

poetry project

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2000 ISSUE #178

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POETRY BY

Claudia Rankine



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Cover and interior art: DAVID LARSEN

Distribution: Desert Moon Periodicals,
1226 Calle de Comercio, Santa Fe, NM
87505 • Small Press Distribution, 1341
Seventh St., Berkeley, CA 94710

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The Poetry Project Newsletter is published five
times a year and mailed free of charge to
members of and contributors to the Poetry
Project. Subscriptions are available for
\$25/year. Checks should be made payable to
The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131
East 10th St., NYC, NY 10003. For more
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The Poetry Project's programs and publi-
cations are made possible, in part, with pub-
lic funds from; the National Endowment for
the Arts, the New York State Council on the
Arts, and the New York City Department of

Cultural Affairs.

The Poetry Project's programs and publica-
tions are also made possible with contribu-
tions from the Axe-Houghton Foundation;
Brooke Alexander Gallery/Brooke Alexander
Editions; the Foundation for Contemporary
Performance Arts, Inc.; The Greenwall
Foundation; The Jerome Foundation; The
Lila Acheson Wallace Theater Fund, estab-
lished in Community Funds by the co-
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GUEST EDITORIAL

POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

ALL WRITING IS PIG SHIT by Antonin Artaud

All writing is pigshit.

People who leave the obscure and try to define whatever it is that goes on in their heads, are pigs.

The whole literary scene is a pigpen, especially this one.

All those who have vantage points in their spirit, I mean, on some side or other of their heads and in a few strictly localized brain areas; all those who are masters of their language; all those for whom words have a meaning; all those for whom there exist sublimities in the soul and currents of thought; all those who are the spirit of the times, and have named these currents of thought—and I am thinking of their precise works, of that automatic grinding that delivers their spirit to the winds—

are pigs.

Those for whom certain words have a meaning, and certain manners of being; those who are so fussy; those for whom emotions are classifiable, and who quibble over some degree or other of their hilarious classifications; those who still believe in "terms"; those who brandish whatever ideologies belong to the hierarchy of the times; those about whom women talk so well, and also those women who talk so well, who talk of the contemporary currents of thought; those who still believe in some orientation of the spirit; those who follow paths, who drop names, who fill books with screaming headlines are the worst kind of pigs.

And you are quite aimless, young man!

No, I am thinking of bearded critics.

And I told you so: no work of art, no language, no word, no thought, nothing.

Nothing; unless maybe a fine Brain-Storm.

A sort of incomprehensible and totally erect stance in the midst of everything in the mind.

And don't expect me to tell you what all this is called, and how many parts it can be divided into; don't expect me to tell you its weight; or to get back in step and start discussing all this so that by discussing I may get lost myself and even, without even realizing it, start THINKING. And don't expect this thing to be illuminated and live and deck itself out in a multitude of words, all neatly polished as to meaning, very diverse, and capable of throwing light on all the attitudes and all the nuances of a very sensitive and penetrating mind.

Ah, these states which have no name, these sublime situations of the soul, ah these intervals of wit, these miniscule failures which are the daily bread of my hours, these people swarming with data... they are always the same old words I'm using, and really making more headway than you, you beard-asses, you pertinent pigs, you masters of fake verbiage, confectioners of portraits, pamphleteers, ground-floor lace-curtain herb collectors, entomologists, plague of my tongue.

I told you so, I no longer have the gift of tongue. But this is no reason you should persist and stubbornly insist on opening your mouths.

Look, I will be understood ten years from now by the people who

then will do what you are doing now. Then my geysers will be recognized, my glaciers will be seen, the secret of diluting my poisons will have been learnt, the plays of my soul will be deciphered.

Then all my hair, all my mental veins will have been drained in quicklime; then my bestiary will have been noticed, and my mystique become a hat. Then the joints of stones will be seen smoking, arborescent bouquets of mind's eyes will crystallize in glossaries, stone aeroliths will fall, lines will be seen and the geometry of the void understood: people will learn what the configuration of the mind is, and they will understand how I lost my mind.

They will then understand why my mind is not all here; then they will see all languages go dry, all minds parched, all tongues shrivelled up, the human face flattened out, deflated as if sucked up by shriveling leeches. And this lubricating membrane will go on floating in the air, this caustic lubricating membrane, this double membrane of multiple degrees and a million little fissures, this melancholic and vitreous membrane, but so sensitive and also pertinent, so capable of multiplying, splitting apart, turning inside out with it glistening little cracks, its dimensions, its narcotic highs, its penetrating and toxic injections, and

all this then will be found to be all right,

and I will have no further need to speak.

o o o

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David Rattray.

Intermission in three acts with beach debris

by

CLAUDIA RANKINE

The thing in play (act I)

Those outside the theatre prevent the intermission from being uninvolved. Hence the overwhelming desire to forgive some, forget others. Even so, we are here and yet I cannot release us to here, cannot know and yet go on as if all the world were staged. Who believes, "Not a big mess but rather an unfortunate accident arrived us here." The past assumes presence. It stays awkward, clumping in the mouth. And this is necessary time. Only now do we respect or is it forget the depths of our mistakes. There often rises from the tiredness on the surface a great affection for order. Plot, its grammar, is the linen no one disgorges into. Excuse me. From that which is systemic we try to detach ourselves, cling to, cellophane ourselves into manmade regulations, so neatly educated, so nearly laid. But some of us have drowned and then coughed ourselves up. The deep morning lifts its swollen legs high upon the stage. Some wanting amnesia float as personified abstractions. Some wash ashore, but not into the audience, not able to look on. Help me if who you are now helps you to know the world differently, if who you are wants not to live life so.

Still in play (act II)

On the street where children now reside the speed limit is 25. Green owns the season and will be God. A rain, that was, put a chill in every leaf, every blade of grass. The red brick, the asphalt, cold, cold. The front step, the doorknob, the banister, the knife, the fork. A faucet opens and the woman, Liv, arrives as debris formed in the sea's intestine, floating in to be washed ashore and perfumed. In time she opens her mouth and out rushes, "Why is the feeling this? Am I offal? Has an unfortunate accident arrived me here? Does anyone whisper, stay awhile, or the blasphemous, resemble me, resemble me?" Those watching say with their silence, that is Liv, she has regret in her eyes, or she needs to forget the why of some moment. She doesn't look right. She is pulling the red plastic handle toward her, checking around her. She's washing, then watching hands, feet and shouting, assemble me, assemble me. She is wearing shoes and avoiding electrical wires, others, steep drops, forgotten luggage. Those are her dangers. She cannot regret. A hook out of its eye,

she's the underside of a turtle shell. Riveted, and riven, the others stare contemplating the proximity of prison to person before realizing the quickest route away from is to wave her on. They are waving her on. Liv is waved on. Now everything remains but the shouting. A cake is cooling on a rack. Someone is squeezing out excess water. Another is seasoning with salt. The blacker cat is in heat. A man sucks the mint in his mouth. Minutes are letting go. A hose is invisible on the darkened lawn.

Musical interlude (act III)

A certain type of life is plot driven. A certain slant in life. A man sucking his mint lozenge. He is waiting for the other foot to drop. His own, mind you. In a wide second he will be center stage.

His song will be the congregation of hope. He will drain his voice to let Liv know she cannot move toward birth without trespassing on here. To succumb to life is to be gummed to the reverberated past seemingly arrested.

Erland knows Liv is as if in a sling, broken in the disappeared essence, the spirit perhaps: catfoot in a moist soil, at the lowest altitude or simply streamside, though seeming fine.

He knows, he too, sometimes, is as if below, drained, non-circulatory, in an interval, the spirit perhaps in an interval. But then frictionized, rubbed hard—

sweet life-ever-lasting, he is singing softly beneath his meaning in the sediment of connotation where everyone's nervously missing or missed. His melody is vertical, surrendering suddenly to outcome, affording a heart.

There is always after all a ladder recalling another sort of knowing because some remainder, some leftover is biddy-bop, biddy-bop, again and again. His voice catches. It feels like tenderness beckoning and it is into her voice, rejoicing.

announcements

Thank You!

Grateful thank-yous from the staff of the Poetry Project to the wonderful volunteers who helped make our New Year's Day Marathon Reading such a success: Jennifer Bartlett, Laura Bean, Eddie Bell, Tracy Blackmer, Brenda Bordovsky, Donna Brook, Jeff Butler, David Cameron, Donna Cartelli, John Coletti, Brenda Coultas, Jordan Davis, Joe Elliot, Elizabeth Fagin, Atticus Fierman, Mariana Ruiz Firmat, Merry Fortune, Tonya Foster, Abigail Frankfurt, Suzan Frecon, Drew Gardner, Eric Gelsing, Nada Gordon, Marcella Harb, Mitch Highfill, Tony Hoffman, Laird Hunt, Lisa Jarnot, Paolo Javier, David Kirshenbaum, Wendy Kramer, Faith Kupecz, Denise LaCongo, Brendan Lorber, Christopher Luna, Kimberly Lyons, Gena Mason, Gillian McCain, Susan Mills, Elinor

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Thank you also to the persons & vendors who donated food and/or books: the Danspace Project, Taylor's, Rectangles, Rebecca Moore, Scot Paris Fine Desserts, Vesuvio Bakery, Telephone Bar, Veselka, Edwin Torres, David Kirschenbaum, Brendan Lorber, Brandon Downing, Kimberly Lyons, Gillian McCain, and Steve Clay.

Awake My Soul!

In the January/February issue of the Poetry Project's webzine *Poets & Poems* is new work by Diane Glancy, Bill Kushner, Mark McMorris, and Susan M. Schultz. The URL is www.poetryproject.com/poets.html.

In Memoriam

On November 18, 1999, American writer and composer Paul Bowles died at age 88. Bowles was the author of *The Sheltering Sky*, and friend with Gertrude Stein, and friend of Aaron Copland (also his musical mentor), Djuna Barnes, George Balanchine, and many other major artistic figures of the 20th century. Many of the Beat writers, such as Allen Ginsberg, would visit him often at his home in Tangiers, Morocco. Bowles translated Moroccan writers such as Mohammed Choukri and Mohammed Mrabet into English and was married to writer Jane Bowles, the author of *Two Serious Ladies* and *Your Sister's Hand in Mine*.

writing workshops

Poetry Workshop: Play Pens taught by Julie Patton (Tuesday evenings, 7-9 pm: 10 sessions begin February 15)

Spear a mental hand-land fabu lips jot dot word wrought blurb blot x pore ear rig elation oriented toward rite *shush!* writ 'gainst rime space up tab u arouse all ^ roar (how you balk talk about ineffable? s-t-r-e-t-c-h un sound practices sight lent speech) Lets play at x pens of many an ism pre seeding opt art tune unity as a muse sing impunity to kill words and re place with blank ____? now that ciphers are in; zero in on what kind of crush we have on words. Julie Patton has taught writing at the Naropa Writing Program and at New York University. Her current projects include collaborations with musician Don Byron and filmmaker Henry Hills.

Poetry Workshop: Attunement in Poetic Practice taught by Kimberly Lyons (Friday evenings 7-9 pm: 10 sessions begin February 18)

A workshop for the devoted—but not necessarily experienced—writer of poetry. We will focus on a writing process which employs the practice of attunement. Randomly overheard language(s), uses of interruption, and a cultivation of local/geographic/urban and personal writing zones. Exercises advised. Responsive reading of work in class. Reading from Mayer, Notley, Eigner, Schuyler, O'Hara, Hejinian, and many others. Guest lecturers. Kimberly Lyons's *Abracadabra* (Granary Books) is out in January 2000. She is editing the new writing section of *How2* (issue #3), the online incarnation of *How(ever)*.

Journals, Poetry and Prose taught by Todd Colby (Saturdays, 12-2 pm: 10 sessions begin February 19)

What are journals and how can we make better use of them? What's the difference between public and private writing? In this workshop we will use our journals as a means to deepen our ability to observe and document the world around us. Our guides will be Kafka, Musil, Blanchot, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Cioran, and Pessoa. Day-to-day observations as mythical and the mythical as ordinary. Lots of in-class writing is on the agenda, so be ready. Todd Colby is the author of *Riot in the Charm Factory: New and Selected Writings* (Soft Skull Press) and the editor of *Heights of the Marvelous: An Anthology of New York Writing* (St. Martin's Press).

The workshop fee is \$250, which includes tuition for classes and an "Individual" membership in The Poetry Project for one year (see back page of the Newsletter for a full listing of membership levels and benefits). Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10th St., New York, NY 10003. For more information, please call (212) 674-0910, or e-mail us at poproj@artomatic.com.

In Memoriam EDWARD DORN

1929 - 1999

The poet Edward Dorn died after a long struggle with pancreatic cancer at his home in Denver early on the evening of December 10, 1999.

Is this thing made
with the end built-in
the component of death hidden only
in the youthful machine...

ah news from the Great Manufacturer.

These lines come from "Wait by the door awhile
Death, there are others," a poem written by Dorn
in 1965. They foreshadow the engagement and
interrogation of Ed's last poems as well. Along
with unfinished long poems about two other long-
time subjects of his, heresy and geography—
Languedoc Variorum and *Westward Haut*—he left
in "progress" a verse journal of his final
chemotherapeutic nightmare-enlightenments,
Chemo Sabe, in which the poet's confrontation
with techno-medicine serves as a kind of warrior's
trial and induction to death. At the end of a sec-
tion of that latter work, titled "Chemo du Jour:
The Impeachment on Decadron," he narrates an
infusion of Taxol, a drug produced from yew tree
toxins, while watching Clinton's impeachment
trial, among other dark comedies, on television in
a Denver hospital:

And Lo now the Taxol infusion clears the
atmosphere
where I see the Superbowl completely superseded
by the *superblow*. O yes, praise the Tree Lord,
now it is time to go.

