999) and two books of poems, *That Man Who Grounded Months into Film* (New Observations, 1982) and *Art Is Boring for the Same Reason We Stayed in Vietnam* (Domestic,

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 28, WEDNESDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Keith Abbott and Maureen Owen**

Keith Abbott is the author of *Downstream From Trout Fishing in America*, a memoir of Richard Braugan, published to much acclaim in 1989 (French edition, 1991) and several short story collections. His novels include *Gush, Rhino Ritz, Racer, and Mondcaai of Monter*. A ten year retrospective, *Common Zens*, and a solo show of Abbott's new art, *Sweet Nothings*, appeared in 2002. A catalogue of brush paintings, *In The Ink of An Eye*, was published by Critical Edge Gallery. Maureen Owen is the author of nine poetry titles, the most recent of which are *American Rubi: Selected Poems*, from Talisman House (a finalist for the L.A. Times Book Prize), *Imaginary Income*, Hanging Loose Press, and *Unmapped Maps*, Potes & Potes Press. Her work has been included in several anthologies including *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing By Women*, from Talisman, edited by Mary Margaret Sloan. Her title *Amelia Earhart* received a Before Columbus American Book Award for Poetry.

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **MAY 30, FRIDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Fence Magazine Book Party**

A *Fence Magazine* Book Party and Reading for 2003 Publications. Fence authors Anthony McCann, *Father of Noise*, Martin Cortess-Smith, *Nois*; Elizabeth Robinson, *Approach*; and Brian Young, who has a new book of poems forthcoming from the University of Nevada Press, will be reading from their work. Elizabeth Robinson is the author of *In the Sequence of Falling Things, Bed of Lists, House Made of Silver, Harrow*, and *Pure Desert*, winner of the 2001 National Poetry Series. *Approach* won the 2002 Fence Modern Poets Prize. She co-edits EtherDome Press, *26 Magazines*, and Instance Press. Martin Cortess-Smith was born and raised in Worcestershire, England. He lives in Boise with his wife and son, and spends his summers in London wandering around. His books include *Of Picoator* (University of Georgia Press) and *Complete Travels* (West House Books, Sheffield, England). Anthony McCann is a poet by day and an English as a Second Language teacher by night. He lives and works in Brooklyn and, having been born in September of 1969, is currently, according to his students, completing his "christ year." He will be reading from *Father of Noise*, his first full length collection of poems. Brian Young is the author of *The Full Night Still in The Street Water* (University of Nevada Press). He is the recipient of fellowships from the Arizona Commission of The Arts, Iowa Writers Workshop, and the NEA. He teaches at University of Iowa and has taught at the University of Utah. [9:30]

◆ ★ ☆ ◎ ★ **JUNE 2, MONDAY** ☆ ◎ ☆ ★ ◆  
**Spring Workshop Reading**

Participants from the three Spring Writing Workshops of Jordan Davis, Sharon Mesmer, and David Henderson will read from their work.

**THE POETRY PROJECT is at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, 131 East 10th Street, New York, NY 10003. All events are \$10.00, \$7.00 for seniors and students, \$5.00 for members and begin at 8:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For formation call 212-674-0910.**

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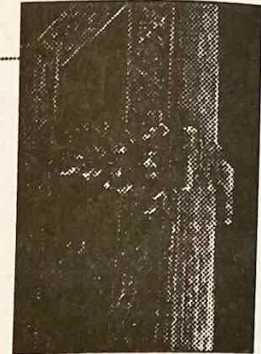
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# REVIEWS

