

# poetry project

NEWSLETTER

DEC/JAN 1997-98 ISSUE #167

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by Sheila Alson

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# regional updates

Minneapolis Correspondent: Mark Nowak

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London Correspondent: Tim Atkins

## MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Nearly 100 members of the poetix posse arrived in the Minne-Apple (along w/ several dozen locals) in mid-October for some non-Wobegone-related activities at the Cross-Cultural Poetics [Xcp] Conference. Here's what I was able to catch, & dug: U Sam Oeur kicked things off w/ amazing chants/lyrics (in Khmer) from his upcoming Coffee House Press book, *Sacred Vows: Poems from the Cambodian Killing Fields*. On deck, a threesome: Julie Patton's vocable histrionics, Roy Miki's searing pomes, & Hilton Obenzinger's documentarian *New York on Fire*. The next morning, Maurice Kenny, on a roundtable w/ Barbara Tedlock, Juliana Chang, Dennis Tedlock, & Maria Damon, churned ideologies up w/ his "I am not a scholar" incantation (this, along w/ a grad student's claim that "All translation is colonialism" served as "dukes up" ring calls of the 4-day pay-per-view showcase). David Michalski coined the phrase "Nixonizing the text" for those abusing the quote/unquote hand gestures; Yunte Huang & I scoured the parkways for yellow referee penalty flags for heinous jargon abuses. Yet stellar wordz flow'd that afternoon from my Xcp bandmates Solomon Deressa, Betsy Burns, & Walter K. Lew. Also, folks told me of amazing papers I'd missed from Rod Hernandez ("*Tropicalism: A Poetics of the POCO-Che Literary Collective and Publishing Company*"), Tina Neumann ("*The Poetics of American Sign Language*") & others. For me? A panel of landlocked no-coasters was one of the conference hi-lites: Jen Hofer (Iowa City) & her translations of Guadalaran poet Mónica Nepote; Paul Naylor (Memphis) reading from "On Certainty (Part III): Memphis, Capital of North Mississippi"; & Fred Wah (Calgary) w/ his write-on excerpts from *Diamond Grill*. In fact, the triumvirate down from more norté than Minne-Apple (Fred Wah, Roy Miki, & Jeff Derksen) provided p'haps the aurora borealis for post-conference poetic navigations. Straight from Barbados, Kamau Brathwaite closed things out w/ his imaginal calypso riddim's that

returned us all back to & sent us out to sea/see/hear/here. (A complete list of all I don't have space to mention is available at <http://www.stkate.edu/xcp/>).

## AUSTIN, TX

Austin, home to the second largest bat population in the US, is the self-proclaimed live music capital of the world. And poetry? Since my move here from San Francisco, I have not investigated the poetry "scene" until engaged with this assignment. My research into poetry activities shows Austin's small city/ big college and civic town character: everyone seems to know everyone else and is often active in several group productions. The Austin Poetry Society is the oldest of these, organized almost fifty years ago. Meeting once a month to read and critique members' poetry, the society provides a forum for local poets to share work and sponsors guest poets and speakers. Not to be confused with younger Austin Poets at Large (APAL). APAL hosts two nights a week of open mike poetry at Quakenbush's across from the University of Texas and at Ruta Maya in Austin's revitalized warehouse district. Other cafe venues include the Electric Lounge, Flipnotics and Mojo's Daily Grind. Austin is scheduled to host this year's National Slam Competition. The most visible annual event is the Austin International Poetry Festival (AIPF). In its sixth year, AIPF organizes and hosts local, national, and international poets. This year's festival will take place April 1st through 5th, with events held at citywide venues. This is just a brief overview. For future updates, I will feature one part of Austin's poetry goings-on as I become more involved. Last night at dusk, for the first time, I witnessed the bats as they issued East following the Colorado River.

## HONOLULU, HI

I arrived in August to see Frederick Wichman read from his collection of Kauai legends. Then in September, Steve Carll read with Angela Nishimoto. Also in September Hawaii Fall Celebration of Writers and Writing, the event that billed itself as the event of the season. The first night Marilyn Chin, Lee Grue, Mahealani Dudoit, Ron Carlson, Pio Manoa, and Pualani Kanakaole Kanahale read. These last two were the highlight of the evening for me. Pio Manoa's poems were straight up new critical verse untainted by new formalism's casualness. I had not heard stuff like this live ever in my lifetime and it made

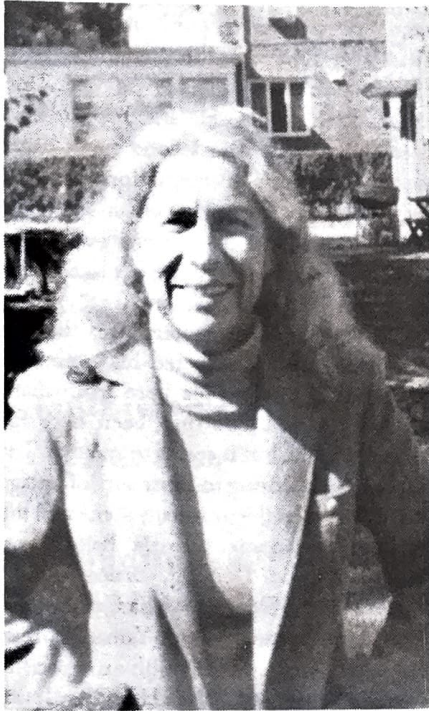
me very excited. Pualani Kanahale's chant was also amazing. She chanted it in Hawaiian and the audience was awed. Then she read it in English and the audience remained awed. The second night began with a incisive introduction by local writer/hero Eric Chock. He said that when he first heard that the university was doing something on the literature of place that he thought oh good, they are finally doing something on local writers. But then he good humoredly tempered his comments by noticing that people were from many different places. I've only been here for three months, but it seems to me that Eric Chock was pointing to some sort of antagonism between the university scene and the vibrant local scene. Pamela Ball, David Collins, Alison Deming, Bruce Fulton, Michelle Cruz Skinner, Malia Collins, and Lois-Ann Yamanaka read. Yamanaka read last and wowed everyone with an especially funny reading from *Blu's Hanging*. It was worth the wait but I have to confess it had been a long evening. In October African novelist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o came to talk. The talk was packed. He was an hour late but the audience didn't complain. They sang chants in Hawaiian while waiting. When he arrived he gave a great talk called "Native Languages and the Politics of De-Colonization." It was right on.

## LONDON, ENGLAND

Summer highlights have included spectacular Cambridge readings by Caroline Bergvall, a surreal and splendid performance by Grace Lake, and pyrotechnics from Miles Champion. In London, Tim Davis flew in to the Serpentine Gallery from NY & lit up the city. His reading was the first in a new series which promises to be the best of the autumn. The Annual Cambridge Conference on Contemporary Poetry took place at Kings College, Cambridge, and speakers included Steve Evans (giving a paper on Bernadette Mayer), Emanuel Hocquard, Fiona Templeton, and Jennifer Moxley. Coming in the fall are London readings by Bill Griffiths, Allen Fisher, Ira Lightman, Maggie O Sullivan, & chris cheek. For writers interested in what is happening in Britain, there is information & debate at the british & irish poets list @ <[british-poets@mailbase.ac.uk](mailto:british-poets@mailbase.ac.uk)>, which is well & generously run by Ric Caddel. It would be nice to be overrun.



# announcements



## Hannah Weiner 1928-1997

New York poet Hannah Weiner died this August. Her career as a writer and performer spanned three decades, and her contributions as a great innovator of experimental writing knew few boundaries. Hannah often participated in events at the Poetry Project. Between 1967 and 1992 she gave over twenty readings to Poetry Project audiences. There is little doubt that Hannah had a major impact on many of the writers in the community. She will be greatly missed.

## A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980

Beginning December 6th, at the Berg Collection of The New York Public Library (5th Ave & 42nd Street), there will be an exhibition of small press books, pamphlets, manuscripts, letters, photographs, and posters

from over eighty publishers. The show will include memorabilia from the great renaissance of publishing that took place around the Poetry Project through the 1960s— including selections from *C* magazine, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, *Angel Hair*, *Adventures in Poetry*, *The World*, *United Artists*, *Lines*, *0 to 9*, and more. Also represented will be such legendary publications as *Semina*, *Origin*, *Black Mountain Review*, and *Jargon*, as well as work from the later 70s. A special video produced from vintage films by Larry Fagin will also be shown, and an illustrated catalogue of the show is slated to be published in April of 1998. The show is being curated by Rodney Phillips and Steven Clay, and will be running until May 20, 1998.

## Happy Birthday Jackson Mac Low

The Poetry Project extends happy birthday wishes to Jackson Mac Low who turned 75 on September 12th. For those interested in Mac Low's work, a special issue of *Crayon* magazine dedicated to Mac Low is now available (see page 31 of this issue for more information).

## HTML Literate?

The Poetry Project is currently looking for people to help work on its web site. If you are interested and you know HTML, please contact Marcella Durand, Program Coordinator at the Project, (212) 674-0910, or e-mail her at [poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com). Our web site address is <http://www.poetryproject.com>.

## The Poetry Project's 1998 Symposium: Identity & Invention A Call for Proposals

The Poetry Project will host its next four-day Symposium, May 7-10, 1998. This year's theme is *Identity & Invention*. We need your ideas for talks, panel discussions, and discussion groups. We probably won't be able to do everything that's suggested, but in the past we've been able to do a lot of what's been proposed.

Some of the issues the symposium will address are: 1) To what extent is invention (i.e. "imagination," "innovation," "improvisation," etc.) a shared objective among contemporary poets? 2) What are the criteria for evaluating the magnitude and usefulness of literary invention? 3) How do poems identify or set the conditions for fresh perspectives, approaches, and modes of communication? 4) To what extent are poems the accounts of individual writers and/or the cultures, communities, traditions, and movements from which they (poets) draw their inspiration? 5) Are there societal groups for whom the assertion of collective identity in poems is liberating for society as-a-whole, and are there other groups for whom such assertions generally prove to be redundant or reactionary? 6) To what extent are identity and invention complementary and/or contradictory tendencies in writing?

Proposals may be sent by to Ed Friedman at the Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th St., New York, NY 10003 or via e-mail, [poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com). All proposals should be received by January 15th. Please specify whether your proposal is intended as a suggestion for others to undertake or if it's something that you would like to do.



An Interview  
*with*  
**VICTOR HERNANDEZ CRUZ**  
 by  
**Sheila Alson**

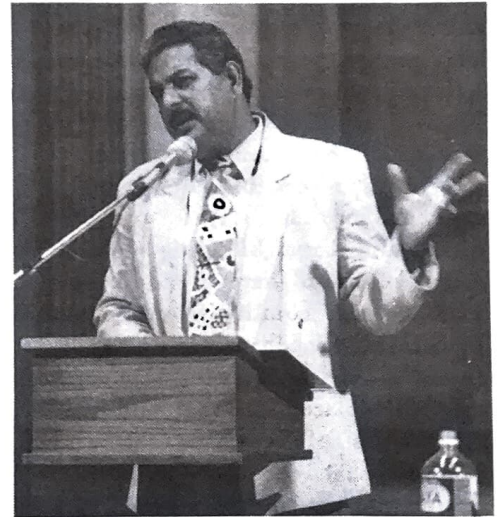


photo by Melissa Zexter

Victor Hernandez Cruz is a writer currently living in Aguas Buenos, Puerto Rico, his birthplace (1949) and residence until the age of five at which time his family migrated to New York City. He was raised in New York City and wrote *Snaps*, his highly acclaimed first book of poetry, in New York at age 19. He subsequently moved to the West Coast and published numerous other collections of poetry and prose including *Panoramas* which has just been released from Coffee House Press. In November, 1995 while he was visiting New York City, I interviewed Victor in a Chinese restaurant in the Union Square area—one block from Washington Irving's birthplace. When the restaurant's vacuum cleaners got too loud, we moved to the Barnes & Nobles cafe and finished the conversation surrounded by looming portraits of literary figures including Nabokov who joined the conversation.

**Alson:** How have the multicultural influences within you affected your poetics?

**Hernandez Cruz:** The interesting thing about the word multicultural is that they use it different in the North than they use it in Latin America. Here in the North they say multicultural or multiculturals as to signify or to designate cultures that are separate standing one next to the other. In the Caribbean, within certain layers of the society, or "classes" if you will, the different cultural energies, expressions and ways of looking at the world have merged or even melted, or have become, through their contact and connection with each other, something new, unique and different. So that when you say multicultural (we say also multiracial), consequently you have to see that

as being multispirited and multimedious different things coming together not because they want to stay separate or fight for their own separate identity, but because they have come together in such ways that they become something different, totally different. In the Caribbean we can identify, for instance, specifically African Caribbean culture or a culture that comes more from Spain. But in the music we can definitely identify and feel that the culture of Africa and the culture of Spain have come together through instruments and instrumentation not just the instruments playing one next to each other, but that the chord structures changed how the music is played in relationship to a new element, the guitar and/or the drum for the other side. In the island of Puerto Rico, we tend to think in terms of three races/one culture three psychologies, three ways of behaviors, three ways of looking at the world, three tempers coming together to make another one that's none of those three, but is the result of those three the Puerto Rican nation as a cultural unit. How do I express what Octavio Paz and some other Mexican writers speak about? The Other. What the mestizaje of the Americas has created is that now the other is also within us. So I am also both the conquistador and the native. I am both the Indian and the Spanish. I am both this what you see and also the mulatto culture of my whole island. The other is also within me. So I don't feel a separateness from that which I see as other outside of me, but a way of bringing it in, or that I know a percentage of that which is out there also makes me up as a human being.