Ed was born and grew up in Eastern Illinois, on
the banks of the river Embarrass (a tributary of the
Wabash). He never knew his father. His mother
was of French-Canadian ancestry, his maternal
grandfather a half-Indian Quebecois railroad
man ("master pipefitter in the age of steam"). He

attended a one-room school, and while in high
school played billiards with the local undertaker
for a dime a point. "Brought up off and on during
/ the intensity of depression nomadism," he fol-
lowed the wandering work-searches of his several
"exodus relatives" down "bleak grit avenues" of a
childhood whose anxious, difficult instruction,
though he was always shy of speaking of it, never
ceased to underlie and complicate the moral and
historical vision of his work. Images of vulnera-
bility and displacement in his poems project this.
In a late poem called "Tribe" Dorn declares an
explicit identification with the plight of refugee
Kurds, relating their exposure before the imperial
contingency of "wholesale helicopter gunships" to
his own autobiographical family recollections:
"My tribe was lowdown struggling day labor /
Depression South Eastern / Illinois just before the
southern hills start / to roll toward the coal coun-
try / where the east/west morainal ridges / of Wis-
consin trash pile up / at the bottom of the prairie,
socially / a far midwest recrudescence of
Appalachia... I'm as proud of my tribe as if I were
a Kurd."

o o o

All may wake who live
the combination is given
and Some comb the connections
in blind search
there are deaths at birth
there is death at 21
and burial at 80
each calculation
involves another century.

Our company thus moves collectively
along the River Rio Grande.

—*Gunslinger*, Book II

Maybe it's in part because he had a lonely and pre-
carious beginning in life that later on Dorn always
liked to surround himself with congenial compa-
ny. In life as in literature Ed had this weird little
travelling party or company: the cowboy, the dance

hall madam, the poet-singer, the Stoned Horse, among others. The great honor of friendship he conferred on me was to number me as an outrider of that party of outriders, along with other diverse disparate friends.

As to Ed's itinerant young manhood out West—of which one can get some sense in an image from a *Hands Up!* poem, "a windborn seed"—I learned quite a bit from travelling with him across the upper Plains in 1979 on what was supposed to be a reporting assignment. We were "covering" the Wyoming energy boom for a magazine, but Ed's coverage always went deeper, wider, longer. We crested the Wind River range in white light and came down to Moorcroft, Wyoming, where Ed drove me past the old New Moorcroft Hotel, a landmark in his great early story "C. B. & Q." We found Tiny's restaurant, back of which the half desert still begins, just as it does in that story. In Ed's day crews of gandy dancers hung out there between shifts. Ed was remembering his wandering working-life circa 1951, when "You could work endless hours but it was dangerous."

On that same trip we followed the Belle Fourche up toward the Badlands and Ed had me walk around Devil's Tower with him. It's a long way around Devil's Tower. When we got to the west face, looking out over two hundred miles of prairie, I saw nothing, out at the horizon rim the sky trembled and shone, in between the space looked completely empty. Ed then filled it for me with the substantial history of everything that had ever happened out there. He was always giving me everything—the most generous man I've ever known.

If it should ever come

And we are all there together
time will wave as willows do
and adios will be truly, yes,
 laughing at what is forgotten
and talking of what's new

—from *The Newly Fallen*, 1961

Tom Clark

December 13, 1999

(This obituary also appears in issue #10 of the web magazine, *Jacket*)

ERRATA: The following poem, which was written in tribute to Rudy Burckhardt appeared in the last issue of the *PPNL* missing its penultimate line. —Ed.

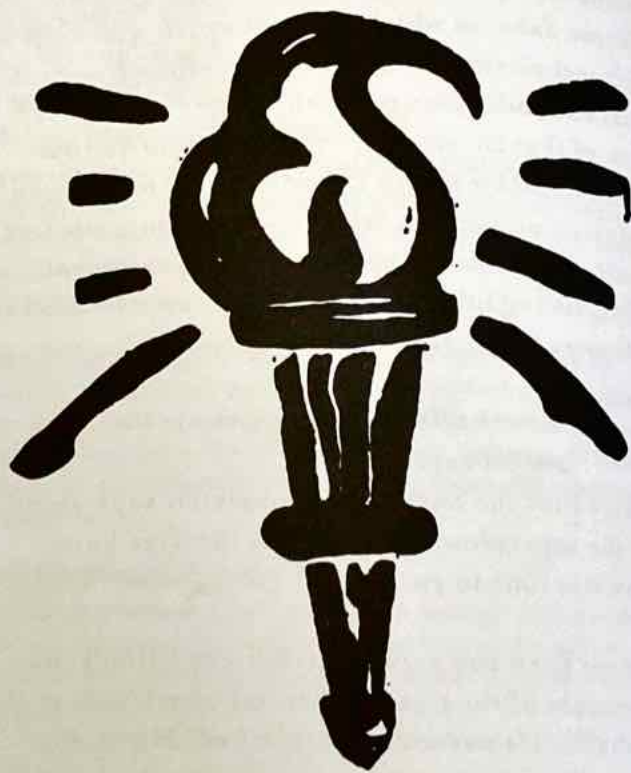
HOW TO THROW AN EGG OUT OF A WINDOW

When the egg flew out of the window
I was sorry until it broke.
When the egg flew out of the window,
It was like a total eclipse of the moon.

Only the word egg flew out of the window.
A leaf would startle one a parachute a joke
An egg that neither cracked nor spoke.

When the egg flew out of the window, my son stood up
on the roof
With an egg inside a ball inside the Crystal Palace
waterlily basket.
Like a film of blue it floated down
And like a lie it landed.

—David Shapiro



Retrospective

AFTER A FASHION: READING ROLAND BARTHES TODAY

by

Steve Evans

It has been twenty years since Roland Barthes succumbed to injuries sustained in a grotesquely absurd accident while crossing the rue des Écoles after lunch with François Mitterand, then first secretary of the French Socialist Party and soon to be president of France. That a sinister violence always lurked in the pedestrian had long been a theme of Barthes's writing; in the month-long agony following the accident this violence coupled with the structural vulnerability of a 65-year old man who had already endured, between 1934 and 1946, a protracted bout with tuberculosis. The lungs that had prevented Barthes from acceding to the École Normale Supérieure at 19—thereby irrevocably queering his intellectual trajectory—failed him definitively just three years after his vindicating induction to a chair (of Literary Semiology) at the prestigious Collège de France.

For much of his incredibly prolific intellectual life, Roland Barthes was understood to be the representative of something: of a tenaciously neutral, colorless mode of writing he christened "le degré zéro de l'écriture" and championed in the pages of *Combat* in 1947 before devoting his first monograph to it in 1953; of Alain Robbe-Grillet's adamantly objectivist novels of the 1950s; of the theoretical avant-gardism of *Tel Quel* as it sought the grail of "textuality" from 1960 forward; of "le nouvelle critique" as attacked into existence by a Sorbonne professor incensed by Barthes's "delirious" reading of Racine's drama; of "French post-structuralism" as it was polemically inserted into an Anglo-American academic situation robbed of its complacency by civil rights and student activism and uncertain whether to mourn or celebrate the "death of the author" Barthes, playing Zarathustra for an atypically muscular moment, brought news of in 1968.

Castigated (or worse, trivialized) for his "fashionability" by everyone from Hugh Kenner to Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, this writer who imagined himself perpetually *demodé*—untimely in the Nietzschean sense—has perhaps only now found the condition of *atopic* legibility he long coveted, not that of the representative man pendant to a necklace-noose of approbative or opprobrious adjectives, but that of the singular, irreducible and irreplaceable, body of work, the *corpus* risen out of and returned to pleasure, the writing an insatiable appetite for reading yielded to one who, like his American contemporary Hannah Wiener, cherished a malady diagnosed by the words "Je

vois le langage" ("I see language").

The irrepressible profligacy of this vision (I deliberately choose a formulation with sexual overtones: Barthes's absence of allegiance to monogamy is a defining textual and biographical trait) is behind his distinctively insouciant performance of "method," one reminiscent of Frank O'Hara's casual deflation of metrics in the "Personism" manifesto or John Ashbery's bemused manipulations of poetic "meaning" in any number of post-*Three Poems* texts. Responding to a questionnaire in 1971, it was "ease"—as opposed to censure or distance—that Barthes counseled as the proper (and most subversive) attitude to adopt toward "formalist" strictures. Without abjuring the labor of formalization, Barthes brings to it a light touch. His texts are worked without being laborious, they think outside the equation—established by the perspiring faces of Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*, object of an especially penetrating and humorous "Mythology" called "The Romans in Films"—that "to sweat is to think—which evidently rests on the postulate appropriate to a nation of businessmen, that thought is a violent, cataclysmic operation, of which sweat is only the most benign symptom" (28). To O'Hara's maxim "just go on your nerve," Barthes adjoins the composed corollary: "don't sweat it."

Barthes's most characteristic intellectual movement is inductive and essayistic rather than deductive and systematic: each object of analysis—be it Garbo's face or a Cy Twombly canvas, a still from Eisenstein or a page from *Elle*, a concept of Jakobson's, a scene from Brecht, a theme of Michelet's, a devotional regime concocted by Loyala, or a sex-act as described by Sade—is addressed first in its specificity; the object is presumed innocent of language until it betrays otherwise (as eventually it almost always does). Though not especially fond of "dialectic" as a term, Barthes nevertheless practices an intimate form of dialectical thinking that moves with an ease unrivaled even by Adorno or Benjamin between particular, and often inconspicuous, objects and the universality in which they often unconsciously partake.

Unlike those linguists who cannot discuss language without converting it—consciously or not—into a protagonist of awesome subtlety and protean mutability (Chomsky comes to mind), Barthes communicates a derogatory and antagonistic vision of language as that which bores (here the life-long apprenticeship to

Proust is evident) and that which bullies (dominant or doxic languages certainly, but also their militant contraries). From the opening pages of *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) to the last fragment of *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes maintains this fundamentally critical stance toward the rule of language as acculturation and intimidation: it comprises not a theme among others, but a commitment so primordial that his oeuvre would be unimaginable without it.

Two modes of activity—or to use the Sartrean idiom of the early work that Barthes retains and revises throughout his career: modes of “responsibility”—follow from this commitment, the one seeking to endure the rule of language, the other to exceed it. Barthes’s “structuralism” is of a primarily ethical, not a scientific, cast: its intention is to furnish knowledge that might permit one to endure the adversity of signs, codes, and systems, and perhaps even to put into practice counter-systems like those detailed in *Sade / Fourier / Loyola* (1971). The sheer stamina manifested in works like *S/Z* (1970) or *The Fashion System* (1967) attests to Barthes’s ethical will to outlast, and whenever possible to outwit, dominant systems of meaning. Like the Manny Farber of the movie criticism, Barthes burrows into these systems, dwelling with embarrassing insistence on what seems to “go without saying” (*va de soi*), robbing messages of their obviousness, dislodging connotations from their presumptively denotative shell, patiently retracing the routes by which received ideas enter the heads and escape the mouths of those self-elected delegates of discursive normalcy who repeat with unreflexive confidence the tautologies of manufactured social “consciousness” (myth, ideology).

What is referred to as Barthes’s “post-structuralism” corresponds not to a discrete period of his career (everything following *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973, say) but to the

prodigious desire invested every where in his oeuvre to the search for exceptions to the rule of naturalized norms, arrogant discourses, and hypostasized images. “He has no affection for proclamations of victory,” Barthes wrote of himself in 1975. “Troubled by the humiliations of others, whenever a victory appears somewhere, he wants to go somewhere else” (Roland Barthes 46).

Barthes exercises considerable invention in demarcating this “somewhere else,” space of exception, exemption, excess: *jouissance* escapes the economy of readerly pleasure, it is an ecstasy that transforms both terms in the reader-text equation; the *punctum* of *Camera Lucida* literally ruptures or punctuates the banal surface of the photograph, it exits the arena of studiously posed meanings for an adventure in fascination; the seminar is subversive of the university’s will-to-knowledge, it is a “phalanstery” whose work is “the production of differences” emerging from individuated desires.

But the most abiding name assigned this space is simply *l’écriture*, writing. This is the word “whose ardent, complex, ineffable, and somehow sacred signification gives the illusion that by [it] one might answer for everything” in Barthes’s text (though it should be noted that he himself, in the section on “mana-words” in *Roland Barthes*, proposes rather “the body”). In fact, writing is less Barthes’s “answer for everything” than the question that he never tires of responding to: “Qu’est-ce que l’écriture” is not only the first chapter heading of his first book, it is the rubric invisibly inscribed at the top of every page to which he committed his hand.

Writing Degree Zero commences with a series of definitions meant to show what writing is not. It is not *language*, that ordered, collective, apparently “natural” (but actually historical) horizon of

social experience (if Barthes has read Saussure at this point he has certainly not yet begun to think with his categories); neither is it *style*, the residue—always some-what crude—of a given author’s biology (body) and biography (past). Between these two predetermined necessities, these forms that impose themselves and that the writer may transform but not refuse, *writing* emerges as a third term, a value more than a fact, a possibility rather than a destiny, a stance more than a substance. “A language and a style are blind forces; a mode of writing is an act of historical solidarity” (14). Solidarity with what or whom? Again Barthes proceeds by negation: not with a specific set of “consumers” to whom the writing is addressed, but with a counterfactual community whose convening value is not a “freely consumed language” but “one freely produced” (16).

In a gesture seldom to be repeated in his work, and in a tone seldom again heard—one of awe before a solemn and sublime object—Barthes turns to post-Symbolist poetry as an exemplary site for the autonomous production of writing. After Rimbaud, he argues, poetic writing disposes with the constraints of consumption, does away with grammar and conventional syntax, liberates itself from the social burden of communication. What remain are words, vertical and vertiginous, that jut like “monoliths... into a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections” (47). Isolate, explosive, emphatically phallic, the poetic word is encountered “frontally,” received “as an absolute quantity,” accepted in “all its possible associations”: “The Word, here, is encyclopaedic, it contains simultaneously all the acceptations from which a relational discourse might have required it to choose. It therefore achieves a state which is possible only in the dictionary or in poetry—places where the noun can live

without its article—and is reduced to a sort of zero degree, pregnant with all past and future specifications" (48). By becoming an "absolute object," the sublime lexeme of modern poetry—pure paradigm shorn of all syntagmatic bonds—enters the real on its own terms: it is a thing among things, indifferent to humanity and to history (or more carefully put: irreducible to them).

Apart from a furtive allusion to René Char, few proper names attach themselves to this description of a poetic writing driven to extremes: clearly what interests Barthes is more a *limit* than any concrete instance. This abstraction aside, one is unmistakably in the realm of the avant-garde, of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and the Surrealists; of the Futurist "word as such" (Russian) or "words at liberty" (Italian); and of the American extension of that tradition, too subterranean to be noted abroad in 1953, in the works of Charles Olson (whose "Projective Verse" bears notable affinities to Barthes's manifesto) and Jack Spicer (whose unsparing, linguistically-aware "realism" aspired not only to include "real objects"—the "lemon" of the Lorca letters—but to transcend poetic subjectivism in the direction of a co-objectival condition: "Hello says the apple / Both of us were object").