**HIP LOGIC**  
Terrance Hayes  
Penguin, 2002, \$16

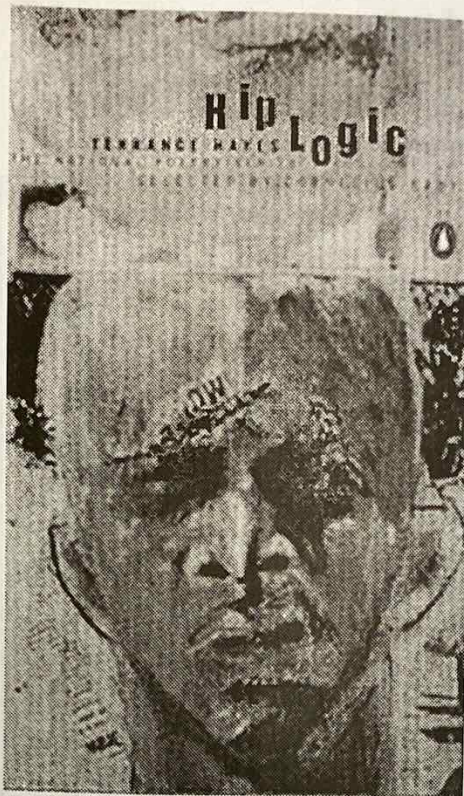
Poet Terrance Hayes is a Generation X byproduct. And his second book, *Hip Logic* (A 2002 National Poetry Series Open Competition Award Recipient), is informed as much by high art as it is by hip-hop. Throughout *Hip Logic's* five sections, Hayes effortlessly crafts free-verse and formal poems. His keen ear and eye are both cerebral and sensuous. His tone is at turns witty, tender, and absurd. Reading *Hip Logic* is like watching a decathlon athlete take first or second place in EVERY event.

The book's initial section, "At the First Clear Word" (the title of a sexually-charged Dadaist painting by Max Ernst), explores the urgency inherent in an urban African-American male's experiences. The first poem, "Emcee," swaggers through a hip-hop concert. The homoerotic nuance of "Touch" skillfully demonstrates how, while playing touch football, an inner-city youth's innocence can be compromised by the police.

Sections Two and Four are populated by Hayes' poetic take on anagrams. These poems inhabit quirky settings. In "Toenails," shoes are described as "dark nests." In "Nuclear," he depicts the final "flash" as "an ulcer/ burning in G-d's guts." For Hayes, these anagrams represent an exciting departure, because his first book, *Muscular Music* (1999), relied more on personal narrative. Here, Hayes' inventive anagrams allow his already mercurial imagination to display its associative powers.

A plangent tone permeates sections One, Three and Five. Poet Larry Levis' irrefutable ache, and discursive strategies, show up in these sections as well. But Hayes' discursions are more economically rendered.

Although this book hums with an elegant lust, Hayes' poems are a slow dance between longing and logic. He balances these tendencies through his magic real, and surreal, impulses and his singular, attention to imagery. Desire's the rickety bridge Hayes constantly traverses: "Autumn"'s yearning for lost youth; "Sleeping Woman"'s need for intimacy, where he recognizes—"I am only as blessed/ as a man bound to his desire" and



"Alter Call"'s plea for spiritual union.

Fathers—real, imagined, and artistic—dominate much of the work. In poems like "Friday," Hayes possesses a keen sense of the artist as simultaneously *a part of*, and *apart from*. In both "Careless" and "Autumn," Hayes niftily takes this duality even further. He writes as a poet who exists outside himself. In "Autumn," Hayes addresses his adolescent self—whom he encounters while dreaming—in the second person.

Not merely occurring in Hayes' poems about the divided self, dream sequences are peppered throughout the book.

In *Hip's* third section, "Conjure," Hayes writes about high cultural icons such as Paul Robeson, Dangerfield Newby (who was killed in John Brown's Harper's Ferry Raid) or visual artists like William Johnson and Diego Rivera. In this same part, Hayes constructs a dreamy, prismatic suite inspired by Winslow Homer's painting "Gulf Stream." Here, Hayes' shifting view points are mythic and sinuous, horrific and undulating.

Hayes' dialogue with Winslow Homer's work reflects his interest in engaging males who are part of both the dominant, as well as the African-American, culture.

Hayes both conjures and engages in a literary dialogue with two African-American

poetic forefathers. In the third section, Hayes pens a sonnet, "For Robert Hayden," in which Hayes boldly interrogates Hayden's masterful tribute to his father, "Those Winter Sundays."

By entitling a poem "Mother to Son," Hayes goes toe-to-toe with Langston Hughes and his cautionary classic of the same name. But whereas Hughes' mother is an older, respectable woman encouraging a young man to persevere, Hayes' "mom" recounts to her "son"—in a free-spirited manner—the passionate encounters that led to his birth. With images like, "his fingers turned my nipples until the music eased out of me," Hayes' "Mother to Son" is unabashedly poignant.

Comparable to his first book *Muscular Music*, Hayes navigates between high cultural characters, like Hughes, and mass media icons. Hayes brings Shaft back—this time needing new shoes. In "Muscular," Hayes coveted Shaft's afro. But Hayes also enlists Mr. T and Big Bird—the yellow fellow visits a shrink—for side-splitting tragicomic effect and to satirize the human condition.