**Alson:** Sort of the union of opposites?

**Hernandez Cruz:** It could be union of opposites.



But I suppose it's what might happen in the United States where there's some sharp separation between people, and they don't see themselves within each other. Perhaps that's beginning to change in certain regions of the country or circles of the country where that doesn't apply. It's much more like a real communication and a real blending. Maybe forms of music here are definitely that—the jazz coming from certain British and French marching bands, layers of African tempos that were originally placed on that and sing song types of attitude (call and response) that were placed upon that. So you can say jazz, in a sense, is a hybrid music mostly cultivated by African Americans. It also has another element in it.

**Alson:** You also earlier talked about the experience of moving here to New York City when you were five years old.

**Hernandez Cruz:** That trip—that migration experience was like moving from one age to the next, at that time. I don't know that would be true for today. Because of the widespread use of television now, someone can move from the mountains of the Himalayas today to the States and not have the same cultural shock as I had between moving from a small town in Puerto Rico to New York in the early 50s. Television sends the image of other cultures, of other geographic spaces into each other. So we know what Tibet looks like from watching TV. People who live in the mountains of Tibet know what the Empire State Building looks like or the Manhattan skyline. But we didn't have no television at that time. It was the early 50s. Television was starting to become popularly used in the States. So you can imagine the small province we were in. We had no visual sense of where we were going. No atmospheric sense. No geographic sense. We came right from the small towns into the most industrialized and developed city in the world, which was New York at the time. So it was more than a geographic move. It was a move of the psyche. It was a move of going from one time zone into another without any preparation. It was a different kind of shock. I don't think people would experience that anymore with television and popular media the way it is now widespread.

**Alson:** So that was once more bringing in that element of contrast into your experience?

**Hernandez Cruz:** Yes. And having that element of contrast or having memory of otherness, memory of other space, memory of other geographies. It kind of never leaves you, especially when you come when you're about five. You have these strong visual, sensorial impressions of the place of your birth. And also you continue to speak Spanish for a while. It always is a substratum of thinking. It's always a contrast. It's always present. It's always like a substratum in your mind, being in one place and thinking of another. As I expressed to you, to me it's like living in the center of metaphors, in its artistic way of comparing one thing to the other. To extract more meaning out of both places or of both objects or whatever you're comparing. In this case, if you compare New York to the mountainous region in a tropicality, then you are doing what might be considered opposites. But we're living in opposites. We're living in a contradiction, within that Puerto Rican diaspora that I grew up. It was that constantly being in a pendulum between hot and cold, between mountain and building. Between staying here or not staying here. Because it was always a debate on whether or not in fact we were going to stay here. Every year there was always talk about getting back to the place of our origin. And there was this development in this tempo that was starting in that direction and then those plans would always fall through. There was never enough money for the whole family to go back, we'd just have to wait one more year. So it was a constant thing of never really settling the mind on, "This is it, this is our new home and we're here forever." So, finally my family did move back. All of my family moved back. Except an aunt that I have in the Bronx, but that's it. That tendency was for real. It was demonstrated now by the fact that they have moved back. So I grew up with that anxiety.

**Alson:** That's an interesting part of what sets up that tension for you in your own sort of psyche, which is ultimately where the poem comes from—which is also the situation with your family and their indecision about where they really were. So they really

were in both places in a sense.

**Hernandez Cruz:** Consequently, the poetry that I did, given that it does take things out of place, has been accused by critics of being surrealistic at times. When in fact there is nothing really illogical that happens in my poetry. I contrast unlikely things. A pineapple in snow, palm trees in Manhattan, things of that sort. And it goes on to other more abstract elements. That constant going back and forth can create interesting content. It doesn't stay immediate. It brings the local situation into an international play. Going back to a Caribbean island is then going back to a historical truth. San Juan was a city 100 years before the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. It's going back to Columbus coming on boats, which is the whole culture of Spain coming here on boats. The medieval period. The Mediterranean element, the Moorish element, the Jewish element, the Gypsy element. All of the other cultural elements that came with the voyages of exploration, that come to the island of Puerto Rico, which I can think about, but from the point of a Manhattan window, are then expanding from the immediate into international space, historically and mythologically, within a single poem. So that the poem is always an exploration of those possibilities of history. And a search for it, and a clarification of it in my mind is like unweaving the quilt.

**Alson:** So some of your poems, I noticed, when I was reading *Red Beans*, were explicitly historical explorations. Then I noticed that there were other poems that didn't have that as the major content or as the major focus, but had some other experience as the major focus. They seemed at the same time to be also historic explorations in the methodology, in the form, in the structure.

**Hernandez Cruz:** I either get to the historical via the personal or I start from the historical and get back to the personal. Either way I have to get back to something much more interesting than a singular person. So I have to write a historical poem or a collective poem. Now for me, language is the most collective thing there is because it is what everybody speaks. So when I'm writing alone, I'm like in a festival of communication with other people. So I never really feel that I'm alone. It is

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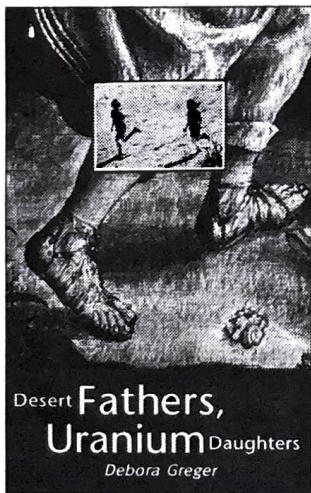
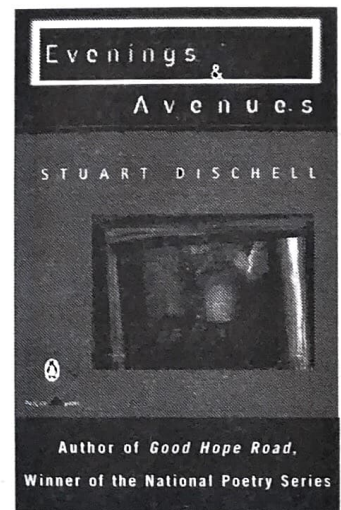
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Debora Greger, who grew up near the site of the Hanford atomic plant in Washington, explores the legacy of a Catholic girlhood spent in a landscape where "even the dust, though we didn't know it then, was radioactive."

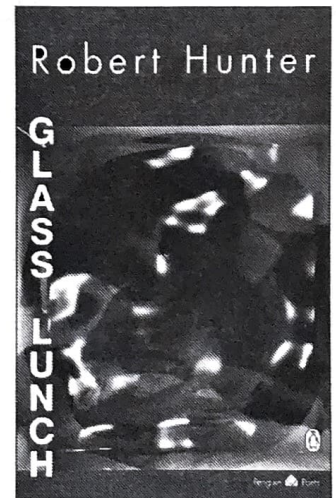
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precisely when I write that I most get filled with the idea of my relationship with other people and my relationship to history, to objects, to mountains and to buildings, to streets, to cities. That's exactly when I think most of the world. For me it's more like a festival—writing. It's more in the sense of a carnival, which is a public event, where everyone participates—there are no spectators. You cannot go there and be an audience. You either have to sing or dance, or march, or move, do something, which is part of the process.

**Alson:** So what is the process for you? What do you do? Every writer has their own particular personal ritual or personal process that they do when they're sitting down to write.

**Hernandez Cruz:** I have to write within this continuous search for history, unraveling Caribbean history. I cannot write just anything that pops into my mind unless I can take it back to an encounter with a larger space, with a larger mythological or historical space. So I'm constantly looking for that. My mind is already prepared for that. It's not just a writing that's done at random. I try to control that imagery, those ideas that come through the mind in a flurry as much as possible. I try to control it to make the language say exactly what I want it to say, to describe what I want it to describe. It is that which is of interest to me. It's about the Caribbean and the way of being human from that position and about the migration experience of Caribbean people. Those are the important things to me in writing. I don't know if that's clear.

**Alson:** Part of what you do for yourself is you write when your mind or your psyche is in that place where you're making that connection, that historical or mythical connection.

**Hernandez Cruz:** Writing is also reading, it's also sensitivity to words, it's also something that you practice. Since everything you write you do not publish. I think writing is something that comes after long struggles of practicing and doing it and throwing a lot of stuff away. To write clearly is very difficult. When we read something that reads smoothly, that reads clearly, that person spent a lot of time to achieve that. You don't write smoothly and clearly very fast. If you write very fast, it gets kind of bumpy and kind of slow, the

language is rugged—the language is rough. To me, writing is always centering in the fact that one has an affinity with the sound of language, with words and with meaning. And second, that one has something to say. Not necessarily something new to say, but something ongoing to say. That one can become part of the process the experience of writing. That one can write with literature or against literature—with some poets or against some poets, within the epic or the age. That one lives with the resources at hand which would then be particular to you. There is a particular way of blending, or twisting or using the words, but it's all interpretation of what's present and available here. It's not so much its originality, but it's our manner of contributing to an evolution of literature, which is what I do. I don't sing. I'm not in the popular tradition of declaiming. My memory is real bad. I am a reader and writer of literature. One of the ways I came to writing was the fascination with reading and also with hearing stories in all senses. Hearing guitar singing, and people reciting. Primarily it was my interest in words and literature and books, ideas all coming together. There's a delicate balance that comes together. One's sensitivity to language and one's content or information—stream, warehouse, river. Then the technical aspects of language. The actual doing of it, the grammar. Knowing how to write a clear sentence, a noun, an adverb to describe your verb, pronouns, and knowing when to stop and put a period or comma, for the sake of clarity. Using dictionaries, thesauruses, and contemplating words over the years. Keeping a word book. Circling words you don't know. Words that have flavor for me; words that are more like vegetable; words that are like machines and words that are more technical-conceptual. It's three different areas that I try to put words into. All of that is part of writing. It's living with language and words and ways to express and using different forms to be able to do it. Like Haikus and Coplas in Spanish. Some sonnets and spoofs, where I try to make the words rhyme. Using a multiplicity of styles and forms to express that river that's constantly flowing through you. What one has to really know is that poetic inspiration is

there as destiny and that there's no other choice but to write. You might write through "peace and storm" and you write through richness and poverty. So you know that this is your destiny since there's nothing else that can erase it. A habit that you have of being sensually analytical.

**Alson:** Talking about the craft aspect of the language, how would you say that those influences have impacted the craft?

**Hernandez Cruz:** After a while they go hand-in-hand. I forgot who it was that said—I don't know if it was Creeley or somebody—that "the form is made by the content." Perhaps Creeley might have gotten that from William Carlos Williams. William Carlos Williams assessed the ideas were in objects. Every step we take gives us our anatomy—sets up our thoughts—the reality that we're living the language that's all around us. The objects, the ideas within those objects, that form can then be your style. So it goes hand-in-hand. The forms that I'm about, the little town that I come from in the Caribbean—the migration experience—the New York City experience all became blended as one. They each have a different tempo. The tempo of New York is different than the tempo of Augas Buenas. The poems that are created could be different. It doesn't have to be the same. If I have the strength of mind to be this one person that a variety of things are happening to, then I don't have to say that I'm different here than I am over there in terms of what interests me and what I may be interested in writing. You see what I'm saying?

**Alson:** You mean in terms of form?

**Hernandez Cruz:** In terms of clarity also. If you're going to be in a confused situation it's good to write about it in a clear way. If you can write about chaos in a clear way then you can communicate. And if you write about chaos in a chaotic fashion, then you're going to see it in the writing. It's going to be too mushy. The reader is not in tune with the object that's in front of them and having that personal relationship with it. In terms of how you might describe something. What it means to you, what it does to you—your emotions and sensations about it. I think that's what Williams is about. He was able to do that—to feel that in his



poetry. It just came out in a very natural kind of way. In terms of my craft, I try to do that as much as possible. I try to let this person that's inside, that's centered in spirit, come out with a certain content that's also similar to the language. The content and language, that there's no disagreement with content and language. You can have wonderful content but be out of step with your language. Your imagination can be way up ahead of your technical skills. You can be very florid, and full, and pregnant all over the place but it's not taking anyone anywhere. Balance comes with time. To have that time, that progression and that evolution, you must have that initial seed. That sensitivity to language to begin with. I don't think that's something that can be acquired. You can't buy that in Woolworth's. You can't take a series of vitamins and achieve it or live a series of experiences and come through it and have that ability. You have to have that in you.

**Alson:** Was there anything else you wanted to talk about?

**Hernandez Cruz:** I just wanted to round out some thoughts I had on bilingualism. I came here with a specific language intact when I was five years old. If we're to believe Edward Sapir, the linguist, we know that language is intact at the age of five. That's about the same age I got to New York City, with the Spanish intact. I grew up stereophonically with the introduction of English. So I was speaking a pretty much broken English. At a certain point, I think the English started to erase the Spanish since this is the environment that I was in. English was all around me. Phonetically, the sounds of Spanish were always with me. I fell back in the writing of it and the reading of it. In my teens when I was 18 or 19, I gained specific consciousness about not losing the Spanish and vigorously practiced and studied and concentrated on maintaining it, keeping it in balance with the English. By that time I'd been writing in English. I was doing a funny thing because I grew up around people who recited poetry orally. This poetry was coplas in rhyming form. I began writing these coplas rhyming Spanish poems using English words. This was a ridiculous thing. For one, English doesn't rhyme as readily as Spanish. You rhyme in Spanish at ran-

dom or by accident, by chance. So those first poems I threw away and went out to look for a more immediate language. A more urban language, a more current language.

**Alson:** When you were writing those rhyming poems, for you, was it a conscious effort to replicate a Spanish form that you knew or was it just because it was within your experience?