Much later, twenty years in fact after the publication of *Writing Degree Zero* (but only a few after Annette Lavers and Colin Smith first translated it into English in 1968), Ron Silliman would find in Barthes's remarks on modern poetry an adequate description for the emergent writing then interesting him. In "The Dwelling Place," Silliman presents to the readers of *Alcheringa* a small gathering of poems by Bruce Andrews, David Melnick, Barbara Baracks, Lee DeJasu, Barrett Watten, and others, borrowing his title from a phrase in Barthes's text ("it is the Word which is 'the dwelling place'"), and his explanation of

"diminished referentiality" from Barthes's paean to the "infinite freedom" of the radically decontextualized word." Not overlooking John Ashbery's inclusion of Barthes's early essay on Dutch painting, "Le Monde-Objet" (translated by Stanley Geist as "The World Become Thing"), in *Art and Literature* 3 (1964), or poet Richard Howard's admirable translations of many of Barthes's works, Silliman's references to *Writing Degree Zero* announce something like the advent of Barthes's impact on American avant-garde poetry, an impact soon to reverberate throughout the extended poetic community. The second number of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (April 1978) carries a longer excerpt from *Writing Degree Zero* on its cover and the penultimate issue of that magazine's regular format run (June 1980) is largely devoted to Alan Davies's "Essai à Clef," a posthumous appreciation of Barthes in which Davies writes: "It is enough to say that this magazine owes its existence, or if not, the meaning of that existence, to the significant desire-producing language mechanisms which Mr. Barthes constantly refurbished with his analyses of/as text."

Hegel says somewhere that one can no more *think* for a person than one can *eat* for them. The same is true for *reading*, though a whole caste of delegate readers—the critic, the reviewer, the professor—has sprung out of the failure to recognize this fact. When Alan Davies asserts that "excellent critical, attentive, writing knows its task to be the reading of the *writing* of a text," he pinpoints a value that Barthes brought into increasingly forceful articulation from the early 1960s forward. "There remains one last illusion which it is necessary to renounce," he writes at the close of *Criticism and Truth* (1966), a book that exceeds its immediate occasion as a rebuttal of Racine-scholar Raymond Picard's indiscriminate attack on the "new

criticism" practiced by Barthes and others: "The critic can in no wise substitute himself for the reader. In vain will he presume—or will others ask him—to lend a voice, however respectful, to the readings of others, to be himself but a reader to whom other readers have delegated the expression of their own feelings as a consequence of his knowledge or his judgment, in other words to exercise by proxy the rights of the community in relation to the work. Why? Because even if one defines the critic as a reader who writes, that means that this reader encounters on his path a redoubtable mediator: writing" (91).

Whereas in *Writing Degree Zero* Barthes had principally (though not exclusively: his remarks on Raymond Queneau's plural/oral texts point in another, less remarked direction) associated *l'écriture* with negation—an operation of subtraction (in Camus's "colorless" writing) and abstraction (in the vertical, worldless words of modern poetry)—his emphasis shifts in the 1960s from a valorization of the *neutral* in writing to a valorization of the *plural*. This transition was hastened perhaps by the publication of Umberto Eco's theory of the "open work" (*l'oeuvre ouvert*) in 1965, but Barthes's essays—starting with "Écrivains et écrivants" in 1960, where he first advances the formula that writing is an intransitive act, and gathering momentum in pieces such as "To Write: An Intransitive Verb" (1966), the "Death of the Author" (1968) and "From Work to Text" (1971)—develop the theme immanently and insistently right through to its aphoristic culmination in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973).

By the "intransitivity" of writing, Barthes means to invoke a condition in which the writing subject disperses into an irretrievable contemporaneity with their practice: "the modern *scriptor* is born at the same time as his text," Barthes writes in "The Death of the

Author," "he is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his writing, he is not the subject of which his book would be the predicate; there is no time other than that of the speech-act, and every text is written eternally here and now." This dispersion invests every syntagm of the text; the work of signification—previously conceived by Barthes as the explosion of potentials concentrated at a paradigmatic level—is refigured as a spasm that convulses the surface of language and calls forth a corresponding seism in the reader, from whom is shaken not an exegesis or judgment, both of which would reinstate the "transitive" dimension of the message (what it is "about," what adjectives engulf it), but an other text, desirous, productive, and intransitive as the first.

That critical writing should extend, rather than enclose, the realm of textuality is a proposition that retains its force even after the initial euphoria of its articulation has faded. Much of what we presently call "poetics" is an attempt—of necessity various in its accomplishments—to take that proposition seriously in conditions that remain severely adverse. After all, reviews remain for the most part the adjective-choked chatter of people with no facility for reading or writing; "scholarship" is still largely defined by the limits it imports from an impoverished institutional nexus and imposes without reflexivity or mercy on its "objects." But even "poetics," in the elastic acceptance given the word by contemporary avant-gardists, misses the mark more often than not, satisfying itself with displaced sociology, half-comprehended linguistic concepts, and more than a common amount of flat-out mysticism. It would take more than a thorough re-reading of Barthes to counter-act these tendencies, but his ethical, secular, pleasurable attention to the "responsibility of forms" remains a proof, past all fashion, that something more is possible, should we so choose.

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For those who read French and have ample bank-accounts (a combination of suspicious frequency in the American context), a three-volume *Oeuvres complètes* edited by Eric Marty appeared from Seuil several years ago. Much of Barthes has been well-translated into English and kept in print by Hill & Wang. *A Barthes Reader* edited by Susan Sontag in 1982 remains readily available and is a good introduction to his work through the lens of his best-stationed advocate in the U.S. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* and *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, independently or taken together, constitute an alternative entrance to the oeuvre, as does Stephen Heath's edition *Image / Music / Text*. For Barthes the essayist, *The Rustle of Language* is the best single collection. For methodology, *The Semiotic Challenge* is indispensable, *S/Z* inexhaustible. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* was a best-seller upon its French publication in 1977, going through sixteen print-runs and attracting wide publicity to its author. Louis-Jean Calvet's biography of Barthes (translated in 1994) is journalistic but passable. Jonathan Culler's respected critical overview for the Fontana Modern Masters series (1982) can usefully be read on the way to inspired interpretations by Naomi Schor, Steven Ungar, and Réda Bensmaïa, among others.

o o o

Steve Evans teaches poetry, poetics, and critical theory at the University of Maine at Orono. Recent criticism has appeared in *Aerial*, *Crayon*, *Poetics Journal*, and the *E-mail column*, Notes to Poetry, archived on the web journal Arras.

ON LONG WINTER NIGHTS THE RESIDENTS OF LOS GATOS CALIF. GATHER TO DISCUSS THE GOINGS-ON IN THE SAN JOSE MANUAL OF STYLE
"Cymbal of the Bridge & Tunnel"



WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT THEIR INTERNET SOFTWARE?

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A Conversation

with

SUSAN WHEELER

by
Michael Tyrell



Susan Wheeler. Photo by Star Black

SUSAN WHEELER'S BOOKS ARE *BAG 'O' DIAMONDS* (UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS) AND *SMOKES* (FOUR WAY BOOKS). SHE IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF TWO CHAPBOOKS: *RE: CHAPBOOK 4* (1999, REFERENCE: PRESS) AND *STARTUP* (1999, WEST TOWN PRESS). SHE IS THE RECIPIENT OF A 1999 GUGGENHEIM FELLOWSHIP.

MT: You've been more or less identified as a descendant of the New York School. What are the vicissitudes of such a connection?

SW: David Lehman mentions my work in *The Last Avant Garde*, if this is the identification you mean. Others see connections I haven't seen myself. When I was a teenager, I loved Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* and Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, to which I responded better than to *Howl*. That particular book of O'Hara's was really my only initial connection to the New York School. I didn't read the others until much later—after I read O'Hara I was ga-ga over Gary Snyder and other poets working out of various traditions. I remember I had Creeley's *For Love* early on, and Merwin's *The Lice*. I've never felt that I have the talky quality that I always associate with the New York School: neither James Schuyler's long, discursive line, nor Ashbery, who has more breadth to a line. Their juxtapositions certainly made me feel a stronger sense of freedom. Later, that was the task behind *Smokes*: to imitate a Schuyler line, and I think of "Studmuffin" especially as an attempt to imitate Ashbery's syntax at a particular time. I learned from both exercises, as always when you graft your own enterprise onto another's.

MT: Like the most notable of these poets, you've managed to insinuate comedy and tragedy at once—I think of "Ezra's Lament"—and succeed at making astonishing leaps. How and when did you first learn how to write poems that combine the elegiac and the hilarious? The early poems in your chapbook, "StartUp," already have that double-edged sword quite sharpened.

SW: I guess I've always been drawn to a sensibility that combines the two. And it's really difficult, even using random operations, to erase any imprint of personality from one's own diction. When I was a kid I wrote rhyming nonsense

poems, and later, more than my share of tormented adolescent poems. (Laughter). Somehow, as I got older, both qualities seemed to settle more: I wanted to tap what each had become.

I remember in my first semester at college, my workshop teacher Alvin Feinman asked us to bring in our favorite poems, and my fellow students brought in poems like "East Coker" and "The Duino Elegies." I'd just come across "The Buick" by Karl Shapiro, a shorter, speedy poem about a car, which seemed inconsequential compared to the weightier poems brought in by my upperclasspersons. It took me some time to feel all right with that. Then I responded to certain poems and poets in part because I was studying them. Some just clicked—I think of Pound's "Maundering" with its furious, absurdist moments, and Berryman, who hits his pitch so exactly in *The Dream Songs*.

MT: In our conversations, you've mentioned Berryman as a primary influence. Have you been drawn to the possibility of an enterprise like *The Dream Songs*? I mean, one which is staged or motivated by a fractured, animated figure like Henry Pussycat.

SW: Even though I love the Berryman construction so much, it would feel a little anachronistic given the issues inherited by this generation. Decades later, sometimes I feel it's been thoroughly investigated, even though it seems to be an idea that Berryman toyed with a bit ahead of his time. I'm not a Berryman scholar. I'm sure I could conceivably construct an argument for the polyphonal, shifting self over a long project, but my own impatient temperament would no doubt capsize it. If I undertook such a gargantuan project with one or several "characters," I would feel too rebellious. I would want to write outside of the lines.

MT: For the past few years, I know you've been writing a novel that takes place in Chicago circa 1980. Acie, your

protagonist, even made his way into your sonnet "Character." In it, you confront him as "nothing but trouble," and his surface description makes him sound like something out of David Lynch: hairnet, glass eye, "wormy dick." What attracted you to writing a longer narrative work? Would you elaborate a bit on the novel's structure, plot, point of view? More pressingly, on Acie himself?

SW: I fell into it. I'd written only lousy short fiction, but I had a desire to convey, in this larger framework, real love I had for a real person. When I was a kid, I remember thinking that a poem might do this—and it's probably only my own naiveté about fiction that makes me think fiction can. Figural representation is not for me what poems are usually about—I'm more interested in connections than in verisimilitude. Once I waded into this longer work of fiction, I wanted something that would be quite the opposite. Berryman's *Dream Songs* project was one kind of model, and he kept me going, as well as Roy Lichtenstein's example, or Mark Rothko's, say—any painter who worked or works within a set of parameters—as most poets and painters do—restrictive vocabulary and so forth. But the process was still torment.

Acie is a fellow who runs a basement record store in Chicago in the late seventies. It's an historical novel, meaning that I got to do research like visiting a website on Saturday Night Live which details every episode ever made! (Laughter) The plot deals with jazz communities like Chicago bebop and AACM and their spin-offs, the burgeoning of the loft scene, a lot of different scenes. It's loosely a thriller that focuses on a young white jazz fan and an elderly black record store owner, and it's set just before Harold Washington was elected mayor of Chicago, when the whole tenor of the city changed. James MacPherson makes a point in one of his essays that 1979 was a pivotal year for civil rights and a certain coopting of a neighborhood cohesion. That's in there. It was also a year prior to the compact disc revolution, at a point when a basement record store could survive carrying cut-outs. Monoliths like Tower Records had just begun making inroads—one of these stores had just opened on Lincoln Avenue. Of course, now the sprawl of Chicago is studded with the chain stores every city knows. The novel is a way to talk about an individual either beginning to commodify his or her own experiences, or refusing to do so.

MT: You've eschewed blatant reference to personal-autobiographical experience. In a recent issue of *New American Writing*, however, you claim that the poem "Short Shrift" has something to do with your own history, though its form looks more radically disrupted than anything you've ever written before. "Short Shrift" is a series of poems about money, I understand.

SW: Recently I found a slew of artifacts while cleaning out my mother's house. In every family, it seems there's always one codger who kept an exact financial record of a house-

hold's expenses, down to the penny. It's very telling on a basic level, telling as a text, as portrait and artifact—and of course, now that personal expenditures are tabulated by commercial institutions, spending records have enormous value in their representation of one economic unit (the individual). And the social effect of the vastly organized kind of consumerism we were just discussing, what it does to an individual spirit: that's a great subject. Money has a peculiar privacy and hiddenness in our culture. I've thought for a long time about doing this project, which would encompass the political, spiritual, personal, and now there are two sections of it. It's one of the things I like in Jeremy Prynne's work—the absolute precision about exchange and material and their effects on private experience, language in thought.

"Short Shrift" was conceived as a dry run. I wanted to play around with meditations and occasions in which money was central; the result feels like a sketch. It responds to work done against the commodification of language, the way certain brand names bear vastly different meanings. (Even brands of education: Iowa and Buffalo, for instance.) And it did give me an opportunity to include personal experience. At one time I couldn't afford airfare to attend the funeral of a friend. That's there. Another friend who dies did praise Republicans. "India," in the poem, is my favorite Coltrane recording, and it was unavailable for several years. With the form of the poem, I also wanted to use the whole page, and to try to think about the energy of it in terms of "field composition."

MT: "Shanked on the Red Bed" in *Smokes* seems to have attracted its fair share of suitors. One of its fans is a very well-known comedian and writer. It must be intriguing to receive a reading not only from someone famous, but someone whose investment in the comic enterprise seems both similar and dissimilar to yours. What have you culled from the interpretations—both accurate and mistaken—of your readers? What has been the strangest, most interesting reaction you've triggered in an auditor?