Sometimes Hayes' humor and imaginative powers work against him. "Butter's" litany of questions feels overwritten. During "Touch," when he writes: "of our crimes blackness was the first," he overstates the obvious. And poems such as "Ars Poetica 789," "Butter" and "Heartthrob" might elicit chuckles, but, regrettably, they veil Hayes' personal pain, too. "Ars Poetica 789" depicts a child improbably discussing the numerous fathers who live with him. "Butter" reads like a sublimation of Hayes' own sexual frustrations. Similarly, the unique sestina, "Heartthrob" finds a mother and her son stranded on a highway. The son imagines cowboys rescuing him and his mom.

These works read as if Hayes' life story were simmering beneath their surfaces. But Hayes distances himself by hiding behind his fanciful strategies.

Comparable to "Heartthrob," the setting for *Hip's* provocative final offering, "The Same City" (a tribute to men who love and raise children who are not biologically theirs), is a broken-down vehicle on a road. But why does "The Same City" run circles around "Heartthrob"? Because the narrative, and Hayes' honesty, are undeniable. Hayes' final

# New Books from Hanging Loose Press

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couplet—which recounts when his stepfather adopted him—is deceptively straightforward, yet full of impact: “if you ever tell my story, / say that was the year I was born.”

Ultimately, *Hip Logic* is as much about being African-American, and “hip,” as it is about a body’s sensual logic. These scintillating poems are prayers whose hands are firmly clasped around a reader’s head. These poems assure that a person can utter the question, “see what I mean?” and not feel that a half-hearted head nod is the only response. Like Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*, Hayes’ *Hip Logic* slyly insists that we shouldn’t quibble over answers, but savor every question’s messy ecstasy. There’s a richness here and as deep as you want to go is as deep as it will take you.

—David Mills

MS  
Michael Magee  
Spuyten Duyvil, 2003

In a coincidence remarkable only for its aptness, my copy of *MS* arrived the morning after the U.S. Federal Court for the 9th Circuit struck down the “under god” parenthesis of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Readers of Magee’s *Morning Constitutional* (Handwritten Press, 2001) will remember his satire, “Pledge,” which rewrites America’s patriotic script via homophones that owe something to Stein, more to Harryette Mullen, but which outdo both in their forensic verve: “I panned a neat myth/ today’s rags/ ugly unified fates never heard a ya.” *MS* picks up where its younger brother left off, and then some. These poems are comic in the fullest sense: full of irony and bile, wit and empathy. Where *Morning Constitutional* affirmed Heather Fuller’s sense that Magee’s poems show how “words collide when worlds do,” *MS* is nothing less than a lexisitential pile-up: a party-line to an “emergency anglo-phone.”

You’ll pick up the “emergency anglo-phone” in “A Case of Nerves.” A longer quotation gives a taste of *MS*’s trademark rhythmic edginess. Here, “nerves” is not a state of mind but the mark of a consciousness at dis-ease with its physical “host.” The nervous case feels “a flutterback in the rib, the/ skull skulling” and the mind gives

way to breath:

briefing the candles, the mouth bothers  
gives out, takes  
in the  
equilibrrious sticks  
bone rattle

The “rattle” of the thinking body looms large in these poems. Magee is too canny to assert the sameness of soma and psyche; but meat and mind won’t stay apart. We see this in “AUT(O IMM)UmN(E),” a poem that mixes New England autumnal reverie with HIV nightmare. Here, “october afternoons” and “the macabre body” share one line, separated by a caesura that’s alternately mighty and insubstantial. The Creeley-esque opening to “Body of Thought” puts it best: “you and your/ dirty mind or/ me and mine/ where does it/ end?” In *MS* such questions are more than rhetorical. The mind, like meaning, is rooted but elsewhere: “the singular valence polyvalent in time.”