**Hernandez Cruz:** No. I was too young for it to be a conscious effort. I just think I was just coming out of some circumstances where it was present. That's what they were and that's how I hung out from them. That's how I proceeded from them into doing the task of sitting down, putting one word next to the other. It's just something that was. As a habit you have grown up with. Landing the English—erasing the sense of a flowery Spanish, a rhyming tradition from the Spanish. Reading William Carlos Williams and Lorca—*A Poet in New York*. That helped me with my footing with the English language to write more in Americanese. It became more like New York City kind of poetry. All the different influences of the different "accents" I call them. There's black English in the housing projects, Polish English, Irish English, Yiddish English, words for things that were all kind of coming together to create a neighborhood language for me that I was able to use. My first two books, especially, and grounding me into a momentum with the language that then opened up into a sense of the American language, a more national kind of sense of it. Just growing and handling it better and becoming more crowded with content. The Spanish always has kept in the background a certain kind of awkwardness in my English. It's hard to describe, but somehow it's there. Sometimes my structure in prose, especially. I can say syntax-wise it's a Spanish structure. I can tell by the ordering of things. So when I write in Spanish they tell me that a verb has to go in reverse. You probably got that from English. So I am doing the same thing in both languages.

**Alson:** Do you see that in your poetry as well?

**Hernandez Cruz:** Yes, I see it in my poetry. But it's an awkwardness that I see as being fruitful and useful. It cre-

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ates possibilities for the language, because it's still within clarity and it's still understood. I'm still using the language well. It just has a tinge to it. I want it always to be part of my character.

**Alson:** So there's actually an intention that has come in your own writing process to retain that flavor in your language, not trying to erase it.

**Hernandez Cruz:** Yes. Now it's intention. Before it was unconscious. I have grasped what was spontaneous. And I've been able to keep it up in a kind of controlled setting. Sort of like a linguistic fascism. Controlling the anarchy of language. Language, pretty much gets hordes of people out of control. And you have to control it. You have to control it by imposing these strict laws of flavor. It has to have this flavor.

**Alson:** One way that you might control it is that when you see it appearing, you keep it there.

**Hernandez Cruz:** I keep it there. I insist on it there. But I don't use so much Spanish words in my English poetry anymore. Julio Ortega, the

[continued on page 29]



## SYMPOSIUM 1997:

## SECRET GOSSIP

by

Charlotte Carter

*Participants in the 1997 Poetry Project Symposium were asked to write recollections for a series of readings called "The Secret Gossip of the Poetry Project". The following piece was one of several read during the three day "gossip" extravaganza.*

As an adolescent in Chicago, I'm stage struck, TV-addicted, and film crazy. It seems that one day I am ditching class to go to the premiere of Parrish, where Troy Donahue and Connie Stevens appear live to promote the movie, and the next day I'm ditching class to take the elevated train from the south side to the Loop and points north, where at dozens of used book shops and open stalls I search out the works of Allen Ginsberg, Leroi Jones, and Diane diPrima.

I invest all my summer money in a black turtle-neck and a pair of handmade lace-up sandals. An uncle recently out of the army, young and handsome and full of all the promise that is soon to be thwarted by his descent into drug dependence, mentions casually that the beatnik is a thing of the past. I am a dinosaur before I even have my first cigarette.

I enter high school 65 pounds overweight, spending my evenings writing scripts for **Dobie Gillis** and **Dr. Kildare**. By junior year I am handing in papers exclusively about writers who have taken their own lives. Graduation comes. My pop's plant is on strike and there is no money for college. I go to bed at night looking at the three things tacked up on the wall of my room: a photo of the campus of Mt. Holyoke College, a nighttime shot of the Arch of Triumph, and the subway map for New York City.

It is the early 1960s and I am a tubby young black woman in the single most segregated city in the United States. Dilemma: will I become a great actress, a classics professor at a prestigious New England university, or a suicide who leaves behind a script guaranteed to win an Emmy for Richard Chamberlain? I wish to be a suicide, but I do not want to die.

I choose life, and, in essence, run away from home, in the bargain securing for myself a second rate education.

I arrive at the Project in late 1973, owing to the influence of my first New York boyfriend, a poet. The hipsters have long ago vanquished the academics. Hippies have replaced the hipsters. And hip is gaining on the hippies.

How odd it is to be asked to supply gossip about the salad days at the Project, when gossip was perhaps the thing I feared most at the time. For, while it was a singular thrill to encounter a host of odd-looking sexy writers, many of them with looks as off kilter as my own, it did not take long to realize that if you slept with one of them, you *would* end up in a poem—no pseudonyms used. The ego-gratification at being immortalized in a mimeographed little magazine was overwhelmed by the innate shyness. And thus the wallflower-at-the-orgy years commenced. How to be fabulous without fucking? It was another dilemma.

Bernadette Mayer was, I think, the first white woman I ever met who did not shave her legs. Cropping up in more poets' poems and journals than any other living entity, she is an uber icon. I adored this woman on sight and there is no way I'd be standing before you today if not for her. And if I still have not learned how to write a sonnet, it is through no fault of hers. Like Paul Newman attempting to buy and destroy every print of the first (awful) movie he ever made, I wish I could track down and obliterate much of the work I did in those early days. I write prose now and am proud to produce the occasional sentence that is a blow to the head. What Ms. Mayer showed me is how to drink beer from a bottle and steal from my dreams, and she dispensed this seminal piece of advice: whenever you're nervous, just put your hand on your hip. In fact, this presentation could easily consist of nothing more than an encomium to her, but tributes to Bernadette Mayer have probably already reached overload.

It was a winding path, the Mayer workshop: growing into and sloughing off class and racial assumptions, snaking through what I thought of myself, what I thought of other people, what I thought they thought of me. I somehow got the mistaken notion in those days that it was morally wrong to hold down a straight job, and so I downplayed what I did for a liv-

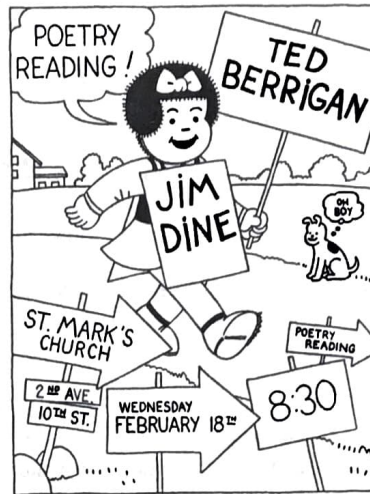


ing, which was working for a lawbook publisher. My days were spent repairing comma splices and researching legal precedents. By night and weekends I wrote cryptic verses—and a lot of lies, I'm sorry to report—and went to parties and movies and predictably to bed with the people in the workshop. What I hid from the other kids were my midnight taxi rides down Fifth Avenue, the sway of all those Truman Capote stories still strong in my fantasy life.

Inchoate shame having played a huge part in my life, it has taken many years to come to terms with not being an exemplary bohemian, an exemplary poet. I often think I managed to get everything wrong—but I'm happy for the role the Project has played in all my turns along the way. Like most everyone else, I've engaged in the inevitable reevaluating of it, the inevitable criticism of its insularity, the inevitable falling away from it, the inevitable rejection and reclaiming of it. Like most everyone else, I'm flattered to be thought of as a part of its history.

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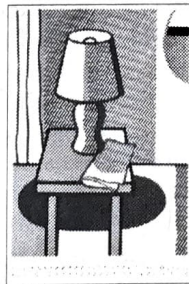


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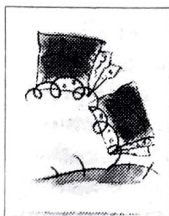
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# On Hannah Weiner

## 1928-1997

by

Charles Bernstein, Andrew Levy, Ron Silliman, and Lee Ann Brown

Hannah Weiner has been so much a part of my life as a writer that I find that her death hasn't ended my relation to her but moved it into another dimension. I don't mean anything supernatural about that—I always played the resolute skeptic to Hannah's more heterodox beliefs; but I never doubted that she was a visionary poet, and I found her insistence on her clairvoyance to be a welcome relief from the heavy-handed rhetoric of poet as prophet that she so utterly rejected.

While Hannah befriended, and was admired by, many poets of my own generation, her poetry begins to make a different sense when considered in the context of some of the poets of her own generation. Like many of these poets, she was deeply influenced by Eastern thought and in search of a poetry of everyday life. In this, her project resonates with Ashbery, Mac Low, Guest, Ginsberg, Eigner, Creeley, Wieners, and Schuyler. Like Jack Spicer, she understood that if the heart of poetry were a radical foregrounding of the medium of writing, then this would also mean that the writing, and possibly the writer, became a medium. But a medium of what, for what? One of Hannah's most enduring achievements as a writer was her unflinching, indeed often hilarious, inclusion of what, from a literary point of view, is often denigrated as trivial, awkward, embarrassing, silly, and, indeed, too minutely personal, even for the advocates of the personal in writing.

For Hannah Weiner, nothing was too minute to merit recording, but she decisively rejected all the extant literary models for recording personal thoughts or feelings—from the single-voice lyric to the narrative-driven diary. The motivation for Hannah's charting of her personal space was not primarily self-expression—any more than the motivation for Descartes's meditations were primarily self-expression. Rather, she used her self as the most ready-to-hand site for her experiments on the relation of language to consciousness. Hannah's work is an unrelenting synthesis of radical formal innovation and intensely personal content. Her best-known work remains *The Clairvoyant Journal* (Angel Hair, 1978), where she used a three-voice structure to record not only her own diaris-

tic impressions and notations but also—scored in italics—a voice commenting on what she had written and—in capital letters—giving commands to her. This highly original fugal structure—an explicit alternative to the more conventional monologic forms—found vivid realization in the three-person performances that she gave in the 1970s and 1980s.

Hannah Adelle Finegold was born in Providence, Rhode Island on November 4, 1928. She graduated from Classical High School in 1946 and went on to Radcliffe College, class of 1950 (*magna cum laude*), where she wrote a dissertation on Henry James. After several jobs in publishing, she became an assistant buyer at Bloomingdale's. In the meantime she married a psychiatrist; the marriage ended in divorce after four years. Subsequently, Weiner got a job designing lingerie. She began to write poetry in 1963. Her best known work of this period is *The Code Poems* (Open Studio, 1982), written using the international code of signals (nautical flag signals). These works were also the basis of performances she gave in the 1960s and she was a participant in the downtown performance scene of the time. After 1970, she devoted herself to writing, emphasizing that all her works written after 1972 were based on "seeing words". As she says in an epigraph to *The Clairvoyant Journal*: "I SEE words on my forehead IN THE AIR on other people on the typewriter on the page." Her other books include *Little Books/Indians* (Roof Books, 1980), *Spoke* (Sun & Moon Press, 1984), *Silent Teachers / Remembered Sequel* (Tender Buttons, 1993), and *We Speak Silent* (Roof, 1997).

It is an irony, perhaps, that the writing that Hannah will be best remembered for coincided with a period in which schizophrenia made her everyday life increasingly difficult. Hannah's illness was often shrugged off as eccentricity, as in we're all a little crazy after all. But few us suffer from our craziness in the way Hannah did and her schizophrenia was not merely metaphoric, despite the fact that Hannah did not accept any characterization of herself as mentally ill. Surely there was the fear that since Hannah's work was predicated on hearing voices and seeing words, her identification as schizophrenic would dis-



credit the achievement of a poetry in which the very idea of a stable, expressive lyric self is exploded into what might, indeed, metaphorically be described as a kind of schizophrenic writing. This may be less a problem for work such as James Schuyler's, where mental illness is explicitly figured, or for writers like Holderlin, in his late poems, or Wieners, where the lyric voice may be read as a kind of sanctuary from schizophrenia. In any case, Hannah Weiner's work is not a product of her illness but an heroic triumph in the face of it. Her personal courage in refusing to succumb to what often must have been unbearable fear induced by her illness, her persistence in writing in spite of her disabilities, is one of the legacies of her work. And if her schizophrenia gave her insight into language, into human consciousness, into the nature of how everyday life can be presented rather than represented in writing—well, we all have to start from where we are.

While Hannah's last few years weren't easy, she continued to produce amazing writing, pushing her own poetry and the possibilities for poetry into new zones of perception. What else are poets for?

Charles Bernstein

### LESSONS FROM HANNAH

Hannah Weiner was my teacher. I first met her in the fall of 1985 (though on the astral plane in which she was an experienced traveller it may have been twenty years earlier). When I think of Hannah, I hear the sweetest, deepest, most heart-rending music. Over the past twelve years she shared with me the many voices of her clairvoyance, from the cartoon lunacy of polar bear and pa, who would sometimes be quite annoying, scolding, while at other times silly and amusing, to her butterflies and other creatures perhaps mythical but always hybrids of her own astonishment and imagination. These creatures together with the poets and friends whose voices filled the thoughts of "the woman who has no mind" (something she once told me on the telephone about herself but also about no one in particular) made the silent teaching, the music she wished everyone could hear. This muse of multiple sources, c'mon pa! Pa be quiet, Andy is trying to speak, was a world I feel privileged to have been

invited into. Her conversation would range between the visible epistemologically present and presence of one another, then move with no qualms whatsoever to externalize the structure of perception in language, "a world we cannot see." These sometimes small, at other times large shifts in attention slighted nothing, attended in equal measure to each nuance ringing in our ears, screened out the turbulent "don't know who they both are explaining," to arrive in order to pass it on "as experience to those listening." I tried to listen carefully—sometimes I imagined I could hear what Hannah heard. To attend to listen to debate, embrace and emanate diagramless, think about moving. One of my fondest memories of Hannah was her excitement several years ago having returned from a visit west with Mary Crow Dog and her assembled kin. Hannah, prior to leaving town for this much needed visit, had been worried as she felt her clairvoyance ebbing. Soon as she was back home she called me and Jude Ornstein to come over to her apartment—she wanted us to smoke her new peace pipe with her. Her friends had performed a ceremony during her visit to help restore her visions, and now, recovered, it was time to smoke the pipe and listen to more music (this may have been at the beginning of her renewed interest in Bob Dylan and Neil Young—Hannah was convinced there were "silent" messages to be discerned in their lyrics). The three of us sat on the floor of her apartment on 12th Street while she ceremoniously prepared her new pipe, a beautifully carved instrument adorned with feathers. I remember taking one long toke then rolling over on the floor gasping for breath while she and Jude enjoyed a fit of laughter at my expense. Recovered enough to again sit upright, we each agreed on the remarkable bitterness of the bark we'd just puffed on. Hannah looked beautiful and happy. Now that she's gone, I can still hear her laughter every time I open one of her books. I miss her.