SW: Yes, your reference is to Steve Martin, who contacted me after we appeared in the same issue of *The New Yorker*, and of whom I've grown very fond. I've learned a lot from him about comedy and about tonal modulation. He is so smart, and his ability to extrapolate a larger idea from a specific situation is something that often confounds me. I've had no particularly strange reaction from an auditor that I can remember, outside of one stranger once who got a little personal and then another listener who put his head, shaking it, down on the table in front of him—which I interpreted, while reading, as being fed up and which in the end turned out to be its opposite!

Michael Tyrell's poetry appears in *Ploughshares* and are forthcoming in the *Paris Review*. Reviews have appeared in the *Boston Review* and the *Harvard Review*.

What's News? Forthcoming

by
Lewis Warsh

Some of the best books I read in 1999 haven't been published yet. Chris Tysh's *Continuity Girl*, divided into six series, balances disjunctive and discursive modes of writing while attending to a common (though tenuous) thread. My favorite section, "Dead Letters," opens with a quote by Lacan: "We are quite simply dealing with a letter which has been diverted from its path..." Each of the letters is directed to the same person, "Dear X," who is also many people, where X functions as a letter that replaces a name that can't be inscribed. The poems in "Dead Letters" consist of 3 or 4 tiny paragraphs and can be read as a series of love letters, not to someone dead, but to occupants of a nether world, where contrariness prevails as a joyous adjunct to longing, where "The Slits open for Vertical Pillows" and "the viola of habit sounds its blue note." Chris Tysh's swirls of language remind me of the music of the neo-classical band Rachels: the poems literally bleed into one another, but the precision is improvisatory and uppity, in the best sense.

Bill Kushner's *That April* is a journal of 70 poems written over four months (April through July) in 1987. The titles of all the poems are the dates they were written and each of the poems begins with an apostrophe to the month it was written—April! May! etc. Kushner gets away with everything he wants to by doing it and then doing it again, because the only alternative is to be consumed by self-doubt and do nothing. The amount that has to be transcended to get anything done is often enormous and pricey and sometimes the only way to transcend self-doubt is to make it the subject of the work or point towards self-revelation like a detective novel or, even like Oedipus, where the truth—if you go on long enough, if you allow yourself to sink & touch bottom—will eventually win out. His poems are filled with as

many contradictions as, say, Edna St. Vincent Millay, who used traditional forms and meters to write about subject matter that was considered sordid and risqué. But Kushner, not hard to say, is better than any of that. (Both Chris Tysh and Bill Kushner's books will be published in spring 2000 by United Artists.)

Brenda Coultas's *The Human Museum* features texts of performance pieces and poems that seem to settle with complete assurance onto the page. Coultas's performance is all in her voice, the way she withdraws into an intimate whisper when she reads, and having heard her read it's hard not to hear the echo when reading the text, a continual reverberation. Whatever, the passive voice is absent from her work. Coultas presides over two landscapes—the political clamor of New York, the folksy backdrop of the Midwest. Ultimately a third landscape emerges, where passive-active boundaries begin to blur. It's as if Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg and Karen Finley were all having a drink in the middle of nowhere. The masterpiece of the book is "A Summer Newsreel": the poet returns to her family homestead for a visit but as a way of being there and not-there at the same time (and of her own sense of displacement: where is home, anyway?) she refers to herself in the third person as if she was a distant other: "Brenda sorts through boxes in the attic." "So many would like to be like Brenda Coultas chewing and stripping tobacco like a grasshopper." "Everyone is robbed in burlap. Brenda Coultas covered you in quilts while you were singing." It's hard to imagine that a book containing such wonders won't be published imminently by someone.

Chuck Wachtel has written two terrific novels, *Joe the Engineer* and *The Gates*, but he is also a prolific poet who has figured out a way of

describing people and things that has never been done before. His fiction isn't "a poet's" version of what a novel might be, but his poetry is definitely the poetry of a novelist. *What Happens to Me* is a collection of poems, plays, essays and short works of fiction. The descriptive technique starts from the particular and builds a world that is forever spiraling outwards without erasing the metaphysical context that was the initial starting point. Wachtel's poetics extend from and broaden the work of Paul Blackburn and Joel Oppenheimer, distinctly non-novelistic poets. "What thing," he writes, "is too specific to sing about," as an introduction to "Archeology," a poem that intertwines the history of a plunger under his bathroom sink with a meditation on the ednurance of objects and relationships. Wachtel's receptivity to the quotidian is awe-inspiring, to say the least. Or as Lacan says: "The real is what always comes back to the same place." *What Happens to Me* will be published by Hanging Loose in the Spring of 2000.

Finally, poet/novelist Wang Ping's delirious epic study of footbinding in China, *Aching For Beauty*, will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in fall 2000. The book begins: "A pair of perfectly bound feet must meet seven qualifications—small, slim, pointed, arched, fragrant, soft, and straight—in order to become a piece of art, an object of erotic desire." Wang Ping draws on ancient Chinese texts from the Ming Qing (1368-1911) into the present, as well as all forms of linguistic, literary and psychoanalytic theory. This book takes an important step towards the difficult task of bridging the myriad cultural gaps between east and west as well as exploring the fantasies (the gap between reality and imagination) that form the unmistakable, though often repressed, common ground. *Aching For Beauty* is subtitled: "Footbinding as Cultural Fetish and Discourse of Body and Language," which says everything.

Lewis Warsh's forthcoming books are *White Oak* (Poetry New York), *The Origin of the World* (Creative Arts) and *The Angel Hair Anthology* (Granary).

poetry project

Calendar

events

FEBRUARY 2, WEDNESDAY

The Anchored Angel: José Garcia Villa

A celebration for the publication of *The Anchored Angel: Selected Writings from José Garcia Villa* by Kaya Press. Featuring readers Jessica Hagedorn, who wrote the foreword; Bob Holman; Molly McQuade; Bino A. Realuyo; and editor Eileen Tabios.

FEBRUARY 4, FRIDAY

7 Beats to 9

Janet Aalfs reads from *Reach*, her just-published collection of poems from Perugia Press to jazz accompaniment with musicians Amy Ritchie and Tom Alfs. Followed by a Jazz Poetry Open Mike (poems must be 2 minutes or under). [This reading will be \$8; \$5 students; \$3 members] (10:30 pm)

FEBRUARY 7, MONDAY

Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8 pm]

FEBRUARY 9, WEDNESDAY

Joe Elliot & Laurie Price

Joe Elliot is the co-publisher of *Situations*, a chapbook series, and the founder of the *Biblios/Zinc Bar* Sunday Reading Series. His books include *Half Gross*, and, most recently, *Fourteen Knots*. Laurie Price has exhibited a series of literary art objects at *Dentro Hacias Afuera* in Mexico City. She is the author of *Going On Like This*, *Except for Memory*, and *Under the Sign of the House*.

FEBRUARY 11, FRIDAY

Come Bring Yr Poems, C'mon Get Lucky!

Erotic Open Mike Quickies with 2-minute time limit. Featured readers are Yolanda Wilkinson & the Manhattan Slam Team & London Slam Poets Tim Wells & Selena Saliva. (10:30 pm)

FEBRUARY 14, MONDAY

My Bloody Valentine

tion of her book of poetry, *Half Angel, Half Lunch*, by Hard Press in 1998. Robert Hershon is the author of 11 books of poetry, of which *The German Lunatic* is the most recent. He is the publisher of *Hanging Loose Press* and *Hanging Loose* magazine. Since 1976, he has served as executive director of The Print Center, Inc.

MARCH 17, FRIDAY

Downtown Reading Bash

In celebration of the publication of *Downtown Poets*, contributors Steve Dalachinsky, Enid Dame, David Huberman, Jushi, Donald Lev, Tsaurah Litvsky, Marlene Lortev-Terwilliger, Susan Maurer, Yoko Otono, Bertha Rogers, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Diane Spodarek, Vipin, Bruce Weber, Irving Wexler, co-editor Dorothy Friedman August, and others will read. [10:30 pm]

MARCH 20, MONDAY

Jeni Olin & Summi Kaipa

Jeni Olin is the author of *A Valentine to Frank O'Hara* (*Erudite Fangs/Smokeproof*). Her poems have appeared in recent issues of *The Hat*, *Mungo vs. Ranger*, *Blue Book*, and *Bombay Gin*. Summi Kaipa is the author of a chapbook titled *The Epics*, published by Leroy Press. Her work has appeared in *Fourteen Hills Review*, *Tinfish*, and *Kenning*. She lives in San Francisco and edits *Interlope*, a journal dedicated to publishing innovative writing by Asian Americans.

MARCH 22, WEDNESDAY

Julie Patton & Drew Gardner

Julie Patton is a librettist, self-proclaimed "phenomenologist," visual artist, and vocalist who performs and exhibits in the United States and abroad. Drew Gardner is a jazz percussionist and poet. He is the author of *The Stone Walk*, *The Cover*, and, forthcoming from Meow Press, *Student Studies*. He has been included in the anthologies *An Anthology of New (American) Poets and Writing from the New Coast*, and is the editor of *Spare* magazine.

MARCH 24, FRIDAY

Rattapallax Open Mike Contest

Readings by poets David Hunter Sutherland and Mark Nichols, to be followed by an open-mike poetry contest where the top seven poets each will receive an HP laptop computer with monitor. Open-mike from 7:00-8:00 pm. Shorter than one and a half-hours. Winners are responsible for transporting the computers. [10:30 p.m.]

(Inxay). With poet Brett Evans, he collaborated on the film short, *Read Shift*. His newest book, *A Revolutionary Kind of Fiction*, is forthcoming from Buck Downs Books this year.

FEBRUARY 23, WEDNESDAY

Sekou Sundiata & Patricia Pruitt

Sekou Sundiata's next CD, *longstoryshort*, is forthcoming from Righteous Babe Records this year. He has recorded and performed with a variety of artists, including Nona Hendryx and Vernon Reid. Patricia Pruitt is the author of *Sessions: I & IV* (1998). Her work has appeared in *Agni*, *Chain*, *lift*, and *Talisman*. She lives and writes in Turners Falls, MA.

FEBRUARY 25, FRIDAY

Issue Zero: A Literary Magazine Conference

The kick-off event for Issue Zero with readings from contributors and editors of new and established literary magazines. Tim Suermont from *Barrow Street*, Guillermo Castro from *The Writers Voice*, George Dickerson from *Rattapallax*, (Downtown), Brendan Lorber from *Lung-Full!*, Charles O'Hay from *Painted Bride Quarterly*, Ed Friedman for *The World*. [10:30 pm]

FEBRUARY 28, MONDAY

Lila Zemborain & Greta Goetz

Lila Zemborain is the author of two books of poetry, *Abrete sesamo debajo del agua* and *Usted*, both from Ediciones Ultimo Reino, Buenos Aires, and two chapbooks, *Germinar* and *Ardores*. Greta Goetz has recently moved to New York City from Hong Kong. Her poems have appeared in *The Hat*, and she is a graduate of Columbia University.

MARCH 1, WEDNESDAY

The French Poetry Festival

Featuring French poets Emmanuel Hocquard, Abdelatif Kechiche, Robert, and Frank André-Jeanne with American poets Kosmarie and Keith Waldrop, Cole Swensen, Ray DiPalma, and Marcella Durand reading English translations. Co-sponsored by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the French Ministry of

Saliva. (10:30 pm)

FEBRUARY 14. MONDAY

My Bloody Valentine

Love, distortion, and torture on Valentine's Day with readings by Elinor Nauen, Prageeta Sharma, Brian Kim Stefans, Jorge Clar, Douglas Rothschild, Kara Rondina, Gena Mason, Richard O'Russa, Gillian McCain, Rebecca Wolff, Marco Villalobos, Bill Kushner, Ruth Altmann, Wendy Kramer, Betsy Fagin, Aaron Kiely, Tracy Blackmer, David Kirschenbaum, Rick Snyder, and Sean Cole.

FEBRUARY 16. WEDNESDAY

Jonas Mekas & Basil King

Jonas Mekas is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, a catalyst for independent cinema, and the founding director of the Anthology Film Archives. Mekas is also the author of seven books of poetry in Lithuanian. A translated selection, *There Is No Ithaca*, was published by Black Thistle Press. He is currently completing two separate millennial film commissions for museums in Paris and Avignon. Basil King's books include *The Complete Miniatures and Devotions*, both of which combine text with art. King studied painting and writing at Black Mountain College, and his art is in the collection of the New York Public Library, and others. His new book, *Warp Spasm*, is forthcoming from Spuyten Duyvil Press.

FEBRUARY 18. FRIDAY

A Measure of Conduct

Barry Wallenstein reads from his new book of poems, *A Measure of Conduct*, (Ridgeway Press) with jazz accompaniment. Wallenstein has recently released a CD of jazz and poetry, *In Case You Missed It*, with musicians John Hicks, Arthur Blythe, Wilber Morris and others, from Sky Blue Records. [This reading will be \$8; \$5 students; \$3 members] (10:30 pm).

FEBRUARY 21. MONDAY

Max Winter & Frank Sherlock

Max Winter's poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, *Boulevard*, *Seneca Review*, *Volt*, and *The Iowa Review*. Frank Sherlock is the author of 13

Featuring French poets **Manuel Hocquard**, **Abdellatif Laabi**, **Jacques Roubaud**, and **Franck André Jamme** with American poets **Rosmarie** and **Keith Waldrop**, **Cole Swensen**, **Ray DiPalma**, and **Marcella Durand** reading English translations. Co-sponsored by the Cultural Service of the French Embassy and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

MARCH 6. MONDAY

Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 pm [8 pm.]

MARCH 8. WEDNESDAY

Hettie Jones & Fielding Dawson

Hettie Jones is the author of *Drive* (1999), which received the 1999 Norma Farber Award, and *How I Became Hettie Jones*. Her work has appeared in many anthologies, including *A Different Beat* and *Women of the Beat*. Fielding Dawson is the author of many novels and collections of short stories. His newest novel, *No Man's Land*, was published this January. He has led writing workshops at prisons including Sing Sing, Rikers Island and Attica since 1984.