This last line comes from “Same

Difference,” a poem which asks “how do you figure/ between/be twin”? A good follower of Freud in this, if little else, Magee’s puns make sameness of difference, as in “Spring & Some”’s implicit riposte to Ireland’s Nobel Laureate: “dig my snug pen/ (that’s/ penis, Seamus).” But lest you think these poems just one more addition to the canon of smug liberal postmodernism, I should note that the political imagination of *MS* is far from Utopian. With punning sameness comes racial difference and economic blight—for while the idiolectical range of Magee’s language is gleefully various, various too are the traces of America’s gutters, gridlocks, and no-go-zones:

Is History “a fable agreed upon”  
or a grumble peed upon

a rumble

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Race above all provides the political unconscious of *MS*, especially in its middle sections, "Black Irish: A Grainy American Dream" and "Same Difference." And race is tricky ground, as Magee's mock-violent adaptation from Henry Louis Gates' theory of Afro-American "Signifyin'" suggests. The danger is that poems such as these, striving for a heady mix of "Contingency, Irony and Solidarity," end up committed to contingency and irony, but offer solidarity in name alone. And what's the answer to this problem? How to square this pun-drunk aporia, where "we have ourselves/ surrounded," demanding that "we" "come out/ w/ our hands where/ we can see em?" It's a question that bothers Magee, whose *MS* gets its defense in first via Charles Bernstein's perennial communication-thrumiscommunication formula: "This is the difference between blues and despair." But *MS*'s biggest irony is that it outdoes its prophylactic epigraph: a feat that has more to do with attitude than theory. Amid all the undoubted wit and indignation of Magee's poetry, one finds an attractive and unglumly resignation to the violence of everyday life—a life "where the earth is wound [...] red in the face" ("Hat's Noodle") and one must never try to "live up" to one's subject:

and there ain't room in heaven  
no there ain't room in heaven  
no there ain't room in heaven for us  
("Political Song, Confused Voicing")

Readers of *MS*, come "meet your accomplice."  
—Matthew Hart

SOME MANTIC DAEMONS  
Garrett Kalleberg  
Futurepoem Books, 2002

You'd better look out for poet Garrett Kalleberg and his *Some Mantic Daemons*. Kalleberg has a micro-telescopic lens that can see the smallest possible 3-D space and with just a click can adjust to see the entire universe over all time. Kalleberg sees the feet of protozoa and then (click) a worm and

then (click) a world-sized force in the universe and then (click) imminence itself, larger than the universe. Kalleberg uses the most down-and-dirty science, religion, psychology, mathematics and metaphysics—from Molech to Bataille to those gross little worm-feet—as a way to investigate existence. This kind of sight leads to a desperate, ecstatic awareness that everything is real and nothing is true and also the opposite. *Some Mantic Daemons* is downright joyful in its sharp, ecstatic rage. If you've ever acted as if you were an individual while all the time desperately denying a deep understanding that this is impossible, watch it: Kalleberg will call you out.

The multiple readings of the title hint at the scope of the poems. On the one hand, the poems have some mantic daemons: divining voices that are part human, part god. From the very first poem, the speaker is aware that life is an illusion: "the life of the organism ... [is] never quite here/ also/ senseless and brutal and without/ meaning, purpose, or positive effect ..." So, too, perception is "a theater of tricks" as the poem "Mimetic Errors" suggests. If life and perception are tricks, what are we? A collection of daemons called up: "I'm one self and many daemons and like you/I avert my eyes." ("Absent While Present") Daemons,

voices called up by corporeal life and existing beyond it, are everywhere: in the blood, brain, identity, the stars. Daemons prophesy perception, recollection and existence.

But what are these daemons, exactly? The pun in the title—semantic—allows that daemons are language and meaning. Language is a collection of daemons busy making up existence. On one hand, to write is to copy what exists, tracing existence with a stylus and cantilever ("Strings in an Empty Container"). On the other hand, language is as real as anything: "This poem is its own law/and supercedes all other laws./ Eclipses can be explained by it ..." ("Stay With Me") Language, as an imperfect copy of perception, gives birth to semantic daemons that in turn create meaning that is, itself, all of creation. Nevertheless, these daemons know that language is both real and not all there is. "Logos, the relata:/ what inheres between two things; there is another system beyond this system" ("Dangling Pointers").

On the other hand, semantics may not be deities at all, silly, but daemons in the computer-sense: prophetic programs that are not invoked explicitly, but are dormant until the condition occurs for them to leap into action. In "To Fly Through a Pipe," for example, it's an algorithm that turns a CT scan of muscle (the stuff of life) into a wild

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**Sparrow's** poetry and writing has been widely published including *The Village Voice*, and the *New York Observer*. He was featured in the PBS documentary *The United States of Poetry* and the HBO film *Best Man*. His books include *Republican Like Me: A True Diary of My Presidential Campaign*, and *Yes, You ARE A Revolutionary!* in addition to two chapbooks, *Test Drive* and *Wild Wives*. He has run for president three times, with the Pajama Party, the Real Republican Party and the Ear of Corn Party.