Andrew Levy

### SILENT TEACHER

The primary tool of a silent teacher appears, somewhat counter-intuitively, to have been the telephone. Increasingly unwilling to venture out of

her Lower East Side condo, Hannah Weiner would call whenever, so she said, I "silently instructed" her to do so. This was something of a conundrum, since I never knew that I was, in whatever unconscious fashion, bidding Hannah to phone and she in turn was unable to respond "silently." But it would be misleading to suggest that this little dance of intention served only to permit her to feel comfortable interrupting my life with a phone call, since, by virtue of the silent message, she never "owned" the call itself, but was by her understanding responding to my own unspoken need or desire. The syntax of that last sentence may capture the process better than any description.

It appears that I only instructed Hannah to phone during the early evening hours or on weekends, times when she would be most apt to find me at home. Once or twice she woke me up and once or twice she spoke with a babysitter, including my mother—who had no idea what to make of Hannah's somewhat disjointed conversation, punctuated as it so typically was by loud, ironic laughter at the most unpredictable moments. Showing my mother a copy of *Clairvoyant Journal* didn't make the matter any simpler.

For the most part, Hannah's calls were exactly the sort of warm, wandering, cogent, often deeply insecure conversations that so many poets have whenever discussing their work, their projects and whatever happens to be going on with the local scene at a given point in time. Hannah was a perceptive reader and turned me onto several younger New York poets, such as Lee Ann Brown, years before I was able to find much of their work in print.

This shouldn't be surprising. At the heart of her writing was perhaps the most rigorously honed descriptive eye of the past 50 years. Her own psychobiology had taken Hannah Weiner to a place where relatively few of us ever get to travel, and from which few of us who do possess the skill and the literal wit to report back. Hannah's accounts of her own life, especially in the instant-to-instant play of literal voices, is a writing as coolly "objective" in its own way as was Reznikoff's use of the citation of "facts" from appellate court decisions in *As Testimony*. Where it differs primarily lies in Weiner's rich sense of humor and her use of rhythm as the driving formal



mechanism of her work. For someone who claimed to have "seen" all the voices that crowded her world, Hannah's use of her ear was remarkable. It must have been how, in writing, she could control what in seeing she could not.

This may be why I find the idea that teaching should be silent so striking. In a universe of infinitely multiplying voices, Hannah conceived of a "teaching" that could occur through silence itself, even as it enabled her, for the first time, to name the voices. I took her designation of me as a silent teacher as the highest order of compliment.

I do not know that I will ever understand why so many of her teachers were male, why there were several male children among them, nor why my son Jesse and not his twin Colin was likewise selected. Having been raised in part by a grandmother who had psychotic episodes and having worked for years amid the displaced mentally ill of the Tenderloin, I have always been amazed that a condition that can disrupt so much of a person's identity (Hannah's past as a successful lingerie designer and wife of an analyst was virtually erased from view) somehow did not touch the great clarity of mind that is at the heart of her achievement as a writer.

Ron Silliman

#### EXTREME OF CONSCIOUSNESS WRITING

*first lesson in how to read Hannah:  
it's very funny!*

I first met Hannah in the winter of 1986 at the Ukranian Bar on 2nd Avenue after she gave a reading with Bruce Andrews. She was wearing a tan parka and wore big glasses that peered out from the hood. I walked her home in the cold. This was my first direct encounter with the Poetry Project which I'd heard so much about from Bernadette Mayer, Anne Waldman and others at a summer session at Naropa, and which would become another big part of my poetic life.

Her reading impressed and inspired me mainly because it subverted the normal aspects and elements of the book and of poetry itself. It was definitely poetry but not in a form I had ever encountered before. She read from her book *Written In* which she described as

being structured in response to the pages of a blank book given to her by Barbara Rosenthal. "Self-reflexive" commentary about reaching the bottom of the page or turning it was built into the work in a very exciting, vibrant way. I had encountered some semiotic theories of language and had begun to read "experimental poetry" and was interested in the conjunction of those fields, but no one was spelling it out for me or making direct connections about the relation of the two. Hannah's playful interaction plunged me into a rich sample of language play that I added to my rapidly growing files on this strange new work. Her work enacted the powerful idea that she was in polylogue with—that words are material things, what Gertrude Stein meant when she said: "Language is a real thing not an imitation." When I suggested that *remembered sequel* reminded me of Stein's *How to Write*, especially in its exploration of the nature of the sentence and paragraph she disagreed that she was anything like Stein. Her repetition & interruption of that rhythm is quite different. (Well, maybe Gertrude Stein in an extremely weird mood.)

Hannah influenced my own poetry from the phoneme to electric word jump, grammar and discourse to larger structuring strategies—all levels. Her assertion that one of the properties of poetry is altering the reader's state of consciousness was what I was thinking of in my *Writing from the New Coast* poetics essay, "Buffalo Stance or Paranoia Big Destroya" when I said that I believe in the "alteration of planetary structures by means of language." Keith Waldrop told me a story about how Hannah came back from the dentist once complaining that he had thrown out of the chair. "Well what did you do to him first?" he asked. "I bit him" she replied. (I allude to this story in my poem, "Coffee," a chronicle of that year's significant thoughts and happenings.)

Our collaboration "Immobilete" was written during a reading at the Ear Inn. When I was trying to decide what to name my first book, she said "Why dont you ask me? Your arm says 'comfit.'" So I named the first section of *Polyverse* "Comfit" consisting of very small, bite-size poems.

In structuring *Polyverse*, I also took a cue from the way the "silent teachers"

section of the book was added to "remembered sequel" and then "bridged" by a third section (in my case "Velocity City," in hers "we must integrate into the next generation.")

In 1993 I published her book, *silent teachers remembered sequel* through my press Tender Buttons in honor of her 65th birthday. The frontispiece is a beautiful photo of her in her senior year in highschool in Providence. The pennant behind her says "Classical."

During the publication of her book—I took notes on the changing manuscript and thoughts on her work.

*come clear with structure with sentence complete*

July 1, 1993

second proofs

Tonight I'm reading *remembered sequel* as a

meditation on death: that of her parents and her own eventual one

the light mentioned in the intro, the omitted lines:

he hurt himself with his heart and couldn't find a nurse

so he died alone like mother like me in my old age

Other deletions: father language capitalism

.. .am struck by the distinct orality of the differently dictated sections

You get a sense of their individual "characters" filtered through Hannah

sort of like a way out Amy Gerstler

She let me borrow the 3 foot diameter wheel she made for *The Code Poems* for the Tender Buttons benefit last spring. As I walked through the East Village with it in my arms people pointed and stared. Amid fluorescent squares and circles on a black background, the wheel asks "WHEN DOES YOU OR IT BEGIN?" the answers ranging from "Now" and "Immediately" to "Shortly" or "Never." Hannah over? No! "WHEN DOES YOU OR IT BEGIN?" to overhear Hannah, hear her extraordinarily diverse, funny, complex voices, rhythms syntax her "then sense then not music or sense."

Lee Ann Brown  
Halloween 1997



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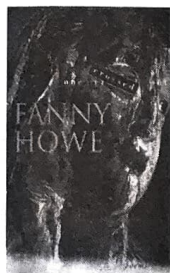


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# THE WORLD

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Jeffery Conway, Jordan Davis  
Connie Deanovich, Joe Elliot  
Elaine Equi, foamola, Josephine Foo  
Merry Fortune, Amy Gerstler  
Carla Harryman, Richard Hell  
David Henderson  
Robert Hershon, Mitch Highfill  
Patricia Spears Jones, Bill Luoma  
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## WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

### Poetry Workshop with Frank Lima (Tuesday evenings 7-9 PM; 10 sessions from October 21-January 20)

In this workshop, participants will read poets such as Henri Michaux, Frank O'Hara, Francis Ponge, and Kenneth Koch, and will learn how to rigorously edit and review their work.

Frank Lima's new book, *Inventory: New and Selected Poems*, the first to be published in over 20 years, was released by Hard Press this fall. A student of Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, Lima is also a teacher at the New York Restaurant School.

### Poetry Workshop with Lewis Warsh (Friday evenings, 7-9 PM; 10 sessions from October 24-January 9)

The focus of this workshop is to build on what we know and do as poets in an attempt to create something we've never done before. Texts which foreground the intersection of political responses (what we feel when we read the newspaper) with emotional stress (what we think about when we look out the window) will be studied as models.

Lewis Warsh's most recent books are, a book of stories, *Money Under the Table*, a book-length poem, *Private Agenda*, and a memoir, *Bustin's Island '68*. He is also the editor and publisher of United Artists Books.

### Writing with Local and Visiting Languages with Brenda Coultas (Saturdays, noon-2 pm; 10 sessions from October 25-January 10)

The workshop will explore writing as it pertains to America as a geographical, psychological, and metaphysical landscape. The course will include in-class writing exercises and collage-making as well as local history investigation.

Brenda Coultas is a poet and prose writer whose work has appeared in *The World*, *Bombay Gin*, *The Indiana Review*, and *Bust* magazines. Her first collection of stories, *Early Films*, was published by Rodent Press in 1996.

The workshop fee is \$150, which includes tuition for unlimited classes and membership with The Poetry Project for one year. Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Membership includes free admission to all regularly scheduled Project events, discount admission to special events, and subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. 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](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com).



# poetry project

# Calendar

events

## DECEMBER 1 MONDAY

Open Reading. sign-up at 7:30 pm.[8 pm]

## 3 WEDNESDAY

### Some of the Dharma

A unique celebration of the first-time publication of Jack Kerouac's remarkable book, **Some of the Dharma**, featuring performances and readings by actors Willem Dafoe and Karen Allen; Lee Ranaldo from Sonic Youth, Rob Buck from 10,000 Maniacs and Danny Chauvin from Hitchhiker; Ed Sanders of the Fugs, David Amram, Doug Brinkley, Ann Douglas, Maggie Estep, and many more. [\$12; \$7 for students and members of the Poetry Project.]

## 5 FRIDAY

### Gillian McCain & Jeffery Conway

Gillian McCain is the author of *Tilt*, recently published by The Figures/Hard Press, and the co-author (with Legs McNeil) of *Please Kill Me: the Uncensored History of Punk* (Grove Press). Her work has appeared on the CD *Geitchertitz* (SOOJ Records), a spoken word album with Ric Ocasek and Alan Vega, as well as in *Lingo*, *Arshile*, *The World*, and *B City*. She is a former Program Coordinator of the Poetry Project and the former editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. Jeffery Conway is the author of *Blood Poisoning* (Cold Calm Press 1995). His work has appeared in *Plush*, *Eros* in *Boystown*, *Queer Dog*, and the current issue of *The World*. [10:30 pm]

## 8 MONDAY

### Elliott Sharp & Eddie Bell

Composer, multi-instrumentalist, and founder of ZOaR records, Elliott Sharp leads the groups Carbon & Orchestra Carbon, Tectonics, and Terraplane. His most recent CD releases include the Carbon album, *Interference*, *Revenge of the Stuttering Child* with Israeli poet Ronny Someck, and the Tectonics CD, *Field & Stream*. Eddie Bell, an educator and poet, completed his first book-length poetry manuscript, *Gaps's Dreaming Chair*, during two fellowships he was awarded by the Ragdale Foundation, an artists and writers' retreat.

## 10 WEDNESDAY

### Thomas Sayers Ellis & Bei Dao

Thomas Sayers Ellis is a co-founding member of the Dark Room Collective and the author of *The Good Junk* which

currently working on a children's book, *Why Is My Name Marisol?*, a book of poetry-prose, *In Dominicanish*, and poetry-prose in Spanish, *Telele, Telele, Telele-Blah, Blah, Blah*.

## 17 WEDNESDAY

### Tom Carey & Tomaz Salamun

Tom Carey's most recent book, *Desire*, was published by Painted Leaf Press this year. He has lived in New York City since 1977. In 1988 he became a Franciscan brother in the Society of St. Francis. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Slovenian poet Tomaz Salamun was born on the 4th of July in Zagreb, Croatia. In the 1970s, Salamun was invited to the Iowa International Workshop, where he met Anselm Hollo, Ted Berrigan, Barrett Watten, and others. One of the foremost poets of Slovenia, he has published 27 books of poetry, including *The Selected Poems* (Ecco, 1988), and most recently, *The Four Questions of Melancholy*. He is currently the cultural attache at the Slovenian Consulate in New York.

## 22 MONDAY

### Poetica and Bob Quatrone

Inspired by the Paul Winter Consort and Coleman Barks reciting the poems of Rumi, Robert Fox and Steven Wright created *Poetica*, which will perform both known and new poetry in an original blend of words and music. Bob Quatrone is the former chief lecturer and program director of the Walt Whitman Poetry of NYC, and the former editor of *Lunch*.