MARCH 10. FRIDAY

Issue Zero: A Literary Magazine Conference

Issue Zero continues with a Talk Show hosted by Brendan Lorber & Douglas Rothschild. Featuring editors Jordan Davis and Chris Edgars from *The Hat*, Gary Sullivan from *readme*, Michael Rothenberg from *Big Bridge*, and Robert Hershon from *Hanging Loose*.

MARCH 13. MONDAY

Lisa Lubasch & Mike Kelleher

Lisa Lubasch is the author of *How Many More of Them Are You?* (Avec Books, 1999). Her poems are forthcoming in *Volt*, *Versé*, and *Fence*. Mike Kelleher has published two chapbooks, *The Necessary Elephant* and *Threë*.

MARCH 15. WEDNESDAY

Sharon Mesmer & Robert Hershon

Sharon Mesmer's first collection of fiction, *The Empty Quarter*, is forthcoming in 2000, following the publica-

where the top seven poets each will receive an HP Vectra computer with monitor. Open-mike poets are limited to reading one poem that is no longer than 30 lines and shorter than one and a half minutes. Winners are responsible for transporting the computers. (10:30 p.m.)

MARCH 27. MONDAY

Brenda Shaughnessy & David Baratiër

Brenda Shaughnessy's first collection of poems, *Interior with Sudden Joy*, was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1999. She is one of eight writers selected as the 1999 *Village Voice* "Writers on the Verge." David Baratiër's prose novel, *In It What's In It* is forthcoming from Spuyten Duyvil in 2000. He is the founder and editor of *Pavement Saw Press*.

MARCH 29. WEDNESDAY

Anselm Hollo & Robert Kelly

Anselm Hollo's latest books of poetry include *Corvus* and *AHOE: And How On Earth*. He presently teaches at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Robert Kelly is the author of over 50 volumes of poetry and fiction, including *The Loom*, *The Mill of Particulars*, *Cat Scratch Fever*, and *The Transparent Tree*. His most recent publications are *The Time of Voice* (Black Sparrow), *Runes (Otherwind)*, and *The Garden of Distances* (McPherson & Co.), a poem-cycle responding to the drawings of Brigitte Mahlknecht.

MARCH 31. FRIDAY

Will Work for Peace

In celebration of the publication of the anthology, *Will Work for Peace*, contributors Ellen Bass, Bill Zavatsky, Bob Holman, Daniella Gioseffi, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Kirpal Gordon, Alix Olson, LaVerne Williams, Steven Hirsch, William Seaton, Robert Milby, Marty McConnell, musical guests Colleen Kattau and Jolie Christine Rickman, and editor Brett Axel read and perform. A portion of the proceeds from this event will benefit SOA Watch. (10:30 pm).

The Poetry Project is wheelchair-accessible with assistance and advance notice. Please call (212) 674-0910 for more information.

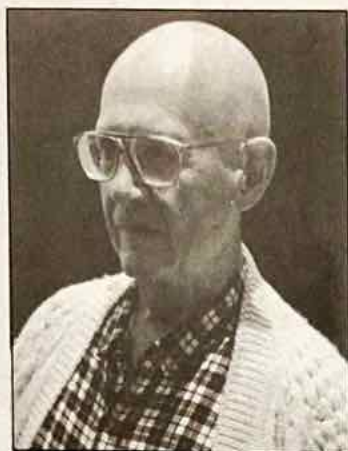
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All events are \$7. \$4. for seniors and students, \$3. for members and begin at 8 PM unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212 674-0910

book reviews



Overtime: Selected Poems

BY PHILIP WHALEN
Penguin, 1999
311 pages

"We can't easily imagine another
world
This one being barely
Visible"

"The business of this world
is to deceive
but it is never deceived"

"I know the world and I love it too
much and it
Is not the one I'd find outside
this door."

"I want to be a world, not just
another
American tinkly poetry-boo"

—Philip Whalen

The publication last spring of Philip Whalen's *Selected Poems* was a major event for several reasons, foremost among them the fact that very little of Whalen's poetry was even in print until *Overtime* came down the line. *Overtime* fills a gaping hole in the material universe, not to mention poetryland, by making Whalen's various takes on various worlds, as conveyed through the mind-and-sense altering abilities of his poetry, readily

available to the interested masses. To readers versed in contemporary poetry but unfamiliar with Whalen, and to readers who don't give a hoot about contemporary poetry for that matter, *Overtime* might provide a real shock to the system: i.e., "What is he doing?" and "How is he doing it?" Few American poets have created a body of work that so dazzlingly, and so humorously, transforms consciousness into poetry.

A poet who simultaneously wants freedom for and from everybody, Whalen's writing has completely resisted the terms of American social and literary engagement that have been set down as unspoken law this century: "Scratch an American and find a cop. There is no/Generation gap." Consequently his poems are formally open-ended, free of self-promotion and self-absorption (though not by giving up the complexity of his "I"), unafraid of embarrassment, and accessible to multiple levels of perception, as evident in this passage from "The Slop Barrel: Slices of the Paideuma for All Sentient Beings":

YOU DON'T LOVE ME
LIKE YOU USED TO
YOU DON'T LOVE ME
ANYMORE.

The sun has failed entirely
Mountains no longer convince
The technician asks me every
morning
"Whattaya know?" and I am
Froze.
Unless I ask I am not alive
Until I find out who is asking
I am only half alive and there
is only

WU!

(An ingrown toenail?)

WU!

(A harvest of bats??)

WU!

(A row of pink potted geraniums///???)

smashed flat!!!

The tonga-walla swerved, the
cyclist leapt and
The bicycle folded under the
wheels before
they stopped
The tonga-walla cursing in
Bengali while the
outraged
Cyclist sullenly repeats:

You knows you got to pay for
the motherfucker
You knows you got to pay for
the motherfucker

The bells have stopped
Flash in the wind
Dog in the pond.

Whalen makes the transmission of consciousness both form and subject in his poetry, an achievement that at once links his poems together as one long work and renders those links invisible, while allowing all kinds of other matter to flow into his poems—poverty, food, art, friendship, music, geography, war, and Zen Buddhist (as well as ordinary) philosophy are a few of his recurring subjects-as-occurrences. Reading Whalen's poems aloud especially demonstrates to the ear how variously they move: the assemblages of colloquial phrasings as ongoing registers of thought ("A continuous fabric (nerve movie?)

exactly as wide as these lines," the notion Leslie Scalapino adeptly hones in on in her introduction to *Overtime*) creating a surface for Whalen's sense of music as form; "a form that happens in time" as he put it in a 1975 interview with Anne Waldman.

Scalapino rightly points out that "reading or listening to Whalen's poetry, one doesn't have to 'figure it out,'" and, by extension, one is also freed from the rigidity of having to figure out what it's 'about.'

Whalen's work is sometimes described as high-end journal writing—an analysis that somewhat misses the point by reducing the work purely to terms of artifice. Poetry as in tune with the mind's processes as Whalen's is generally beyond the semantics of such terms, but Whalen's formal breakthrough is so total (he often seems to be inventing a new form with each poem), and his manner so offhanded and unconcerned with itself, that the ease with which his poems move can avert readers from their wisdom and intellect: "There's not an owl in the world who thinks or knows/ "I am an owl." This is a sensibility that manages to be gentle and independent, extremely rare traits in combination but, nevertheless, recognized by the author as commonly attainable: "Pleasure, pain, and recollection are events inside the brain;/ their "outside" location (please scratch my back) an illusion?"

There's a tendency in literary circles to overplay the importance of lineage and influence, a long-standing trend that perpetuates the myth of writer-as-figure looming over time as well as ordinary lives. Whalen's tones are utterly resistant to creating such authority, understanding that no one needs to have their consciousness dominated by a

figure, poetic or otherwise, and thus have any development towards independent thought pre-supposed and crippled. That being said, Whalen is generous in his allusions to, and naming of, the community of artists, musicians, and writers past and contemporary whose work has informed his own (beyond his well-known Beat and SF Renaissance contemporaries). As well, it should be pointed out that Whalen's work has been cited as important to their own by poets as radical, and radically distinct from one another, as Leslie Scalapino, Anne Waldman, and Alice Notley, among many others.

Michael Rothenberg's diligent editorial work—he read upwards of five hundred poems aloud to Whalen, who suffers from glaucoma and is legally blind, in order to create the most well-rounded *Selected*—should be applauded. At the same time, there's certainly room for more of Whalen's poetry to reemerge in print, in particular the long poem "Scenes of Life at the Capital" (though well-excerpted in *Overtime*), and much of the work in *On Bear's Head* that didn't find its way into *Overtime*. There's much more to say about Whalen's poetry, not least of which being his use of cut-up techniques, his walking eye, and his deep exploration of Zen, but these are things readers can investigate themselves, and much more extensively than they would have been able to previously, thanks to the timely creation of this sorely needed book.

—Anselm Berrigan

Anselm Berrigan is the Program Assistant at the Poetry Project. His first collection, Integrity & Dramatic Life is out from Edge Books.

Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence

EDITED BY RALPH MAUD AND SHARON THESEN.

INTRODUCTION BY SHARON THESEN.

Wesleyan UP, 1999,

Pages?

"I would wear the poem around my neck to make a speech for me" (19 March 1948)

Covering less than 3 years of correspondence in almost 550 pages, *A Modern Correspondence* quickly simmers with intellectual and physical passion bewildered and mixed. Never corporeal "love letters" but knowledge palpable and passionate because embodied. Which is, to Frances (Mutz) Boldereff, to be knowledge slighted because "trapped" in a woman's body, but the substance of crucial missives nonetheless. Else it might remain thus, a useless body of knowledge, unless, by some such as Charles Olson, it might be put to use. His then recently-published *Call Me Ishmael* evoked the initial letter—she would later reflect that it "had saved [her]—absolutely literally" (17 August 1949)—and Olson, her praise ("one of the ones we so urgently need" (22 November 1947)). That Boldereff, herself a scholar of art, literature and philosophy, was not the one to fashion this deliverance for its awaiting public she was sure of. Olson would become her "Christ" and to make clear she sends, about 16 April 1949, a notebook from May 1936 which verbalizes "the thing no man anywhere has stated in words—the young woman terror" but also serves as evidence that Boldereff is "not the one to write it": "I am the one to live it—it states that there is a man—a writer—who will come after—you can judge yourself if it is you—certainly if it is not you, it is no one else" (26 March 1949). Each Boldereff insistence that Olson must "make a speech" for her infused and brim-

ming with her own self exceeding her own proposed limitations.

"There is no way in which I can make a direct return, but at whatever time it is returned to you Olson, in whatever form, you will know that one of the sources is me." (17 August 1949)

Olson takes of her delightedly: "(((one of my secret delights is to find myself suddenly not just using the motz vocabulary, but the twisting of the mouth, the exact same heat and pressure of breath, the gestures, the works! and finding that it makes people jump and i mean jump! what a wonderful wonderful thing you are, what a power and beauty)))" (31 January 1950). Interpretation of this textual affair caused a "Riot" (see "Tom Clark and the Olson-Boldereff 'Riot'" by Ralph Maud in *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* #29 [April 1999]). Fuss over what Tom Clark finds of significance in their correspondence in his biography *Charles Olson: Allegory of a Poet's Life*—as Maud puts it "that Olson failed the challenge she represented," an obvious betrayal of Olson's intellectual and libidinal gigantism. Ralph Maud, trimming back Boldereff's influence so that it is merely directional, a pointing to various sources, supplies careful correction of misguided assertions Clark puts forward. Whatever the fine details of his orthography, he seems to shortshrift Boldereff's contribution to Olson's scale of self-value and sense of poetic amplitude in daily doses: "I want some day to see you but I can not say how important it is that you go on being alive—that you do not stop writing—(I am trembling so terribly I just can't hold the pen) I mean there is nothing if you can not write America can not be—" (18 October 1949).

In Maud's introduction to *Charles' Olson's Reading: A Biography*, he writes that at the 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference "we felt we were in the presence of the man, for our

time, almost complete in knowledge, and therefore a great resource for a general moving forward." His biography of Olson would be an attempt to outline "the story of how this accomplishment came about," specifically the role of Olson's reading. In the crucial years of this development (1949-50) reading Boldereff was daily, as surely as writing to her was. Daily magnanimous praises: "You should Olson some day do the ten new commandments" (11 March 1950), "I would rip my flesh straight down through the middle again and again for my baby who deserves everything not only from me but from all" (10 March 1950), "Oh Charles darling Christ—someday people will recite them on the street" (20 February 1950). And as for the part Olson's reader played (one letter closes with "Your loving reader"), Boldereff offered not only psychological support but material formative to Olson's emerging poetic model. Olson drafted poems in letters and as letters, pulled poems out of letters, sent her drafts of poems and essays, spliced her writing into his, and fully expected her to voice her opinions—responses to his writing, news of her own developing vision.

"I will tell you later maybe about myself—but it is so lousy for me now—that the only good thing is that you would be able to work—if not that—then I must go into the desert" (18 October 1949)

We are faced with in this sort of effacement—self-effacement on the part of Boldereff herself and retrospective effacement on the part of critics and biographers—our own failure to see and hear—to provide a context that makes visible and audible—the work of women writers. Boldereff's self-effacement, her self-denial of her own stature as a writer, hides behind it a willed and complex understanding of herself as a woman and the particular philosophic problems that entails.

"I am fucked of Olson every

minute of every hour of every day and every night—I belong to him as god has never before envisioned in flesh—forever it will never be possible to separate an Olson from a Motz because my blood is his ink" (17 February 1950)

That is, how, in the way we have come to understand and discuss poetic production, might a Frances Boldereff claim her contributions? Had she considered herself a writer, her own intellectual achievements—in the shadow of Olson, certainly—might be recognized as poetic work, rather than merely the work of a lover or supporter. No matter how crucial such roles are, they are easily dismissed even though, as in the case of Boldereff (and of Hettie Jones, most notably, though a list of particular women writing in the 1950s-60s "Beat Generation" might ensue), they were the only means by which an independent woman might keep her hand on the pulse of the new. Is it any coincidence that Boldereff was a book designer, a typesetter and a printer?