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microscopic flight. This reading of daemon as computer program is most explicit in the poem "Execution Errors," where the language of programming—syntax and logic errors—is used to explain perception and fate:

In everything, the one irreducible execution, logic or syntax

error. A critical irony, as when we find ourselves on a path we did not ask for, along an arc we cannot correct within a trajectory we cannot prevent once the perception is initiated ..."

Semantics arise like a program when called into action by logos—though sometimes the semantics are faulty and cause us to understand things all whacked.

My own favorite (mis)reading of the title is "some manic demons"—creative devils in a frenzy—which is hard to ignore as a

force in the poems. In "Seed Pearl": "Perhaps this mood will pass./ Perhaps this mood will fold, double over, convulse/uncontrollably ... become separated from the body/ and fall flat down before them/by a natural transposition/ in an ecstasy of despair." Crazy mood! The poems are delightfully wicked in parts, as in "Spinoza & Co." where the speaker lobotomizes himself in a torturous interrogation about his own belief in God. Or painfully manic, as when Georges Bataille appears in underpants, sobbing, in "Stay With Me."

If you're not squeamish about things like a rat king—a circle of rats with their tails knotted together—there's a lot to meditate on here. In *Some Mantic Daemons*, Kalleberg invites readers into the fury and offers up his atomic microscope so they can see first hand the "vats of blood & honey" and "holy spittle" of what we call existence.

—Jen Coleman

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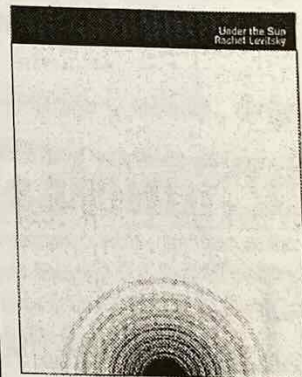