## JANUARY 1

### 24th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading

Featuring over 120 poets, performers, dancers, musicians, and artists, including Richard Hell, Tuli Kupferberg, Penny Arcade, Homer Erotic, Vole, John S. Hall, Todd Colby, Tracie Morris, Marcella Durand, Eleni Sikilianos, Lewis Warsh, Bridget Brehen, Brenda Coultans, Ed Friedman and many more! [2 pm-1 am, \$15. \$12 for Poetry Project Members]

## 5 MONDAY

Open Reading. sign-up at 7:30 pm.[8 pm]

## 7 WEDNESDAY

### Juliana Spahr & Harryette Mullen

## 16 FRIDAY

### Lauren Spencer & Sharon Mesmer

Lauren Spencer is currently working on a series of books profiling bands on the road and in the studio with MTV/Simon and Schuster: the first installment on Bush is due in stores in 1998. She is a regular contributor to *Rolling Stone* and *Jane* magazines. Sharon Mesmer's first collection of poems *Half Angel, Half Lunch*, described by Allen Ginsberg as "beautifully bold and vivaciously modern," will be published by Hard Press in 1998. Formerly of the band Mellow Freakin' Woodies, and fresh from performing her work in Japan, she now teaches at the New School for Social Research. [10:30 pm]

## 19 MONDAY

### Babalorisa John Mason & Raymond Patterson

Babalorisa John Mason is a Yoruba priest, African and jazz percussionist, and noted scholar and theologian whose books include *Orin Orisa: Songs for Selected Heads* and, co-authored with Professor Henry Drew, the forthcoming catalogue for the exhibition, *Beads, Body and Soul: Luminous Art in the Yoruba Universe*. Raymond Patterson is the author of *26 Ways of Looking at a Black Man and Elemental Blues*. He is the writer of opera librettos, former member of the Umbra Poetry Workshop, and has been anthologized in numerous collections, including the seminal *New Black Voices*, edited by Addison Gayle.

## 21 WEDNESDAY

### Nina Zivancevic & Ben Friedlander

Nina Zivancevic was born in Belgrade, former Yugoslavia—a literary critic, journalist, translator as well as a poet and a fiction writer—she lived for several decades in New York where she wrote in English, and now resides in Paris where she is currently working on her PhD on Modern literature. Her most recent book *Inside and Out of Byzantium* was published by SEMIOTEXT(E), and her first novel *Living on Air* is to come out by Cool Grove Inc. in New York this coming spring. Ben Friedlander's most recent publication, *A Knot is Not a Tangle*, is available from Meow Press. He is the co-editor, with Don Allen, of Charles Olson's *Collected Prose*. Friedlander currently lives in Buffalo, New York where he is a graduate student at the State University of New York.

## 23 FRIDAY

### Chris Kraus & Ann Rower

Chris Kraus's novel *I Love Dick* has just been published by Semiotext(e) Native Agents. She wrote and directed the feature film, *Gravity and Grace* (Lonely Girl Films 1995) and produced *The Chance Event*, a three-day philosophy rave with Jean Baudrillard and Roseanne Stone at Whiskey Pete's Casino in the Nevada Desert. Ann Rower, a former Wooster Group writer, is the author of *Armed Response* (Serpent's Tail, 1995) and *If You're a Girl* (Semiotext(e) Native Agents). [10:30 pm]



Orchestra Carbon, Tectonics, and Terraplane. His most recent CD releases include the Carbon album, *Interference*, *Revenge of the Stuttering Child* with Israeli poet Ronny Someck, and the Tectonics CD, *Field & Stream*. Eddie Bell, an educator and poet, completed his first book-length poetry manuscript, *Capt's Dreaming Chair*, during two fellowships he was awarded by the Ragdale Foundation, an artists and writers' retreat.

#### 10 WEDNESDAY

##### Thomas Sayers Ellis & Bei Dao

Thomas Sayers Ellis is a co-founding member of the Dark Room Collective and the author of *The Good Junk* which appeared in the AGNI/Graywolf annual *Take Three*. His poems have appeared most recently in *Grand Street*, *AGNI*, *Galloo*, *Best American Poetry 1997*, and *The Garden Thieves*, *Twentieth Century African-American Poetry*. He is also the author of *View-Master*, a forthcoming chapbook from Vival Press. He currently teaches in the English Department at Case Western Reserve University. Recently elected an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Bei Dao is one of the foremost poets from China. A former Red Guard, he now lives in exile in the United States. Translated into English are four books of poetry (most recently, *Landscape Over Zero*, *New Directions*) and a book of short stories, *Waves*.

#### 12 FRIDAY

##### Janet Hamill & Lo Galluccio

Janet Hamill, co-author with Patti Smith of the forthcoming *The Eternal Café*, will be presenting new work accompanied by bass and rhythm guitar. Hamill is also the author of *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, *The Temple*, and *Troublante*, and has been included in several anthologies, including *Living with the Animals*, *More Reflections on the Meaning of Life*, and *The Unmade Bed: Sensual Writing on Married Love*. Lo Galluccio, a poet and singer, has recently put out her first CD, *Being Visited*, with musicians Miki Navazio, Brad Jones, and Michael Evans. Galluccio started performing in *FishPistol* and evolved *Being Visited* at cbg's gallery, *The Knitting Factory*, and the Nuyorican Poet's Café. [10:30 pm]

#### 15 MONDAY

##### Malika Lee Whitney & Josefina Baez

Actress, writer, and storyteller Malika Lee Whitney is the artistic director of Pickney Productions and the Pickney Players. She is also the author of *Bob Marley: Reggae King of the World*. Josefina Baez is the founder and director of *Latinarte*, an intercultural art troupe. She is

cians, and artists, including Richard Hell, Tuli Kupferberg, Penny Arcade, Homer Erotic, Vole, John S. Hall, Todd Colby, Tracie Morris, Marcella Durand, Eleni Sikelianos, Lewis Warsh, Bridget Brechen, Brenda Coultas, Ed Friedland and many more! [2 pm-1 am, \$15, \$12 for Poetry Project Members]

#### 5 MONDAY

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm. [8 pm]

#### 7 WEDNESDAY

##### Juliana Spahr & Harryette Mullen

Juliana Spahr's most recent book, *Response*, is available from Sun and Moon Press. She co-edits the journal *Chain* with Jena Osman and currently teaches at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. Harryette Mullen currently teaches Creative Writing and African-American Literature at UCLA. She is the author of *trimmings*, *Muse & Drudge*, and *S\*P\*E\*R\*M\*\*K\*E\*T*.

#### 12 MONDAY

##### Elizabeth Alexander & Shirley LeFlore

Elizabeth Alexander is the author of 2 books of poetry, *The Venus Hottentot*, and *Body of Life*. Her verse-play, *Diva Studies*, was produced at the Yale School of Drama in 1996. She is currently working on a third book of poetry, and a book of essays, *On Black Masculinity*. Shirley LeFlore is a poet, professor, and vocalinist. Her works-in-progress include a CD, *The Bet*, forthcoming from MapleShade; a book, *The Collection Plate*; and a collection of autobiographical stories and poems, *Threads*. Her collaborations with saxophonist J.D. Parran are on the recent CD *Spiritstage*.

#### 14 WEDNESDAY

##### Etel Adnan & Ammiel Alcalay

Etel Adnan was born in Beirut to a Syrian father in the Ottoman army and a Greek mother from Smyrna. A novelist, essayist, poet, and painter, she is the author of many books, including the highly acclaimed and widely taught *Sitt Marie-Rose* and *The Arab Apocalypse*. Ammiel Alcalay is a poet, translator, and scholar who teaches classical and Oriental literatures at Queens College and at the CUNY Graduate Center. He is the author of the Cairo *notebooks*, *After Jews and Arabs*, and *Keys to the Garden*. He has translated poetry and articles written in Bosnia, including *The Tenth Circle of Hell*, an account of a survivor of a Serbian camp.

Friedlander currently lives in Buffalo, New York where he is a graduate student at the State University of New York.

#### 23 FRIDAY

##### Chris Kraus & Ann Rower

Chris Kraus's novel *I Love Dick* has just been published by Semiotext(e) *Negative Agents*. She wrote and directed the feature film, *Gravity and Grace* (Lonely Girl Films 1995) and produced *The Chance Event*, a three-day philosophy rave with Jean Baudrillard and Roseanne Stone at Whiskey Pete's Casino in the Nevada Desert. Ann Rower, a former Wooster Group writer, is the author of *Armed Response* (*Serpent's Tail*, 1995) and *If You're a Girl* (Semiotext(e) *Negative Agents*). [10:30 pm]

#### 26 MONDAY

##### Reading and Book Party for Patricia Landrum

Patricia Landrum was an early member of the Stoop Poetry Workshop, formerly on the Board of Directors at the Poetry Project, and part of the Nuyorican Poet's Café. She was also a founding member of the women's poetry theater collaboration, *Cayenne*, and author of the chapbook, *Sweet* (New Spirit). In honor of her, and of the publication of the manuscript—*Mary and Other Ordinary Women*—that she was preparing at the time of her death, Tracie Morris, Sheila Alison, Cheryl Boyce Taylor, and others will read, talk, and perform.

#### 28 WEDNESDAY

##### Miles Champion & Keith Waldrop

Miles Champion was born in Nottingham, England, in 1968, and now lives in London. He is the writer of *Sore Models* and *Compositional Bonbons Placate*. Recent work has appeared in *BOO*, *The Germ*, and in the anthology *Sleight of Foot* (Reality Street Editions). Keith Waldrop teaches at Brown University and, with Rosmarie Waldrop, is editor of the small press, *Burning Deck*. Recent books include *The Silhouette of the Bridge* (*Avec*) and *Light While There Is Light* (*Sun and Moon*). He has translated, among others, Anne-Marie Albiach, Claude Royet-Journoud, Paol Keineg, Dominique Fourcade, and Jean Grosjean.

#### 30 FRIDAY

##### New Writers from Saint Ann's School

Students from the Saint Ann's School Poetry Workshop/Seminar—Stefan Bondell, Jesse Brand, Sara Fernanelia, Margo Gregory, Rachael Morgan Peters, Micaela Mendlow, Hannah Meyers, Jesse Spector, Emma Straub, and Nao Teral—will read their work. [10:30 pm]

All events are \$7 and begin at 8 PM unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212 674-0910

The Poetry Project is located at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery  
131 East 10th Street, New York City 10003  
<http://www.poetryproject.com>



# book reviews



photo by Kai Sibley

ANNE WALDMAN  
**IOVIS Book II**

Coffee House Press ( 27 North Fourth Street, Suite 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401), 1997, 311 pages, \$15.95.

"IOVIS omnia plena / All is full of Jove" is the persistent battle cry of Anne Waldman's epic project IOVIS, and the second book is now available. In IOVIS I, writes Waldman in the introduction, "I summoned male images, 'voices,' & histories as deities out of throat, heart, gut, correspondence & mind" in order to chart a "cohesive landscape" for the field of Jove's warrior son, Mars. In IOVIS 2, Waldman is still summoning—but what she conjures up is less about Jove and his various disguises coming through her, than it is about the political and social ramifications of the freedom to create.

In the interim between the two books, the field of Mars was transformed into a multi-million dollar play-pen for eager astrophysicists who captivated our collective imagination with their robot's adventures on the red planet. The result of our mythical quest to open fields in space will be a taxpayer-paid space program controlled by the highest corporate bidder. What knife have we to blunt but our own intelligence in the face of those who would incite us to worthless passion only to profit from our

dreams?  
lunar terrain  
trained assassins  
tens of thousands of assault rifles  
rocket-propelled grenades  
millions of rounds of ammunition  
hundreds of deadly accurate Stinger missiles

meanwhile back in the jungle

millions of dollars of taxpayers' equipment  
is missing from Rocky Flats

The last words of IOVIS I were "To blunt the knife." Book two returns to those words in order to accept their challenge of putting into practice the difference between acting and being acted upon; of writing and being written upon. Blunting the knife that is the pen and attempting to, as she writes, "make & act art outside anyone else's agenda or dogma," invokes a systemic enemy in whose interests it is to curb the imaginative and intellectual potential to create new forms for the unpredictable contents of our world. The anti-intellectual environment of the political and social spheres that has been escalating with the rise of fundamentalism and the agreements made between liberal and conservative politicians (manifested by welfare reform, cuts in arts funding and social spending), might mean that knife-blunting poets, like Waldman, are urgently needed to clear our minds of the idiotic media-babble that inevitably clouds them.

To say that poets are urgently needed does not mean that they can change the world. They usually move in and out of sense much as the world around us moves, making no sense. Theirs are condensed meanderings around all that is happening, has always been happening, and will happen again and again. When we read them, it usually is not to extract precise information about gun control, apathy towards homelessness, riots in Bombay, AIDS, and other similar concerns. But why not? The world oftentimes makes no sense, and so neither should the information that we use to shape it make sense:

(sung)

The Cobray is descended from the MAC-10 which fires an astonishing 1000 rounds per minute as an automatic weapon  
Pull the trigger & the barrel jumps up as repeated recoils throw the gun's weight back

Try to hold it down & it's likely to swing about, spraying its hundreds of rounds per minute across wide arcs . . .

Waldman includes the above statement in a chapter about the death of her father. It is followed with a dream, followed by a letter from her son about cold spaghetti, followed by facts about the Japanese invasion of Malaya, followed by a profile of a US company that exports TEC-9's to international military forces, followed by another dream, followed by a poem:

When father died he had one adrenaline thing in his hand another was claspng a book—what? No I can never remember this...suffocation is a greater coil than you can even IMAGINE a lesser evil you can not ever imagine

Waldman's chapters are fluid and ever-changing—like life. Hers is a pedagogic poetics that teaches as much as it complicates, enlightens as much as it mystifies, is filled with stories and myths, personal reflections and homages. Because the poem moves through time, contained among clusters of practical information are also elegies for the deaths of loved ones, ritual practices, erotic wishes, and the lost soul of a poet still searching and wondering after all her years of writing and experiencing.