"any thought or word or thing I ever put in a letter is for you to use if you wish to so honor it—I am not and am never going to be a writer so never again urge me" (21 March 1950)

Not being an Olson scholar I can't say what relation Olson's writing to and reading of Boldereff bears on his own writing, but it's well known (mostly among Olsonites) that it was an early mutually supportive and collaborative effort. She was the first to receive "Projective Verse," to which she responded enthusiastically, noting that "the main points have points lying behind them which are all Motz points" (13 February 1950); she appears to have addressed him as "Maximus" in her letter of 9 April 1949; a point corroborated by the fact that the first Maximus Poem was composed to her in/as a letter (17 May 1950)—though these last two are points of scholarly debate.

a matter open to speculation. It seems safe to say that the importance of Boldereff's role as "Muse" will be valued according to one-or-another scholar's particular investment in the figure of Olson as a genius of the libidinal-masculine model, as seems to be the gist—without exactly being the point—of Maud's comments on the "Olson-Boldereff 'Riot'."

"I remember that I planned all my life and at last victoriously found myself with a leave of absence of three months . . . and in exactly those three months motz [i.e. I] was pregnant as it came about and the mind shut down as though it had never been there and here I was all supplied with paper, solitude, freedom, will, everything—and the mind absolutely shut off. I said 'OK nature you win—I see you are wise, but don't expect me to ever forget this insult'" (18 January 1950)

Masculine genius is the model that Boldereff herself puts forth. The fact of the body, her body, a natural fact, is what Boldereff brought herself up against. In 1950 there is yet little critical activity to question this. Now, recognizing the self-diminished potential of her own writing, the question is should we continue to put this model forth? Should we rethink our concept of poetic production in that era, which is weighted toward recognizing and valuing as "primary" production (by men) and "secondary"—domestic, secretarial, psychological, physical—all manner of material support, the work then done more exclusively by women? Fact is that Frances Boldereff wrote some beautiful, sharp, insightful, impassioned letters for a man whom she proposed could and should do what she, as a woman, could not. And those, so long as she could maintain her own writing practice, would continue to provide Olson with the support, the company, and the direction he at times needed. In a superb intro-

duction that delineates the complexity of Boldereff's situation Sharon Thesen writes, "What this correspondence demonstrates is that an intimacy of two strong minds helped to engender Maximus." Boldereff's contribution can no longer be underestimated though there isn't really an appropriate vocabulary to express her particular contribution. We might call her a postmodern Dorothy Wordsworth figure—she and Olson felt themselves "siblings" as well as lovers—but what would that mean?

"I hope to God these my letters are not intrusions" (16 November 1949)

This volume does not represent all of the Olson-Boldereff correspondence (Olson sent the last letter in 1969, a few months before his death), but 22 November 1947 to 7 September 1950. This particular selection leaves Olson at a poetic acme: "Projective Verse" would be in *Poetry New York* in October, and Olson had started corresponding with Robert Creeley, who would forward to Cid Corman Olson's work, which Corman would feature in the first issue of *Origin* (Spring 1951). Not so a personal acme; his wife Connie's suspicions and dissatisfactions were mounting. Though the final letter in the volume is a telegram, Olson informing Boldereff of his arrival in New York, it was a visit on which, according to Clark's biography, Olson would be turned away. It is perhaps imagined that Olson's "Mayan Letters" to Creeley during 1951 might stand in as the next installment of generative correspondence, where Boldereff's drops away. Thesen's introduction provides an account of their dwindling and sporadically rekindled passions, but the surrogate closure to this intriguing epistolary affair can only be disappointing.

"I love you in a way that makes anything possible to me. I am searching for a path. I can find guidance

neither in the Bible, nor in Blake nor in Lawrence. You and I have to create the pattern" (12 February 1950)

These letters are finally a testament to how a post-modern woman might fashion herself as Muse without denying herself intellectual beauty. She might create for herself with Olson a "pattern" which would say that "this terrible struggle I make is of use" (12 February 1950). She was astounding, brave—a college-educated single mother with a creative (and not merely clerical) career, economically soluble (usually; marriage being for the most part an option)—but was she unique? Were there others of her ilk, still unlocatable? The question remains, but the fact of these letters, and her life, remains as well. As much as it shows Olson to be an articulate and emotional lover while rounding out and demystifying the trajectory of his explorations and poetic formulations, I have come to think of this volume as "about" Frances Boldereff, and as "about" the predicament that an introspective intellectual woman might have found herself in at mid-century. These letters open quickly onto her life and it's difficult, reading this correspondence at the end of the century, not to see the implications: as to the poetic subjectivities our understanding of poetry as a cultural phenomenon produces, and of the way we choose to locate and discuss poetic production retrospectively, as readers, scholars and critics; of the particular gendering of the poetic landscape especially during the era of the *New American Poetry* (now increasingly under critical investigation); all of these through which we continue to formulate what it means to engage in our world(s) as poets.

—Linda V. Russo

Linda V. Russo lives in Buffalo, New York

Imagining Language

EDITED BY STEVE MCCAFFERY AND JED RASULA
MIT Press, 1999,
618 pgs

As Tom Orange notes in his online review for *Lagniappe*, *Imagining Language* enters onto a field already riddled with anthologies of "alternative" writing, employing frames as various as "new (American)", women's writing, non-US late modernist writing (England, Argentina), the entire planet over the past century, writing from the Language generation, writing from communities determined by ethnicity, and even—as a sort of alternate version of the "alternative"—"New Expansive" poetry, a.k.a. the "new Formalism." With the exception of the last group, each attempts to assemble from a wide, borderless, and purportedly invisible or marginal, mass of material a coherent view of poetic innovation, premised on a difference with writing of the "past." "Coherence" is, of course, also a troubled term here, as these anthologies mostly attempt to acknowledge their own provisional nature as a storehouse of fragments. The cynic, believing in a sort of purity to the non-institutional tradition of the avant-garde, sees such anthologies as merely vessels transporting this material into the classroom, and so don't find themselves in any position to offer opinions on the strategic or aesthetic successes and failures of these books, as the stakes are rather low—nobody's hurt, the march of "culture" remains unaffected, since the classroom itself is a sort economically lucrative, but philosophically and politically nullifying, abyss. A more sublime view understands the anthology as being a field in which literary works thrive on their disparateness more than their similarities, such that the book itself becomes (in a phrase coined by McCaffery and bpNichol when writing as the Toronto Research Group) a "book

machine," more specifically a place in which juxtapositions in texts are so drastic and unique that, in the end, the anthology goes into auto-critical mode, self-animating like a nuclear fission chamber. Without trying to diagnose the situation, it does appear that desktop publishing and some sort of fear that our culture isn't producing has pushed small press publishers into substituting mammoth anthologies for anything resembling literary criticism. Criticism is usually seen as authoritarian (even one of the century's most productive critics, Kenneth Rexroth, makes the ethical claim that he did it only for money), or contributing to the communication sphere the sense of "literature" and not the "social." The problem with that, of course, is that the few critics there are, present writer included, get away with murder on occasion, but also that poets are forgetting that their work is being read, and even misunderstood, disliked, or generally ignored (even by sympathetic readers). Anthologies, especially the "contemporary" ones, try to address this problem by making repairs in the general stage on which poetry is enacted—yes, there is a "community," yes, there is a mechanism for publishing whereby small, Xeroxed things get read, and then, with luck, bound and distributed. But as for aesthetic and political issues, they are not only absent, but are further hidden as the anthology fails in its comparison to the *New American Writing*—nothing to be ashamed of, of course.

McCaffery and Rasula's anthology is unique in this context, in that it not only extends the period of "modernist innovation" to well before the 19th century—indeed, there is material in this volume from well before the printing press, and extending into Islamic cultures—thereby challenging the idea of modernism itself, but it is an exquisite critical effort as well, punctuated as it is by informative, encyclopedic essays and introductions. It also offers, at various

times, a more mystical (or material), visceral (or ethereal), political (or autistic), eccentric (or general), idiotic (or heroic), well-known (or obscure) view on the social formalist linguistic project, from Russian Formalism to Oulipo to the Torontonian poet Christian Bök (who is included). It is as if the tiled floor that experimental formalism had conceived as cutting us off from the past had been revealed to be an illusion, or at least made of glass. Reading it, one accepts the fact that language, even when it foregrounds its surface qualities to the detriment of linear meanings, has a pedigree, even if it's one that's eccentric or fractured.

Imagining Language, then, is something of a sourcebook for the Foucauldian genealogy of language, with all its drama of the aberrant being (as if letters, when seen for themselves, invariably produced insanity, or were a form of pornography) exiled to the dimmer corridors of history. What any self-respecting experimental writer will find a whole range of practices that may be weirder, even more dangerous, than anything in her own poetries. It is as if a third (or is it fourth or fifth) vector were created for the textual sign, such that the so-called self-referential—the "liberated"—can't help but find some tether to an historical predecessor, giving a vertical vector to the levelling (fill-the-canals-of-Venice-with-cement) component of Futurism. Many of the systems presented here are idealizations of language, some eccentric Dutch or English autodidact's ideas on how language could be simplified or rendered more exact. Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins are, in a sense, synthetic figures in this company—they wrote poems that could live two lives, one for the pure interest in its unusual orthographic systems, the other as legible, relatively mainstream "poem." Others included are consciously constructed works of "art" such as that by Bök, Stein, Joyce, Bob Brown, and others (the first sec-

tion of the book, "Revolution of the Word," retraces some of the path covered by Jerome Rothenberg in his anthology, now in reprint, of that name). A list of the contents of one (randomly selected) sub-section is dizzying in itself, and worth remembering for cocktail parties: Athanasius Kirchner, Sir Thomas Urquart, Francis Lodwick, John Brinsley, Joseph Webbe, Anonymous (cuts a good figure), John Wilkins, Peter Walkden Fogg, Mercurius van Belmont, Richard Grey, Jonathan Swift, Roland Barthes, Beth Learn, Ernst Jandl. This is from the section called "Transpositions," involving the "parasitic" nature of language when viewed across several frames, mostly involving the textual sign of language as the host, and a range of associations—whether it be the echoing of Latin in its sounding or the signified itself—as a "parasite." Peter Walkden Fogg's inclusion unearths an "invisible parasite" on the text host when several lines of a poem are crossed out and replaced with (literally) straight lines, the breaks in the lines occurring at the caesura, such that the pattern of the words as pure pattern is all that is retained. Fogg's contention is that such a viewing exposes the general integrity of a verse, not to mention conveys the emotional tenor of the poem as an augmentation to reading. Fogg's, like many others in here, is a "pseudo-science" of sorts, and threatens the halls of legitimacy, though, as Susan Howe has demonstrated, private investigations into linguistics can spawn monumental changes in pedagogy and research.

Given the authority so many self-educated, obviously self-confident people have felt they had over language, an anarchistic geography is exposed here, or a series of rhizomic pockets of distortion and reconfiguration, such that linguistic isolation (as in the "two solitudes" of Canada) becomes not the exception but the norm. The book is a "coffee table"

production of sorts, but, despite its size, it comes off as a very small window on what is a detailed, nearly romantic search for origins, and at the same time a wonderful product of the fine art of being interested in the past. As the book seems destined for a sort of obscurity itself, it is the bibliograph's sort of auto-erotic dream, a rare encyclopedia of rare things that is already fading into the past, or into the future.

—Brian Kim Stefans

Brian Kim Stefans is the author of *Free Space Comix* (Roof Books), and *Gulf* (Object Editions). He lives in New York and reviews regularly for Publishers Weekly.

87 North

BY MICHAEL COFFEY
Coffee House Press, 1999,
124 pages

Verbs of motion abound in Michael Coffey's new book—walking, riding, driving—as if the ruminating "I" of most of the poems were constantly searching for sureness in a seemingly unsure universe. Some readers might consider the book a search for a different voice, as *87 North* has taken a very different direction from his first book, *Elemenopy*. While that volume featured an homage to Jackson McLow, a series of poems written in emulation of Stein, and a nonsense novella written in a made-up language, this book is composed of acutely reflective poems inspired by trips through New England, dreamy paeans to New York City, meditations on the significance of family, and, at the book's center, a poem called "My Quarrel with Language Poetry." What gives? Or, more verbally, is this move rewarding? Is it a worthwhile development? The answer is, in this case, yes and no. From its beginning, the book has an honest tone, a blend of a more relaxed Creeley and a less knowingly casual O'Hara—with a little bit of Frost

SALE OF PRINT EDITION TO BENEFIT THE POETRY PROJECT THISTLE

by Donald Baechler



Thistle, a color lithograph (22 x 45 inches), incorporating poems by David Greenberg, is being offered in an edition of 75 by Brooke Alexander Editions at an introductory price of \$1,200 (after December 25th, 1999, the print will cost \$1,500). Sales benefit the Poetry Project.

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thrown in. The longer "In Robert Motherwell's Car" describes driving through upstate New York and the poet's childhood; as he moves from one town to another, the driver sees ghosts everywhere. Some he can stave off by retreating into churches or inward philosophical spirals, but others remain.

Half-address, half-journal, the trip is an attempt at recovering what adulthood's responsibilities have taken away—an attempt dropped, it seems, as he mellowly concludes, "I drive by/ and still don't know/ what lasts of what's written." In "February Thaw," a train trip becomes the site for a prolonged exercise of intense looking, as long as it holds up: from a sign of life in a cabbie scratching his balls to a sign of death in a news clipping on a recovery of a drowned body. Will quiet observation of the universe save us or drown us? Coffey swims quite nicely.

Coffey also writes openly about intimacies—his father's quietly cursing the lace of a shoe, Coffey himself teaching his son to speak—and in so doing, risks losing ground. In several poems, he isolates such secret moments and then, oddly, makes no moves to drive them towards a revelation. In "Originally Called 87/20/96," he lays out images of personal historical importance: walking on the moon, his mother asleep in a lawn chair at night, a child (possibly his son) drowned in urine in a bucket. These images weaken when Coffey objectively states that "we live the news/ and relive the news" or, earlier, that "the horror only begins,/ is only beginning, for him,/ for my young son, for me." Rather than gaining resonance through independence, the images may seem loosely gathered, aimless.

But these meditations by no means fill the book. Fans of John Cheever will appreciate Coffey's prose poem named after him, which follows Cheever's daily path through the West Village, a Cheeverless reverie that leaves us fulfilled. Coffey writes with admirable restraint about New York City,

almost as if he were tinting his impressions with a miraculous pastel that makes them both mellifluous and admirably clear. And Coffey maintains splashes of the cavalier element of his earlier book, as when "Fuck the calamari!" appears in an otherwise somber poem or when "The Death of Robert Creeley" narrates the older poet's death in a car crash, making his last words "whispering//something about woodwinds." *87 North* will require a different set of muscles in its readers than *Elemenopy* required: muscles that absorb and process plain speaking about universal emotions, which are not bad muscles, in and of themselves. If you don't have those muscles, this book might give you some.