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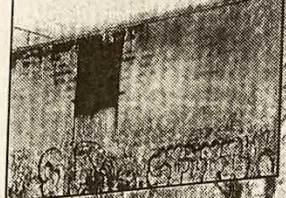
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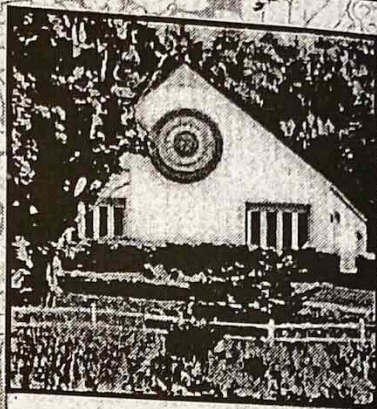
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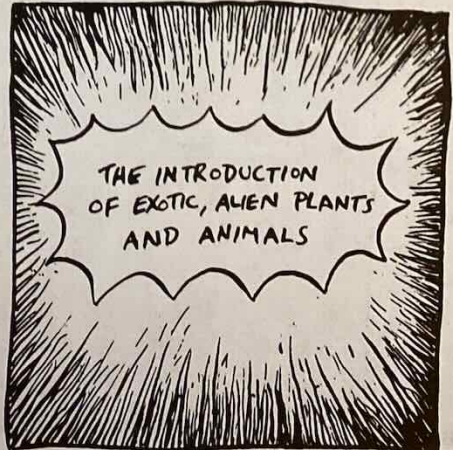
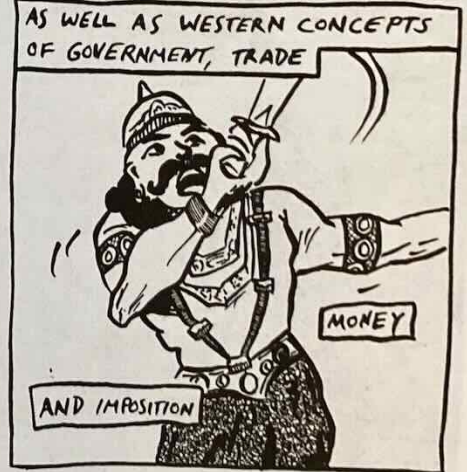
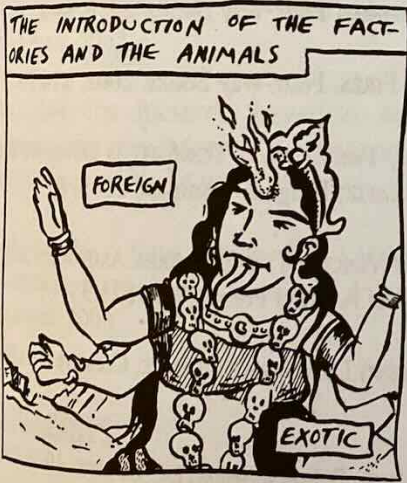
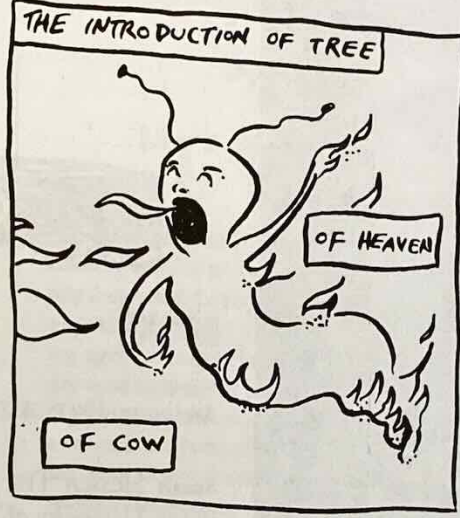
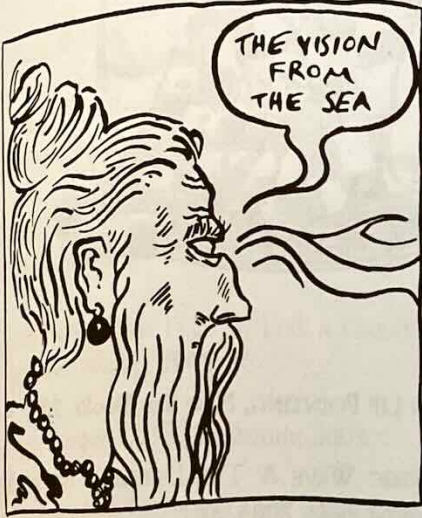
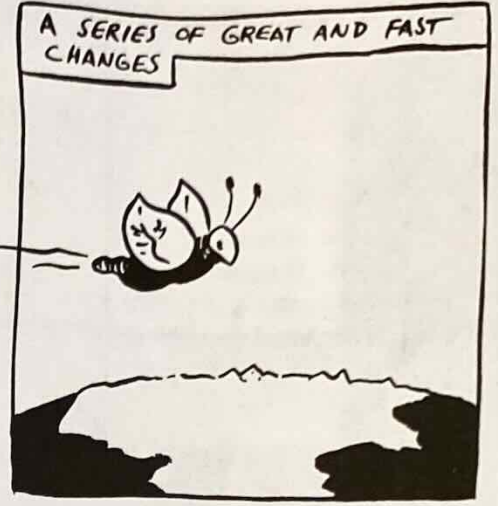
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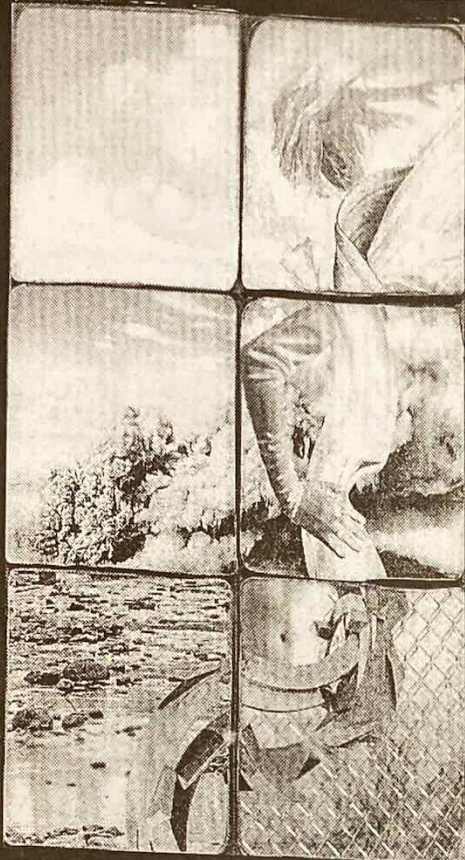
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RICHARD HOWARD  
MAXINE KUMIN

Saturday, March 22, 2003

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER  
HARRYETTE MULLEN

Saturday, May 31, 2003

1:00 pm

\$6 general admission

\$3 students, seniors, and members

Dia  
518 West 22nd Street  
New York City  
(212) 989-5566

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Book  
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# MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I wish to become a member of the Poetry Project. Here is my membership gift.