Waldman is carrying on the 20th-century epic tradition, a "multi-decade research project" as Ed Sanders defined it for the "open field" approach to poetry and poetic thinking. This project of writing involves a method of poetic composition based on research that expands through time and could take decades to complete. Notes for research taken in verse form an important part of what Sanders calls "data clusters" which the poet



includes in the body of the poem. Expanding the terms for what poetic language is or should be, Sanders' theory is one way of articulating revealed sources in long poems like Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (see "Sunday, January 16, 1966" from Book III, 111) and parts of Duncan's *Ground Work* (see part II of "Santa Cruz Propositions," 39) as well as Sanders' own recently finished 1968: *A History In Verse*.

Waldman's IOVIS project is in this epical lineage and marks the end of one decade of the poet's investigative research that will certainly continue into the new century. Like Olson, Duncan, Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky before her, Waldman expands and yet sustains her poetic focus through time, and is conscious not to put any limitations on her poetic form that would curb her energy and passion for the project. In IOVIS I she was fighting for the right to write an epic in the wake of the great male masters of the tradition. IOVIS 2 has abandoned the quest for permission and acknowledgment, and has proceeded to just write it, without turning back.

As in any honest epic attempt, there are parts of IOVIS that are imperfect and loose with language's meandering poised up against parts that are lucid and precise. But the work is always impassioned. This is a poem that moves forward with a momentum of particular grace and integrity, anger and frustration, beauty and ugliness. All is full, and Waldman holds on to the intensity of it, refusing to let go of her persistence to teach what she knows using poetry as her means of articulation. The IOVIS project tests the poet's endurance to speak about the insanity of her time:

How do you get the transmission  
in paper a tide across time,  
how do you pass muster  
in your aggression versus  
erudition's goodwill  
did you simply breeze by a librarian?  
*Homo homini lupus* is a strange motto  
How true is it?  
How brutal?

It will be unlikely that IOVIS will "change history" as its back cover states.

The epic poem is not a time machine that can replace events with words, and certainly any claim to change history by poets should be reflected upon with some suspicion. What can one poet's urgent plea in the waning night of this violent century do to save the world from the destruction that has already devastated so many parts of it? Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Tibet all ring out as signs that millennial fears of doomsday mean nothing compared to the violence that already exists in various parts of the world. The urgency of love to tame warrior psychology is a battlecry from the Western poet's look-out point, and how hollow does that word "love" ring. Still, the poet's plea will not cease. "I had a lung / I sang him down" she chants to the powers that be, even though they're not listening.

stalk  
by  
root  
connect  
~~might induce melancholy~~  
but never fall into illusion

ford the river  
to heaven on earth: DISARM

The systems under which we think and the simultaneous influx of the world's stimuli which we must process with head and heart in order to think clearly however, is within the poet's field of affecting change. Apocalyptic gobblede-gook shouldn't consume our imaginations, just as apathetic and anti-intellectual "dogmas and agendas" shouldn't inhibit our ability to act. Waldman describes her own call to action as gathering "herein to create ongoing orderly chaos." This chaos is the hear and now, and it is useful that poets like Waldman continue to track it. A poetic system of intelligent and investigative interaction with the world at least keeps us thinking.

KRISTIN PREVALLET

LAYNIE BROWNE  
**Rebecca Letters**  
Kelsey St. Press (PO Box 9235,  
Berkeley, CA 94709), 1997, 78  
pages, \$10.00.

Early in "Rebecca Letters," the first of

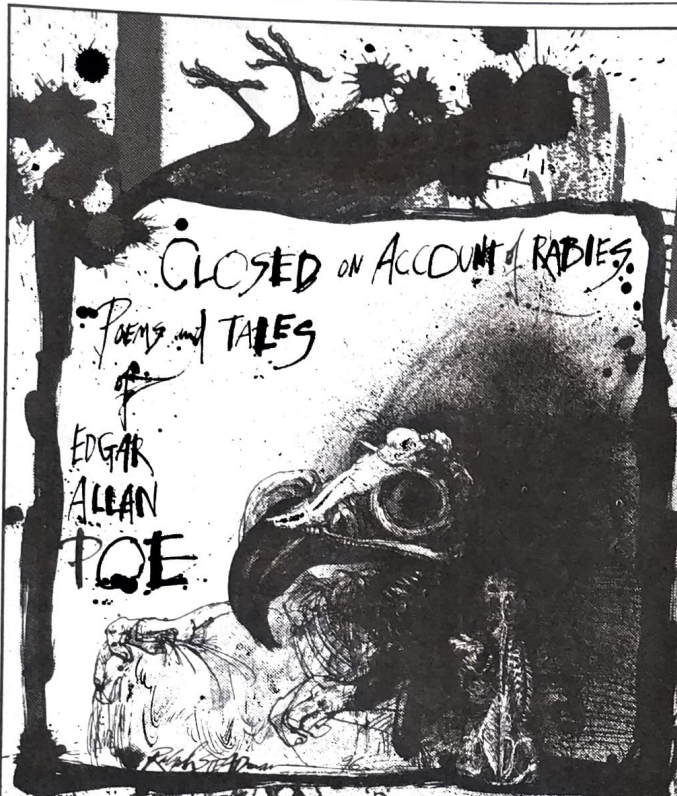
the three poem sequences that compose Laynie Browne's debut full-length collection, walking is identified as "dangerous" (12). This everyday and necessary act is not usually associated with danger except in particular forms like crossing a busy street or hitchhiking. But as Browne quietly asserts and reasserts the risks of walking, she succeeds in developing an unease around this activity that builds throughout the section.

I was walking, as always walking  
through steps in black which lead  
towards what must be a remarkable  
departure from all that has come  
before. (28)

What became clear as I read this passage was that the source of danger is not the act of walking itself but is in not "re-marking" upon it; danger lies in taking for granted that an act is straightforward. By extension we can identify danger in blithe reliance on any progress narrative and, in turn, on any history as absolute. Thus danger lies in mindless activity of all sorts—"waking" may be in fact even more dangerous than walking—since what is dangerous is drawing the line too firmly, from starting point to destination, between dream and reality, or between what is included in a text and what is excluded (12).

Browne has good reason to explore the dangers of absolutes in this work, for her subject, Rebecca Browne, was also a subject of historical and familial exclusion. In a note regarding the construction of *Rebecca Letters*, Browne writes, "I was always told of [Rebecca's] brother's existence, Lewis Browne, a theological writer of some success, the only writer to my knowledge in my family. The omission of Rebecca in family history, I interpret as an example of the lack of representation/documentation of women artists" (Chain 2, 37). Browne unearthed the fact of Rebecca and information about her with dreams, questions, and, significantly, letters to and from relatives. Rebecca is by necessity both real and imagined as a result of her exclusion and re-creation; like the prose-poem form that Browne constructs, she is a hybrid. With her project Browne reminds us that in fact all linguistic work is formed of collage, of choices, of give and take. Rebecca's





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history is that of all language, for its generation and what it produces depend on this same process of exclusion and inclusion.

Rebecca Letters, then, is an epistolary novel about language. "Rebecca Letters," "Ancestor Alphabets," and "Speak A Long While To A Brook" act as chapters, formed of letters between the poet and her process. Browne's collection of letters has a momentum dependent on the back-and-forth of analysis and its subsequent reporting, each poetic report affecting and effecting the next in acts of literary generation that echo the family tree. "Letters, utterance, perplexities—Thoughts manifest everything made of thoughts" (13). In the epistolary tradition we expect a correlation of subject and text, that Pamela is a true textual representation of its title character, for instance. But because Rebecca is a process of construction, not a fully-formed character, the unwinding discovery traditional to the form is literally evident.

Browne's decision to investigate process in order to address the structural complexity of correspondence allows her to also reveal that of its components. She exposes words' ability to simultaneously illuminate and bewilder by foregrounding their multiple meanings and applications, echoing the infinite responses we are capable of making as readers, writers, poets, listeners, speakers, pedestrians. It is provocative to hear that

knowing in sensation cannot be acquired, but can be concentrated from the tips of fingers, so that what moves out from fingertips which contain seasonless design, is the manifestation of thought. We are mostly made of thought, not water. (25)

Reading this passage with the awareness that Rebecca's responses are encompassed both physically and verbally by the writer herself reminds us to reconsider the possession and form of a body, how it is determined genetically and historically, explicable as "a unit of time" (71). To remember that *body* is used of work and of flesh. In "Ancestor Alphabets" setting is also given body and thus is also identified as a product of selection: "Window ledges remember who has been here. Beg walls, and the back becomes an arch" (51). In addition, a series of transformations makes evident the nonlinearity of lineage: "a table became an altarway. River rapids became the only place to move rapidly... . A gem became a song that kept repeating its facets into diagrams... ." (55) The connection Browne sets up here between generation and transformation is logical in this text, where writing is a creative act in all senses of the word. Creating with words transforms events into stories, which can be limiting, like the restriction of rapid movement to a single area, or illuminating, like music in which all events are given voice.

The role Rebecca plays, word and character, is to extend referentiality. "The large deciphering begins with setting names"; *Rebecca* is the primary name, but like any word it relies on syntax, its linguistic setting, for meaning (45). The signing taking place here is not of signatures ending epistles but of signals composing all. The setting of a name is the writing of a word and also its assignment to an object and a formal location.

There is this walking priestess, walking through what was a statue, an ancestor, a phoneme unnamed.



As the waters also scrying her eyes. In search of distant history, utter reflection. A gaze mirrors maze. (38)

The un-naming Browne identifies is a process that cannot be separated from naming itself, for word selection, like all elements of narrative, is based on rejection and association. Where rejection eliminates altogether, association reinvents vocabulary, just as it can reinvent history.

Rebecca Letters continually examines the linguistics and physicality of its own diction with an eye toward this reinvention. "Ancestor Alphabets," for example, is a direct analogy to the book title: ancestor is to Rebecca as alphabets is to letters. Correspondence means itself, etymologically speaking: a corresponding, a coinciding, an accuracy. Correspondence also works as an object and a symbol; the correspondence of a name to a character, a word and its definition(s), a person to her photograph, a gesture to its implication. "If you place your body in that series of postures, you / send a message"; actions are also letters, part of an alphabet (56). To write a word is to perform it and form it, a step in creating narrative that mirrors the generation of the whole.

Browne also calls attention to the role played by expectations, that we are in fact culpable for how we think and how we draw lines; this point is reinforced by the concluding section of the book, "Speak A Long While To A Brook," in which "a town defines talk. Sand is called water" (64). We expect certain vocabulary to not be present in avant garde writing, we expect subjects like history and gender to be addressed in certain ways and in certain poetry, and we think we know what to expect from activities like walking. Our expectations matter as part of the exchange that forms language and because they stop us from marking and remarking on what happens around us. When we accept a history as true, we do not explore what is missing from it. Browne reminds us that "we are breathing in collaboration with all living matter," and by association that we are speaking (and reading, and writing) collaboratively too (30). And just as language is formed only by the participation of its users and inhabitants, the historical is formed by those who tell stories and by those who listen and respond, together forming a "book in which to dwell" (42).

That history is restrictive is not new; Browne's insistent evidence that it is collaborative is. In a stance against deterministic thinking, be it based on genetics or Calvinism, Rebecca Letters reveals the origins of this writer to be as much in the fight against a selective process as in that process itself and to be as personal and gendered as they are literary. Rebecca is recovered alongside the obscured modern novelists Mary Webb and Barbara Comyns, from whose works epigraphs for sections one and three are taken. Elements of allegorical writing are reclaimed for a tradition that works without and often against allegory. As Lyn Hejinian does in her memoir *My Life*, Browne uses formal innovation to innovate a form. The "reflexive atmosphere" that she notes early in her collection is an element taken for granted in experimental writing; notably, however, this atmosphere is generated not only with the word as constructed object but by a strong persona and coded history (13). Returning to and reassessing elements of an epistolary tradition and a formal referentiality in the hybrid prose poem, Browne has written a collection that reaches for something as large as the topics with which it works, a "stratosphere collaboration" (41).

BETH ANDERSON

### Xcp Cross Cultural Poetics No. 1

Mark Nowak, Editor, (College of St. Catherine, 601 25th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55454), 1997, 134 pages.

"A long time coming..."  
—The Electric Flag

Xcp Cross Cultural Poetics number 1, edited by Mark Nowak and posse, housed at St. Catherine—Minneapolis, is a radical inauguration of voices, thinkers and open space blurred-genre writers all organized into 134 pages of wild perceptual & canonic displacements. This is a timely call for the necessary pulse-work of our dis-locations in a multi-vocal culture bomb called You&mehere. Although the triptych format may not be in-synch with the journal's vibrant dissonance & oppositional assemblage, its array of collapsible universes Yin-Yangs through literary cross-genres, public & private literary practices & salsas anti-ethnographic enterprises; welcome to a writer's manual on how to detonate the Master-Axis of Big Brother Narratives.