—Max Winter

Max Winter is a writer living in New York. His poems and reviews have appeared in the Boston Review, The New Republic, and past issue of the Poetry Project Newsletter.

A Summer Newsreel

BY BRENDA COULTAS
2nd Story Books, 1999,
23 pages

At the beginning of *A Summer Newsreel*, Brenda Coultas writes, "Is singing a song, an American song, an American folk song allowed?" Over the next 20 odd pages she proceeds to answer her

question by doing just that. *A Summer Newsreel*, Coultas' first longer publication since *Early Films* (Rodent Press, 1996), is a kind of late twentieth century 'Song of Myself' set amidst the old toy and discarded implement strewn grass of rural Southern Indiana.

Readers who have been following Coultas' work will happily recognize the poem's topography (heralded by the book's nifty cover photograph); here, in abundance, are spinning jennies, crickets, discarded car bodies, lilies, mammoth teeth, camper shells, rabbits, salt shakers and Shaker brooms arranged with a troubadour's sense of play and intricacy. Those new to Coultas' writing are in for a fine treat: for several years, Coultas has been conducting an in-depth evaluation of the interstices of rural and semi-rural America and *A Summer Newsreel* is another stunning chapter in the most gloriously idiosyncratic work around. The five-part poem, with its Whitmanic undercurrents, is infused with the quirky, challenging and disruptive rhythms of Gertrude Stein and the powerful self-distancing and self-description of Slovenian poet Tomas Salamun.

For so many I'm going to do
today
that they wish they
could do for themselves.
breathing
walking

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Is there something that you
would like me to do today?

Is there something Brenda
Coultas can do for you?

She
would like to help you.
She is reading and
writing and
stopping to serve you.

Like other of Coultas' works, *A Summer Newsreel* has the feeling of a documentary. Throughout the poem there is a concern with digging, with unearthing, with excavation. Words built into images of filmic clarity are held up to the light, historical context is probed, connections are established, deconstructed and dissolved. As in documentary, a wandering, inquisitive spirit prevails. Questions, often unanswered, follow questions, and bits of abridged narrative appear.

Are we riding on the backs
of mammoths unable to
recognize them?

Are we treading on the
backs of something
larger than
ourselves?

crickets sing.

Coultas's highly individual work could be placed in the genre-bending lineage of an Henri Michaux. Like his, her work annihilates the boundaries between prose and poetry, effectively synthesizing lyric and narrative tendencies and, in the process, happily rendering categorization all but impossible. Near the end of *A Summer Newsreel*, Coultas writes, "This poem wanted to imitate a piece of smart and beautiful writing". I say this poem didn't need to; this poem is beautiful. And smart.

—Laird Hunt

Laird Hunt lives in New York, where he edits *The Bestiary* for the web magazine *The Transcendental Friend*. He is the author of *Dear Sweetheart* (Jensen/Daniels).

How Many More of Them Are You?

BY LISA LUBASCH
Avec Books, 1999
99 pages

At once intensely philosophical, fantastical, and romantic, Lisa Lubasch's *How Many More of Them Are You?* opens with "I have no patience. I want to leave life quickly in order not to be barbered by its," thus inquiring into the multiple senses of a poetic frame. The meditation, which simultaneously considers the intellectual terrain that the poet contends with ("The incomplete illogic which creates me"), to the literal form of a poem ("an ellipsis intuiting its form"), questions the boundaries that shape the reception of language, thought, and the always complicated Self.

In this first book, Lubasch creates a metaphorical stage, where the asterisks, which appear in most of the poems and which act to separate one discreet thought from another, are akin to the scenes in a performance. The highly theatrical narrator, who employs such tactics as quoting herself, cutting off dialogue in mid-sentence, and spreading phrases generously over the page as if in the intensest meditation, forges a stylized self unafraid to exhibit both certainty and doubt. Thoughts and identities bleed from one section to another: "Je suis toute seule avec" is followed in the next section by "When I suffer, singing 'I am the rogue, it is not as nice as all that.'" Indeed, the overflow of Self is enacted through the intermittent overflow of the speech out of English and into French. An innovative enjambment, where a line trails off to be picked up in the next serialized cluster of ideas, becomes a way to imagine the blending of fact and fiction. To

extend the metaphor of the theatrical further, the actors (the speakers), though they disappear behind the wings (the asterisks) frequently forget that they are meant to distinguish one distinct episode from another. An edgy stream-of-consciousness ensues that elegantly gathers all of the players into one scene—or *mise en scene*, as the case may be.

All this to say the self-conscious staging of the events in Lubasch's work effectively questions the authority of the traditional divisions in poetry; the poet remains troubled by the concrete and the abstract, by the real and the imaginary, and by love and the absurd. She considers, "(My reflection in the dirt/ is not a reflection)" and "the horse, the broomstick, and the beam, the ineluctable odor of (something)." She is a mix of both the lofty and empirical—unable (or unwilling) to separate herself from the real-world events of her experience and the ethereal impulses that inspire the poetry. We witness the staged and the sincere Self, the multiples of those selves which ultimately beg the question: "How Many More of Them Are You?"

—Summi Kaipa

Summi Kaipa lives in the Bay Area, where she edits *Interlope Magazine*.

Sorrow/ Saudade

BY CLARIBEL ALEGRIA,
TRANSLATED BY CAROLYN
FORCHE
Curbstone Press, 1999
103 pages

Poems in translation offer passage into two distinct worlds, the world of the original idea and the world of the idea's shadow. In *Sorrow/ Saudade*, Claribel Alegria's series of lyric love letters to her deceased husband, the poet demonstrates the narrow ache of grief in her everyday life and Carolyn Forché deftly negotiates this landscape of longing and desire for the fleeting.

The title of the collection,

Saudade, is a Portuguese word which Forche describes in the preface as "a vague and persistent desire for something that cannot be." Indeed, each poem communicates moments in a life disrupted by death as in the poem "Insomnia,"

I say love
and abandonment
lacerates my body.

Alegria lives these moments deeply and yet the poems' candor and simplicity rescues them from seeming merely maudlin. Instead they describe the vast spectrum of emotion that are evoked from the benign gestures of looking in a mirror or at the flowers planted by her husband.

Forche's translations of these poems are diligent if only occasionally pedantic. She does manage to maintain the simplicity with which these poems were written and the translations are never overwrought.

These poems are meant to be read together; they are a string of days. The power of this collection is realized through the sequencing. The work is significant because it is brave; rather than hiding behind obtuse gestures of grief, Alegria's poems inform the reader that her whole world is marked by the change. Yet, at the same time, the progress she describes gives hope as in the final poem "It Cannot,"

Sadness
can't cope with me
I lead it toward life
and it evaporates.

This is not Alegria's most significant book to date. However, the tenderness evoked in these poems is rare and worth examining in light of the fear we have of being spectators of someone else's grief. In the end, this book is about hope and the urge to live, simple yet pertinent subjects.

—Carmen Rosello

Carmen Rosello holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from the University of Iowa. She lives in the Bay Area.

In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art

BY RUSSELL FERGUSON
University of California Press, 1999
160 pages.

In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art is the catalogue to the exhibition organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Bound in linen, it's obviously meant to evoke in title, form, and content Frank O'Hara's original book of his

collaborations with artists published by the Museum of Modern Art.

Loosely grouped sections each informally address a different facet of O'Hara: his collaborative processes, his gay identity, uses of metaphor, the New York School, his self-effacement, etc. Presenting O'Hara poetically and personally this way is warmly non-didactic and subjective, and also gives a sense of O'Hara's personal charm through the many portraits, photographs, and friends' tales of his unique charisma. Written with an immediate and understanding touch by Russell Ferguson, the text gently highlights and illuminates the art with liberal application of poems, anecdotes and quotes from O'Hara himself and friends. The art is not overcome by some book-long thesis, nor are individual reproductions subjugated to the text. Many of O'Hara's friends reminisce about O'Hara's physical charm, and this adds more weight to the art, particularly the many portraits drawn by artists of O'Hara.

However, one underlying idea that permeates much of the book is the tension between figurative and abstract art. This is only to be expected, as O'Hara was at the center, both geographically and artistically, of an extremely volatile and exciting period of abstract expressionism. The catalogue gives more understanding for this vital interplay in O'Hara's poetry—both in his collaborations and his own work—between the ideals and practices of the abstract expressionists such as Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, and those of the more figurative artists, such as Rivers, Freilicher, and Hartigan—or even someone like Philip Guston, who moved between the two poles. Another underlying discussion is how wide the breadth of O'Hara's artistic interests really were—that his understanding of art and artistic practice came from a passion for the entire history of art, dance, music, literature—and how compelling this was for those who knew him. As Philip Guston says in the first chapter of the catalogue, "Frank was in his most non-stop way of talking, saying that the pictures put him in mind of Tiepolo. Certain cupola frescoes. Suddenly I was working in an ancient building, a warehouse facing the Giudecca. The loft over the Firehouse was transformed. It was filled with light reflected from the canal. I was a painter in Venice." On the facing page is Guston's sketch of O'Hara: "Guston's portrait drawing of O'Hara goes to the edge of caricature to catch him holding forth in this way. Guston's line traces the elegant curve of O'Hara's neck and head, his broken nose, and his lips, parted to deliver the next sparkling line."

—Marcella Durand

Marcella Durand lives in New York City. Her book, City of Ports, is out from Situations Press.

Krupskaya Press
PO Box 420249
San Francisco, CA 94142-0249
Steven Farmer, *Medieval*
Dan Farrell, *Last Instance*
Elizabeth Fodaski, *fracas*
Peter Inman, *at. least.*

Poetic traditions at their best are rich sources of ideas, punctuated by the quirks & hic-cups of those maneuvering beneath their monikers. On the outside, the traditionalists are waiting for themselves: the point of recognition being their own terms on others' lines. Not to suggest that the designations and debates between groups are unnatural acts or are unhelpful, but they are famously misleading in their focus. On the inside, you have poets doing whatever their individual and/or collective ear incites them to.

Krupskaya press is headed by Jocelyn Saidenberg, with a rotating co-editorship. The name is lifted from a Bolshevik with close ties to Lenin, whose work was destroyed by Stalinism. The four books from its first round are each balanced with signature lines that bespeak eccentricism, industrialism, and some sense of humor.

I attended Dan Farrell's reading last spring at the Poetry Project, where his poem, "Avail," was the highlight. The poem is comprised of responses to emotional queries concerning physical health. "My appetite does not suffer because of my feelings of anger. I notice immediately when my body doesn't feel healthy. My anger does not interfere with my sleep. Sometimes I don't sleep very well because I'm feeling angry." The crowds reactions came in waves, initial laughter at the contradictory statements, and the awkwardness of the subject, changing with the insistence of the repetition to a thoughtful "hunh?!" and finally to a quiet seriousness. I found myself charged at the end from the range of response available.

There may be a distance created by the layered and often contradictory positioning of the lines in *Last Instance*, though the deftness of the technique and humor pulls the reader through. The opening poem, "No Future," is less inviting a read for those less inclined to strain for coherency, but to miss moments such as, "Bailed borrowed brains, but there's no thence, no going back to ye information" would be a shame, and humor appears often enough to relieve the tensions. From "My Recognizance"—"So consciousness is not as much as its appurtenances. This is the last gong I will ever bong on on on on on." Plus the immortal phone message to K. in the poem of the same name: "I, um, ah, ah, um; I, ah, um, um, um, ah; ah, I, um; ah;..."

The layering of language and the page length lines give these pieces the feeling of a busy painting. Some of these works are clearly built with a computer's help, some straight writing, and all seem to have been worked over quite a bit. That the surfaces of a cut-up

piece like "Avail," and a straight piece like "K" carry a similar handling show that Farrell's methods are well worked to the point of being internalized.

Steven Farmer's lines are so tight the space around them politicizes as a more-than-capable and ironic "yawp" decodes :

Disembodied the young shoots look heavenward
which is a language of promise & vapor.

The poems are ironically critical of perceived modes of organization:

Narcotics is one
zoning board, theater another

but are deeply rooted in the same organizations by his presence and attunement to its phrasings. Farmer's humor often comes from this juxtapositioning of being the insider/outsider, which displays a wealth of ideas and character, but with a balance of spiritual impoverishment due to environment. This coupling is also apparent in the strong works of fellow California poet Kit Robinson, among others. From "TERMS OF SUPPRESSION":

Increasing the sheer emotion spent
embellishment a lustrous yoke
the debt incurred to get to this point
where no one would notice the debt incurred.

The title poem is the bulk of the book. Farmer stretches out in this work and the breathing room brings the magnifying glass to his dis-ease: "intelligence leading to cynicism/ an effortless grace in the way it/ connects the killing events to an order"; and shows that the scale he turns away from and into has its own fabric of detail: "the guitars sound like cans/ physics bitch, dark cables of hair." His criticism deepens: "National Anti-Depressant Clause/ imagines an era of stress and blame/ complicit monolith/ cubicle want/ shoelace endorsement/ fix it/ masking you, imitate bird songs/ or gunfire..." and many parallels are woven in, but there is no relief or solution by the end, only clarity from the inside of system which hollows itself to grow larger: "at stake a replication/ slashing strokes devoid of testament" Farmer's own strokes are the opposite, well-rendered, versatile, and bringing his bread to the table.

I earmarked every other page of Elizabeth Fodaski's *fracas*. The book begins with a painful ending to a relationship and then moves into etymologies, closing with the strange eminence-from-a-distance of the section titled "Paper Daybreak." Fodaski poems are open field, deftly employed to the page but not trying to break it "the absolutes the/ sinews tenuous at/ best we/ worry the words onto paper/ as opposed to/ meadows..." But this is also a set up for moments where the poems glow in their drive to clear the space around them:

it was inedible

the whole scene made me
 consumptive
 the words spilling
 from your
 face now
 the scene was spectacular
 a bedraggled mirage
 a Cubist nostalgia
 it was ineffable
 the whole thing made me
 diffusive
 a volume unraveled
 in the sense of burial
 the paper breaking

There's a constant push for empowerment, not to be aggressive, but to be able to do what one wants with respect, "Someone told me recently he'd really be interested in seeing what I do, but he never really understood poetry or liked it very much. I told him to fuck off." and empowerment for clarification, which often manifests as writing: "we are/ parts of sentences from the start/ so why not pick their words."