\$50   \$80   \$120   \$250   \$500   \$1000

No, I do not wish to join at this time but here is my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (For a gift of \$25 or more you'll receive a year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make all checks payable to the Poetry Project. Detach this page and mail to:

The Poetry Project  
c/o St. Mark's Church  
131 East 10th Street  
New York, NY 10003

## New Members and Recent Contributors:

Jack Anderson, John Ashbery, Bill Berkson & Constance Lewallen, Charles Bernstein & Susan Bee, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Jean T. Bleich, Michael Brownstein, Rosemary Carroll, Marie Carter, Mike & Alice Cincotta, Emilie Clark & Lytle Shaw, Steve Clay & Julie Harrison, Clark Coolidge, Samantha Cornwell, Contessa Davis, Georgia & Bill Delano, Fred Dewey, Ulla Dydo, Shell Fischer, Maya Flamm, Michael Friedman & Dianne Perry, Ruth Friedman-Simring, Lorraine Gehrig & Patrick Mullins, Brina Gehry, Lorraine Gilligan, Joseph Grancio, Robin Graubard, Iri Greco, Mimi Gross, Eileen B. Hennessy, Marcia Hoisington, Skye Holly, 99 Hooker, Hawley Hussey, Phil Johnson, Boni Joi, Garrett Kalleberg, Dian Killian, Doris Kornish & Phil Hartman, June Labyzon, Susan Landers & Natasha Dwyer, Rose Lesniak, Peter & Anna Levin, Chip Livingston, Rachel Loden, Lois E. Lowenstein, Jill Magi, John Martin & Michelle Filshie, Gillian McCain, Ann McCain, Harrison McCain, Laura McCandlish, Honor Moore, Bill Morgan, Maureen O'Hara, Hilton Obenzinger, Toni Oliviero, Nat Oppenheimer, Kathleen Ossip, Bob Perelman, Marjorie Perloff, Michael G. Peskura, Wang Ping, Jonathan

## YOUR GIFT ENTITLES YOU TO THESE MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

### Individual Membership (\$50) Benefits for one.

- Discounted admission for a year to all regularly scheduled and special Poetry Project events.
- A year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.
- E-mail broadcasts and special members-only mailings.
- The opportunity to take writing workshops with renowned writers.
- Priority discounted admission to all special events.

### Dual Membership (\$80) Benefits for two.

- All of the above! PLUS
- Invitations to special members-only receptions.

### Family Membership (\$120) Benefits for four.

- All of the above! PLUS
- A free subscription to *The World*.
- Reserved seating at designated special events.

### Donor Membership (\$250)

- All of the above! PLUS
- Free admission to designated special events, including the annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading featuring over 100 poets and performers.
- A free limited-edition poster: *Edwin*, by Alex Katz, one-color silkscreen, 37 x 23 3/4 inches, signed edition of 100.

### Benefactor Membership (\$500)

- All of the Donor-level membership benefits! PLUS
- All 2003 Poetry Project publications.
- A 20% discount on the purchase of any Poetry Project print (in addition to the Alex Katz poster).
- Grateful public acknowledgment.

### Patron Membership (\$1000)

- All of the Donor-level membership benefits! PLUS
- All 2003 Poetry Project publications.
- Your choice of any Poetry Project print (in addition to the Alex Katz poster).
- Grateful public acknowledgment.

D. Rabinowitz, India Radfar, Edward Richardson, Hector Hugo Ruizdiaz, Paul & Greta Salzberg, Lynn Sarro, Veronica Saunders, Robert J. Savino, Genia Sharp, Herschel Silverman, Joel Sloman, Rick Snyder, Stephanie Sweeney, Tony Towle, Fred Tuten, Marie Warsh, Craig Watson, Denise Welsh, D.W. Wright, Lila Zemborain, and Larry Zirlin (as of 3/6/03).

The Poetry Project  
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery  
131 East 10th Street  
New York, New York 10003

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