In the first riff, the most daring and perhaps the most lethal, aptly titled the "X-section," we journey with Baraka's "Flawed Operator" character, the "twin of Dude" and go on to his spoken word collage, "Undug" prosodies and a trancespoken "Re:Ports." Maria Damon's "When The NuYoricans Came to Town: (Ex) changing poetics" continues the barrage of breakdown with a fast paced event, frame and performance analysis of poetry in public space and process. The Pentagon of Official Verse Culture & Lit-Crit takes a necessary hit; we move through the smoky overgrounds of slams, lofts and open mikes; Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner appear in chartreuse, hot-shot culture critic Mary Pratt smashes against classic anthropology's golden boy, Marcel Mauss, as Damon burns and proposes the Potlatch of public word performance as the root rebel offering of Urban Neo-Word cultural produc-

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tion tribes. Lise McCloud takes us into another plane of language rupture in her "Mixed American Pak: National Holiday Thunder Chrysanthemum With Pearls & Reports." We net "fish reports," hook boarding schools of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, scale diary entries of her "Favorite Insect-Inspired Fireworks" and "Rat infested Minnesota apartment." The acid topographies of the text are akin to Allison Hedge Coke's recent collection, *Dog Road Woman*. McCloud's "Geographic Memoir" blazes and goes big bang inside. Genre writers don't call for mercy.

The second set, "Multi-lingual and Translated Poetries," operates as a Borgean Aleph intent on sucking in the mango-colored shrapnel from the first section—lingo, dialect, idiom, parole & signs transgress & implode.

Solomon Deressa's poetry, (did I say poetry?) juts up Ethiopian "Deberas," refigures the lines, floats to "King Gojam;" it comes in ordered and Bold Faced stanza bleeps: our exit signs from Occidental narrative; as he says—"Sheer tongue, mere syllabic impressions." Ofelia Zepeda literally speaks from the centerless mid-point of the volume, a bilingual smoothing of words close to the earth surface, on the Nanakmel Bat and the Ciadagi Gila Monster; Zepeda chants America in the language of the Tohono Oodham Nation of Southern Arizona. Poems by Diane Glancy, Edwin Torres follow and we end with Alejandro Aura's own double-voiced treatment of Carlos Fuente's *Aura* (translated by Forrest Gander) with a "Dead-eye bang" and "Species etcetera," perhaps tapping the radiated beats of EZLN blasts through Mexico City avenidas, through us.

Xcp finishes with a thick array of reviews covering anthropology's recent reflexive revolution of the speaker versus the spoken-for social object. We go from Anthro and Lit connections, Kim Koch's treatment of the *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* by Kamala Visweswaran to new findings in the field of Phenomenological Anthropology and *Home Places: Contemporary Native American Writing from Sun Tracks* covered by Dan Featherston. In her reading of "The Dialogic Emergence of Culture" Bonnie Irwin's review speaks to Xcp's bordercrosser vision; rather than a

sundry one-dimensional treatment, the text utilizes asymmetrical notes from a "Reader/Reviewer."

As in the initial two sections of this first-out volume, again, we go into a performative languagescape, our subject(s) talkin' out loud to herself(selves) in a febrile figure of multiple hearts, new fast faces and deep-hued brave voices. Xcp, You&mehere, jot my pulse.

JUAN FELIPE HERRERA

### Meow Books

(Buffalo, New York), available through Small Press Distribution, 1341 Seventh Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 1993-1997.

In Gary Sullivan's strange novelette, *Dead Man*, the protagonist shows a bloody corpse to his buddy Pat. "Open it," he says, "and it'll blow your head off." But the resemblance between this story and your typical pulp thriller ends there. This dead man isn't any ordinary victim. This dead man isn't even human. "Pat hesitated," the investigator continues, "He'd never seen a book before. He was afraid of what it could do. It was leatherbound, possibly a classic." The book/dead man is later revived and leads the protagonist on a search for his killer. He discovers him in an unlikely place:

My mind was hammering itself silly. I swung my heap around in a U-turn, then—

It hit me like a pile driver, hard crushing. The library. I had been driving past it all night and I hadn't even seen it.

Sullivan's conceit, that the library might be the scene of the crime, takes its cue from a Blanchot quotation that acts as an epigram to this book. Presumably speaking of books, Blanchot muses:

I had penetrated it, I carried it in me, I gave it life, a life which is not life, but which is stronger than life and which no force in the world could ever overcome.

The notion that books might have something to do with violence is one explored thoroughly by Meow. Many of Meow's writers are suspicious not of

books per se, but of what books have become: repositories of social authority used to rationalize violence; elements of an academic canon more concerned with its own formation than with the works it promotes; and purveyors of longstanding literary tropes that romanticize social inequalities.

Meow's editorial concerns thus coincide nicely with the chapbook format. The books are handsomely produced, but retain a handmade quality. So though the writers question literature, and particularly its material forms, the press itself comes across as refreshingly sincere rather than hypocritical in its efforts to print works that are uncomfortable with their medium, but no less important for being so.

What's even more refreshing is the constructive poetics the press represents. In James Sherry's book, *Four For*, he asks:

What are we afraid to say? What might be proposed? Can't say I'm concerned, can't say I was wrong, can't say ought. No I, no you, no description, no narration, no information, only language misery.

I love this passage because it gets us all beyond much of the supposedly "critical" poetics of the seventies and eighties. A deconstructive poetics in and of itself won't stop the violence that books do. Calling books "texts," slamming subjectivity, and refusing to publish on commercial presses doesn't solve any real problems. But these are necessary gestures that must precede the kind of work that Meow represents: work that has style, work that uses the full arsenal of poetry's traditions to get something that's important to the writer across.

Sherry continues the passage above by observing that "The critical commodities take over as values, hate this, hate that, hate everybody else, is supposed to mean something about what we think of ourselves..." If such a passage may be taken as a poetics, Sherry's agenda becomes one of expression. He allows me, as a younger writer, to stop fretting over who I'm going to hurt, and start thinking about what I want to say. Sherry himself says a lot in this little book. His ear is amazing, giving the reader an array of tones and rhythms that do total justice to his subject mat-



ter. And what subject matter it is. Sherry runs the gamut in this work. On the very first page we find the playful "Old and New Be(e)n" in which Sherry states, in response to an epigram by Ben Jonson,

I don't have to have sung  
the 'plaint that's been sung by Old Ben  
On My First Daughter and On My First Son,  
because I have been with new Ben,  
but sinned like the ancient then,  
who hoped to much of the child of his right hand.  
who to Donne did don a fawning cloak...

And so on. The rhythm is seductive. The intelligence is quirky. Yet in the very same book Sherry manages to write something as enthralling, yet as completely different as

Before Zionism had won its own internal victory  
and realized itself, become a "self culture",  
it succeeded as an idea in Germany,  
but there was no body yet in Jerusalem,  
They had not yet dragged it from the tomb to revivify.

Four For is more than a manifesto or a poetics. And it's more than a smarmy book of woes. Four For is a book expressive of feelings and ideas more complicated and irrational than such forms can withstand.

Leslie Scalapino is another established writer who has taken her suspicion of books beyond decoding and mimetic parody and into the realm of the expressive. Her poetry is more manic than Sherry's, but no less comprehensible for being so. Where Meow writers like Sherry, Wendy Kramer, and Bruce Andrews concern themselves primarily with the world of the real, and share their perspectives on it, Scalapino proceeds along a more phenomenological path, writing of perspective itself:

The former first lady trotting and then pulling with her  
muzzle her legs shaking trembling as she's dragging the  
wieners out of a woman on a field far away  
runs to a cobalt cloud with the wieners. (out on the plain).  
This contains no violence as it is empty with the real.

This is to isolate the shape or empty interior of some  
events real in time so their 'arbitrary' location to each other  
emerges to, whatever they are.

To scrutinize their forms is to see the interior relation of  
experience.

Narrative 'soley' is the same as hanging within the 'visible'  
horizon as being its existence.

It narrows to and is the blue night. If it is only the visible  
it is not what's regarded.

For Scalapino books are violent only insofar as they are real—as  
they are reified. As artifacts that exist in relation to oneself  
and one's perspective, they are no more the agents of violence  
than the sky.

Philosophy covered, Scalapino's writing style in this book  
is, as usual, exquisite. As a style that is mimetic of its content,

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it is precise. As a vehicle for constructing new worlds, it is potent. More than any other writer working today, Scalapino manages to purlion the new out of the detritus of the old without sacrificing her integrity as a cultural critic. She is also impossible to paraphrase or otherwise reduce, so I'll refrain from reprinting the entire manuscript here, and hope that you read it on your own.

Another Meow book that I'd like to quote from is Rob Fitterman's *Metropolis*. Like Sherry, Fitterman's writing style is clean, well-suited to its content, and lively. Like Scalapino, Fitterman regards the world from a unique perspective and is not afraid to express his thoughts on the page—regardless of how tainted said page might be. Not that Fitterman isn't critical. In the first meandering stanzas we get a good sense of the speaker—a somewhat befuddled city dweller, musing in a quiet tone:

These seats  
ur miraculous  
a felonesque sub-developer  
pent-up effervesces  
after hours an ad  
underworld turned taught at  
no public piled  
core, contessa

Travel light  
you're the idea man  
praise aroma of pepper, erased  
length of vision shed  
we'll take the check

Though it superficially resembles the broken lyric forms made famous by the 1993 *O-Blek Anthology* (edited by another of Meow's writers, Peter Gizzi), Fitterman's work differs from this kind of work in its emotional intensity.

In those people. A thorough.  
After traffic when we  
Daunting nod of recognize  
A face from paper. Written  
Off Somewhere is  
Not anywhere. Turns well  
Or wretched in the hands of.

Unabashed, yet hesitant, this is not a work bent on garnering authority. But, like Scalapino and Sherry, it isn't afraid to say something—to admit to feeling

something—in spite of its own dilemmas.

Meow's writers for the most part uphold the larger claim that Meow seems to be making for itself as a press—that it is highly suspicious and ultimately subversive of the role that literature plays in a culture of physical and intellectual violence. Yet, some of Meow's authors, however playfully, do cite canonical writers more as authorities than as literary peers, thus increasing the power of canonical rhetorics and those who purvey them. In addition, as is plainly stated inside of each book cover, Meow is supported by the University of Buffalo, an institution affiliated not only with that nasty crime scene, *The Library*, but with that even nastier crime scene, *The State*. One must then wonder whether Meow is truly subversive in its attitude toward the book or is rather using a posture of subversion to increase its own authority as a press. After perusing a number of its chapbooks, I tend to believe that the former is true. In spite of its institutional affiliations, Meow is a fantastic small press that doesn't mistake good writing for good ethics, yet manages to deliver both to its readers.

KATY LEDERER

PHILIP LAMANTIA  
**Bed of Sphinxes: New & Selected  
Poems 1943-1993**

City Lights (261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94133), 1997, 141 pages, \$12.95.

Imagine yourself lying in a bed of sphinxes. You might be trying to engage in one or another of the activities most associated with beds, instead of which you're confronted by mind-crushing existential riddles, demanding solution on pain of your life. An understanding of the title alone should give you a sufficient glimpse into the mind of Philip Lamantia to continue with this retrospective of 50 years of his poetry.

Lamantia was first associated, while still a teenager, with André Breton and the Surrealists (he's one of the few today with no need for the prefix "neo-"), and the early poems in this collection share many of the strengths and weaknesses you'd expect from a remarkably

talented teenager writing in the surrealist mode: they're filled with phrases like "my body/the savage fruit of lunacy," "flower bursting with eyelids," "islands of inflammable virgins," and, in a demonstration that Lamantia has already (by 1946) begun to view the process with fire-tongue in Toltec-cheek,

all long pajamas are frozen dust  
unless an axe cuts my flaming grotto.

But imitation was never what Lamantia was about, and the poems written between 1948 and 1958 and originally collected in *Ekstasis*, especially the virtuoso prose poem "Inside The Journey" and short, dense and powerfully imaged animal poems like "Animal Snared In His Revery" and "The Owl", attest to an imagination tuned into a deeper source than that of some guy just trying to make a name for himself in the avant-garde literary world. By the mid-60s, the seeming randomness of the opiated surrealist imagination has focused itself into the spiritual Quest.

And the pursuit continues unabated. Lamantia, who turns 70 this year, writes with Mercury firmly in Scorpio, forming verbal relationships with symbols of talismanic power, taboo, and transformation. His poems are alchemical spells woven of tarot, astrology, gnosticism, Egyptian and Native American mysticism, yoga, sex magick, druidism and even ornithology. Through the power of the spells Lamantia confronts and sometimes overcomes (hey, nobody's perfect, and Lamantia's awareness of where the confrontations lie is often victory enough), in each poem, the limits of the knowable, and perhaps more importantly, the be-able. Then, in the next poem, the next limit is confronted.

HA! I decipher/the talk of the gods!

Check out the Whitmanic rant of "Hypodermic Light" following the manifesto "Resurrection" and you can hear echoes of "Howl" and see the differences in the ways Lamantia and Ginsberg transfigured their sources. Try reading these poems aloud as they're meant (particularly after the 40s) to be experienced—Lamantia was a



spellbinding performer who regrettably hasn't read in public for several years due to illness.

Also interesting are the poems from the mid-60s, which tie together a preoccupation with Blake and an early Aquarian-Age environmental optimism, as in "Voice of Earth Mediums":

Oh, William Blake  
thou can overseer, if it please thee,  
this lesson of Aquarius Clean Sweep

or "Astro-Mancy":

I foresee a couple of  
essential changes:  
a Break Out Generation  
of poet-kings...

Each one his own poet  
and poetry the central fact  
food & excrement of culture

Finally, there is the sense of humor, arguably Beat, that deflates whatever pretension one might find in these pages. To read the poetry in this collection is to, with Lamantia:

Do a Kundalini Somersault

STEVE CARLL

### Nothing the Sun Could Not Explain: 20 Contemporary Brazilian Poets

Edited by Michael Palmer, Regis Bonvicino, and Nelson Ascher, Sun and Moon Press (6026 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036), 1997, 312 pages, \$15.95.