Fodaski shares Steven Farmer's dissatisfaction of surroundings: "how/ and how not/ you are not but another/ quivering weed/ how to make a diff/ authenticity trope/ we need another parlor but/ who will sit there?" "how to sit upon/ this unengulfable space." Socrates appears often in the "Etymologies" section as her consciousness, and reason is often the strength of her dilemmas, in its ability to overcome difficulties in relationships ("The Anatomy of Associative Thought"), in public ("fracas"), in history ("Etymologies"), and in its drive to create ("Paper Day-break"): "the/ locus uncertainty/ in the sense of faith/ in the sense of rigor' in the sense of/ progress in the making."

Peter Inman's *at. least.* is punctuated with thoughtfully broken stutters, half-syllables, and many hard stops. The poems look like they fell apart on the page and were nailed back together. You could pronounce each stop (I tried this while riding the subway)

and the sounds may come in full bloom from the words, but the constant stoppage can easily lead to an exaggerated tone. It's hard to overlook, though most readers will read through it, "slurring" the punctuation, which still accentuates the arrhythmia of the poems. "fractions. of. capital./ to. select. but. a. passage. / is. not. the. class. struggle. crossed. out. / its. clusts. from./ a. wife's. paragraphs. / as. launches./ crossed. out. Howard. Beach./ everywhere. he. stripes. as./ the. back. of. another. painting. as. / the. only. distance. that's. left." Some passages of the book feel more like static, other times a peculiar commentary is forcing its way through: "a./ row./ of./ gesture./ meadowed./ from./ my./ hands./ however./ i./ might./ talk./ than./ "wilderness./ itself." pairs./ of./ eyes./ on./ some./ already./ removed./ streetcar./ bone./ structure."

The moments leading towards structural coherence can be quite

stunning, often jumping out from particular pages. Does one read this book, or look at its pages as if a sculpture? The occasional suffix or non-word combined within the punctuating effect point the whole structure back to the most primitive utterances. In fact, each of these four books in their own way, and many other contemporary books of poetry, are pointing towards a reinvention of the use of language as a tool for more complex and expressive ideas, a place to stretch out against a growing lack of physical space. A tricky and emotional procedure still in the beginnings of its realization.

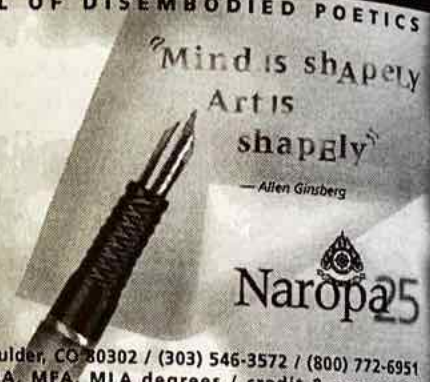
—Edmund Berrigan

Edmund Berrigan is the author of *Disarming Matter* (Owl Press, 1999). He has written reviews for past issues of the Newsletter.

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Janet E. Aalfs

Reach
Perugia Press (Shutesbury, MA), 1999.
86 pages, \$11.95.

William Bronk

Metaphor of Trees and Last Poems
Talisman House (Jersey City, NJ), 1999.
147 pages, \$15.95.

Garrett Caples

The Garrett Caples Reader
Black Square Editions (New York, NY),
1999. 98 pages, \$9.00.

William Corbett

New York Literary Lights
Graywolf Press (St. Paul, MN), 1998.
344 pages, \$16.95.

Andrei Codrescu & Laura Rosenthal

Thus Spake the Corpse
Black Sparrow Press (Santa Rosa, CA),
1999. 417 pages, \$17.50.

Cid Corman

Nothing Doing
New Directions (New York, NY), 1999.
153 pages, \$13.95.

Robert Creeley

En Famille
Granery Books (New York, NY), 1999.
\$19.95.

Mary I. Cuffe

The Woman of Too Many Days
Calyx Books (Corvallis, ON), 1999. 64
pages, \$12.95.

Ales Debeljak trans. Sonja Kravanja

Dictionary of Silence
Lumen Books (Santa Fe, NM), 1999. 79
pages, \$15.00.

Michael Dorian

The Nektonic Facteur
Silk City Press (Hoboken, NJ), 1998.
100 pages, \$10.95.

Amy Dryansky

How I Got Lost So Close To Home
Alice James Books (Farmington, ME),
1999. 65 pages, \$11.95.

Stephen Ellis

Interface
Jensen/Daniels (Jersey City, NJ), 1999.
36 pages, \$4.00

Homer trans. Robert Fagles

The Iliad & The Odyssey
Penguin Books (New York, NY), 1996.
683 & 541 pages, \$14.95 & 15.95.

Edward Foster

*Answerable To None: Berrigan, Bronk,
and the American Real*
Spuyten Duyvil (New York, NY), 1999.
187 pages, \$14.00.

Gloria Frym

Distance No Object
City Lights Publishers (San Francisco,
CA), 1999. 168 pages, \$10.95.

Peter Ganick

Around A Corner: an epidermis (1-28)
Potes & Poets Press (Elmwood, CT),
2000. 244 pages, \$15.00.

Michael Gottlieb

Gorgeous Plunge
Roof Books (New York, NY), 1999. 95
pages, \$11.95.

Lauren Gudath

The Television Documentary
Second Story Books (San Francisco,
CA).

Barbara Guest

If So, Tell Me
Reality Street Editions (London),
1999. 47 pages, £6.50.

Daniel Halpern

Something Shining
Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY), 1999.
83 pages, \$23.00.

Brooks Haxton, trans.

*Dances for Flute and Thunder: Praises,
Prayers and Insults - Poems from the
Ancient Greek*
Viking (New York, NY), 1999. 84 pages,
\$20.00.

Barbara Henning

Me and My Dog
Meeting Eyes Bindery/Poetry New York
(New York, NY), 1999. 27 pages.

Gad Hollander

Walserian Waltzes
Avec Books (Penngrove, CA), 2000. 92
pages, \$11.00.

Laird Hunt

Dear Sweetheart
Jensen/Daniels (Jersey City, NJ) 32
pages, \$4.00.

Peter Jaeger

ABC of Reading
Talonbooks (Burnaby, British Colum-
bia), 1999. 135 pages, \$16.95.

Robert Kelly

Runes
OtherWind Press (Ann Arbor, MI),
1999. 25 pages, \$8.00.

Joel Kuszai, editor

Poetics @
Roof Books (New York, NY), 1999. 188
pages, \$18.95.

Michael Lally

Of
Quiet Lion Books (7215 S. La View
Drive, Portland, OR 97219), 1999. 108
pages, \$9.95.

Oleh Lysheha

The Selected Poems of Oleh Lysheha
Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute
(Cambridge, MA), 1999. 121 pages.

Bernadette Mayer

books received

Janet E. Aalfs

Reach
Perugia Press (Shutesbury, MA), 1999.
86 pages, \$11.95.

William Bronk

Metaphor of Trees and Last Poems
Talisman House (Jersey City, NJ), 1999.
147 pages, \$15.95.

Garrett Caples

The Garrett Caples Reader
Black Square Editions (New York, NY),
1999. 98 pages, \$9.00.

William Corbett

New York Literary Lights
Graywolf Press (St. Paul, MN), 1998.
344 pages, \$16.95.

Andrei Codrescu & Laura Rosenthal

Thus Spake the Corpse
Black Sparrow Press (Santa Rosa, CA),
1999. 417 pages, \$17.50.

Cid Corman

Nothing Doing
New Directions (New York, NY), 1999.
153 pages, \$13.95.

Robert Creeley

En Famille
Granery Books (New York, NY), 1999.
\$19.95.

Mary I. Cuffe

The Woman of Too Many Days
Calyx Books (Corvallis, ON), 1999. 64
pages, \$12.95.

Ales Debeljak trans. Sonja Kravanja

Dictionary of Silence
Lumen Books (Santa Fe, NM), 1999. 79
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Michael Dorian

The Nektonic Facteur
Silk City Press (Hoboken, NJ), 1998.
100 pages, \$10.95.

Amy Dryansky

How I Got Lost So Close To Home
Alice James Books (Farmington, ME),
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Stephen Ellis

Interface
Jensen/Daniels (Jersey City, NJ), 1999.
36 pages, \$4.00

Homer trans. Robert Fagles

The Iliad & The Odyssey
Penguin Books (New York, NY), 1996.
683 & 541 pages, \$14.95 & 15.95.

Edward Foster

*Answerable To None: Berrigan, Bronk,
and the American Real*
Spuyten Duyvil (New York, NY), 1999.
187 pages, \$14.00.

Gloria Frym

Distance No Object
City Lights Publishers (San Francisco,
CA), 1999. 168 pages, \$10.95.

Peter Ganick

Around A Corner: an epidermis (1-28)
Potes & Poets Press (Elmwood, CT),
2000. 244 pages, \$15.00.

Michael Gottlieb

Gorgeous Plunge
Roof Books (New York, NY), 1999. 95
pages, \$11.95.

Lauren Gudath

The Television Documentary
Second Story Books (San Francisco,
CA).

Barbara Guest

If So, Tell Me
Reality Street Editions (London),
1999. 47 pages, £6.50.

Daniel Halpern

Something Shining
Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY), 1999.
83 pages, \$23.00.

Brooks Haxton, trans.

*Dances for Flute and Thunder: Praises,
Prayers and Insults - Poems from the
Ancient Greek*
Viking (New York, NY), 1999. 84 pages.
\$20.00.

Barbara Henning

Me and My Dog
Meeting Eyes Bindery/Poetry New York
(New York, NY), 1999. 27 pages.

Gad Hollander

Walserian Waltzes
Avec Books (Penngrove, CA), 2000. 92
pages, \$11.00.

Laird Hunt

Dear Sweetheart
Jensen/Daniels (Jersey City, NJ) 32
pages, \$4.00.

Peter Jaeger

ABC of Reading
Talonbooks (Burnaby, British Colum-
bia), 1999. 135 pages, \$16.95.

Robert Kelly

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OtherWind Press (Ann Arbor, MI),
1999. 25 pages, \$8.00.

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pages, \$18.95.

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Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute
(Cambridge, MA), 1999. 121 pages.

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Epigrams, Imitations and Translations -
CD (Utopia Productions), 1999. \$12.00

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Midwinter Day
New Directions (New York, NY), 1999.
119 pages, \$12.95.

Louis Mckee
River Architecture
Cynic Press (Philadelphia, PA), 1999.
70 pages, \$12.00.

Elizabeth Morse
The Future Is Now
Linear Arts Book, 1999. 33 pages,
\$7.95.

Sheila E. Murphy
The Indelible Occasion
Potes & Poets Press (Elmwood, CT),
2000. 75 pages, \$11.50.

Ron Offen
God's Haircut
Pygmy Forest Press (Eureka, CA), 1999.
73 pages, \$10.00.

Bob Perelman
Ten to One: Selected Poems
Wesleyan University Press (Hanover,
NH), 1999. 216 pages, \$35.00.

Ron Phelps
The Sentence of Madison Morrison
Sentence of the Gods Press (Norman,
OK), 1999. 37 pages.

Carl Phillips
Pastoral
Graywolf Press (Saint Paul, MN), 2000.
74 pages, \$14.00.

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119 pages, \$14.95.

Benjamin Saltman
Sleep and Death the Dream
Red Hen Press (Palmdale, CA), 1999.
57 pages.

Leslie Scalapino
Seamless Antilandscape
Spectacular Books (New York, NY),
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Sharon Thesen
News and Smoke
Talonbooks (Burnaby, B.C.), 1999. 142
pages, \$12.95.

Quincy Troupe
Choruses
Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, MN),
1999. 111 pages, \$14.95.

Paul Vangelisti
Alphabets
Litorral Press (Los Angeles, CA), 1999.
134 pages, \$11.95.

R.M. Vaughan
Invisible to Predators
ECW Press (Toronto, Ontario), 1999.
64 pages, \$14.95.

Diane Wald
Lucid Suitcase
Red Hen Press (Palmdale, CA), 1999.
63 pages, \$10.95.

Rosanne Wasserman
Other Selves
Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 113
pages.

Walt Whitman
Selected Poems
St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 530
pages, \$32.50.

Magazines:

The American Poetry Review
Editors: Arthur Vogelsang, Stephen
Berg, David Bonano (Philadelphia, PA),
48 pages, \$3.95.
Contributors: Claudia Keelan, John
Yau, Carl Rakosi, David Trinidad, Dana
Levin, others.

Cher Cher #1

Editors: A. Hautvast, B. LaRoe,
D. Smith (303 Park Avenue South, #500,
New York, NY 10010). 94 pages.
\$10.00.

Contributors: Donna Cartelli, Bob
Feldman, Bill Kushner and others.

Crazyhorse #57

Editors: Ralph Burns and Lisa Lewis
(Dept of English, University of Arkansas
at Little Rock, 2801 S. University Little
Rock, AR 72204). 165 pgs. \$5.00.
Contributors: Martin Espada, Tom
Smith, Cathleen Calbert and others.

Downtown Brooklyn #8

Editor: Wayne Berninger
(English Dept. LIU-Brooklyn, Univer-
sity Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201), 124
pages.

Contributors: Barbara Henning, Lewis
Warsh, Eleni Sikilioanos.

Fence, V 2 #2

Editor: Rebecca Wolff
(14 Fifth Avenue, 1A, New York, NY
10011), 196 pgs. \$8.00.
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Free Lunch #22

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(PO Box 7647, Laguna Niguel, CA
9207-7647), 32 pgs. \$5.00.
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Victor, Thor Rinden and others.

Lungfull #8

Editor: Brendan Lorber
(126 E. 4th St. #2, New York, NY
10003), 172 pages, \$6.95.
Contributors: Hoa Nguyen, Eileen
Myles, Jordan Davis, and others.

Poets & Writers Magazine

Editor: Therese Eiben (New York, NY),
128 pages, \$4.95.
Featuring: A Profile of Sapphire by Fran
Gordon, Metromania by Michael
Scharf, among others.

Rattle, Winter 1999

Editor: Alan Fox (Los Angeles), 192
pages, \$8.00.
Contributors: Lisa Glatt, Lyn Lifshin,
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