The styles displayed in **Nothing the Sun Could Not Explain: 20 Contemporary Brazilian Poets** range from luminosity in nakedness to cosmic prescience in spatial arrangement. The anthology's poets have all struggled out from under oppression by political regimes; the verve and rage that has empowered their liberation empowers their poems as well. This volume serves as yet another reminder that a woeful amount of the world's literature remains unjustly ignored, unclaimed, unavailable—except through the aegis of such readers as the book's editors.

These poems are easy on the eyes, to make a gross understatement. Michael Palmer, Regis Bonvicino, and Nelson Ascher have compiled a visual 20-course buffet. Ascher shows us one region of his Brazil, his universe, through haiku-esque bursts of nascent vision, as in "Where There's Smoke": "No smoke implies/memory, since things/are lost in smoke/which cannot thus/become a monument..." Lenora de Barros writes "There is life/where the life happens/What was is past/Turns will come to see" beside simply drawn film frames which hauntingly duplicate the words of the poem within their boundaries. When Torquato Neto sculpts his "Matter Material," its tangibility remains glowingly present:

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Formally and structurally, these poets take great strides away from inherited political and aesthetic assumptions; they have replaced their predecessors' intellectualized indifference to oppression with glaring and radiant vitality.

The cultural references peppering this volume are by no means limited to Brazilian history; the authors included are less citizens of Brazil than citizens of the world. Many of them write either in the wake or in the throes of tropicalism, an organic movement rooted in 1970s Rio de

Janeiro which relies upon the assimilation of icons and traditions associated with various cultures into a vibrantly mongrelized whole. In Regis Bonvicino's "The Disorder of"—"The disorder of successive/ateliers Picasso's heirs/paid taxes with drawings/Derain Cezanne Matisse Seurat"—or Paulo Leminski's "moon/did you shine like this over auschwitz," the outward stare of these poets becomes as immanent as a fist.

The fist punches, however, in all directions. Witness becomes both personal and universal as the anthology unfolds itself. Waly Salamao offers Whitmanic visions of lush landscape: "Auguries in the jonquil flowers;/opened, precisely, this morning./The rainbow and its witchcraft,/precisely, this morning./ Fig-tree leaves levitating, airborne." Later in the volume, Ruy Vasconcelos de Carvalho narrates an everyday occurrence with the ease of a sedate Frank O'Hara: "today as I crossed the square/clovis bevilacqua seemed/par-

ticularly sad/his head bent/slightly to the left." Carvalho and Salamao are *in touch*, in the most cosmic sense of the phrase—the rest of the anthology explores the potential of such contact.

While a simultaneity of social, emotional, and narrative cognizance forces many of these poems into dizzying extremes of hyperpoetic language, some of the works employ more direct forms of address. Francisco Alvim pontificates like a goal-oriented Bukowski in his "Set Phrases": "So then he said: /I'm not rich but I've got some crystal/He saw I wasn't laughing/Why sully ourselves for so little." Ana Cristina Cesar lays out the timbre of human relationships as if she were laying out cards for a game of aesthetic solitaire; she confides in us, in "Travelling," "Late at night I put the whole house back in its/place./I put all the leftover papers away./I make sure of the soundness of the locks./I never said another word to you." These poems are honest but

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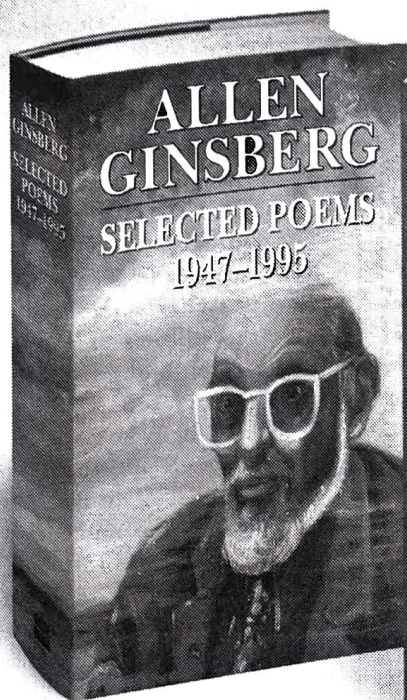
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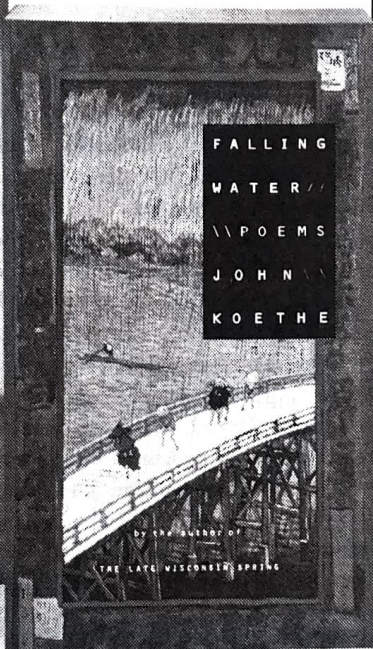
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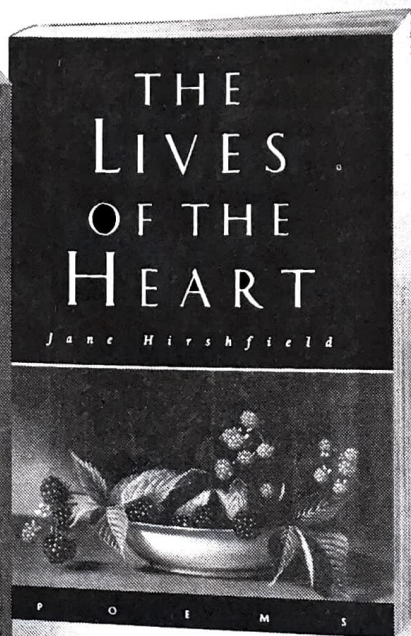
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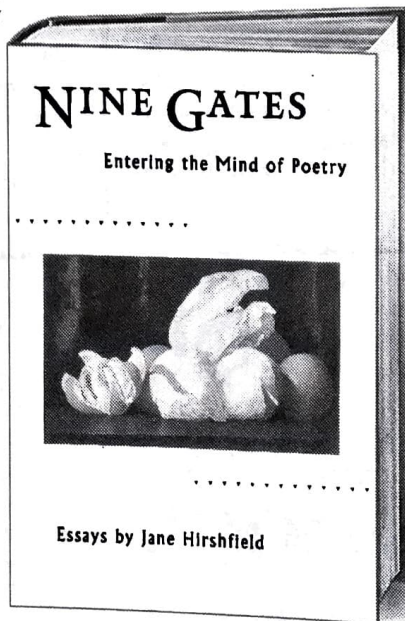


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never banal; even when confronting "reality" head-on, they remain subtle enough to be potentially inspiring.

The translators of the collection include Michael Palmer, Robert Creeley, and Dana Stevens, North American poets, whose conjoining of formal, aural, and political dimensions involves them in a continuing debate on poetry's debt to language itself, on the struggle of verse to define itself as such when, as one century nudges another, previous conceptions of "content" have begun to seem exhaustive. The editors chose the right set for the job; the translators' work is smooth and inventive. The poets of *Nothing the Sun Could Not Explain* speak not in translation but, it would seem, in their own voices: angry, blissful, curious, amused, anxious—and sometimes all of the above at once.

MAX WINTER

**TOM CLARK**  
**Empire of Skin**

Black Sparrow Press (24 Tenth Street, Santa Rosa, CA 95401), 1997, 232 pages, \$15.00.

Poet Tom Clark has published many intensely-felt books of lyric luminescence and humor throughout his career. His newest book, *Empire of Skin*, functions on a different scale, telling the story of the Northwest fur trade through the early years of the 19th century. Although many nations gathered in search of riches and land at this time, the otter, with its valu-

able fur, is the fulcrum for this tale of greed, survival and conquest.

When the first whites entered the area situated along the northwest coast near today's Vancouver, British Columbia, they encountered the culture of the native Nootkan tribe. The European hunters and explorers were exposed, to their surprise, to native trade practices that proved to be at least as sophisticated as their own. Clark writes, "Business with Indians / begins and ends with singing / Exchange of goods / is passed off as gift giving / Purchases disguised as gifts / come dearest of all / Protocol is cultural / but business is still business / After each transaction / there is further song and dance." This epic work traces the European shipping routes of the captains who traveled the coast in search of peltry, ultimately claiming the land for western nations. But Clark complicates any notion of systematic exploitation, showing that nature complicates human endeavor. From the east coast shipping cartels of New England to the Chinese market demand for otter fur, *Empire of Skin* charts the often difficult and dreary circumstances of both the alien white intruders and the native hunters who played the newcomers often to their own benefits.

Although the book sympathizes with the otters, Clark weaves an intricate narrative rich with the voices of the past. He layers these poems with subtle humor and authority that is based on a disciplined regard for discrete historical moments. These poems reflect history as process, not subject; as a mimetic chain of enact-

ment rather than chronological distribution of information. Like Charles Olson, whose biography Clark wrote earlier this decade, deep human elements inform the historical patterns gathered from journals, shipping logs, and documents filed in the stacks of university libraries. Unlike Olson, however, Clark's tale is tight, never abandoning narrative for the more chaotic terrain of subjective intrusion. The story he gives us is not the accumulation of a life's work, but a focused, narrative specific to a single location in both place and time.

As in other books, Clark presents a lyric radiance few can match. He swiftly sketches a landscape that evokes the stillness of a hunt held under "calm night moonlight in cedars/a little soft wind a cloud or/two blowing over glassy water/go out along reefs in a/polished-hull ottering canoe." This lyric painting contrasts with the mimetic reports and journal entries that reveal the human drama set against the background of a dangerous and expansive landscape. In "Voyages autour du Monde (Cook and the Burneys)" we experience these dangers through the voice of a young woman who says:

'There is talk of his intended expedition'  
Jem sailed round the world with him  
learned reefs and leeshores scurvy  
and cannibals could kill got skins  
at Nootka sailed for China saw  
Cook sent to the savage shades of Owyhee  
survived

'the tragical history of blood'  
vision of the sacrificial pyre flickering  
through palm fronds

to bring *Discovery* home  
Out of Empire

—and

'wretched weather, much  
danger, infinite sickness,  
& no prize!'

These lines hint at the predatory significance of survival and profit which are important themes in much of Clark's work. The trepidation of exploration are magnified through this young woman's voice, but these final lines also convey the

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matter-of-fact reality attached to the possible glory of discovery. The frank directness of expression in Clark's poetry teases us with the brutal reality of commerce and discovery, but the lines are sublimated by an awareness of the frailties unique to the human folly of these exploits. In *Empire of Skin*, he acknowledges the suffering inflicted on every one involved.

To this poet-historian, the building of empire is a process in which none are innocent, with the exception of the otters. *Empire of Skin*, however, never moralizes or criticizes the key players in this drama. They are revealed by their actions, influenced by a commitment to perseverance under harsh situations. Although fault often lies with the European explorers, for their greed and passion for otter pelts, Clark refuses the sort of easy condemnation formed by the vague assaults of multi-cultural critiques. Instead, he draws for us a complex and sometimes contradictory story that reveals, without condemning, the varied human impulses sparked by the trade of an animal's skin.

DALE SMITH

[continued from page 9]

Peruvian critic, said that the Spanish language has become English poetry in my work. I'm thinking in Spanish and to an extent, writing in English. Because of this bilingual drama, that I live, I'm very much aware of that drama as it lives in history and literature. I've been reading some of the writers who are linguistic immigrants such as Nabokov, the Russian, Joseph Conrad, Kosinsky, Samuel Beckett, writers who have migrated linguistically to other languages. I was looking at an essay that appeared in the *New Yorker* on Joseph Conrad, how his sentence structures come to the verge of being bad English in *The Heart of Darkness*. All throughout his life he had this struggle with the language. Nabokov insists on using these tremendously out of the way, big words that you don't readily use in everyday language. You see that in all his books. I don't know if you've read *Ada*, where you have to go to the dictionary constantly. Why is this writer doing this? Is it because he wants to show his profound vocabulary or because he's also a writer who's coming into the English language via dictionaries, and via a struggle to be correct in it and not go out of the way as opposed to most American writers who would write in simple immediate language? Sort of like Williams who also wanted the language to be made up of immediate spaces and experiences rather than to be abstracted and far away. I've been reading a lot of bilingual literature as inspiration, as a resource for my own writing. Some people choose this exile. Puerto Ricans were immigrants through conditions beyond us, economic conditions, when we encountered this English. Through a man like Joseph Conrad, it was a personal choice that he made as an adult. In my case, it's the reverse. I'm back now in Puerto Rico writing in Spanish and also writing in English but separating the two languages because I don't necessarily write in Spanglish. I see some faults in that, not that there's not valid literature that has come along in the Spanglish mode. Bilingualism is the history of

literature. To use another language, in practice and in spirit and in reading and in translation. Writing is constant translation to me. No matter what the situation, nor how provincial it might get. To me it always is that. The greatest writers come from those encounters with not just other cultures, but with other languages. I had briefly mentioned that I thought it was important to learn one language before going on to the other. In this country you grow up bilingually. You can also grow up with accessibility to languages, but you only learn a percentage of each. If you don't round out in either one, instead of becoming bilingual you could become nono-lingual and I think that's something that we're experiencing in the schools in New York City and Los Angeles and San Francisco and Miami. A whole generation of Latin American kids are actually in a state of confusion because of this language thing.

**Alson:** What did you just say? You become what?

**Hernandez Cruz:** Nono-lingual. A word that means no language. It is best to be centered in one language which expresses your physical and psychological needs, for it to have accompanied your total growth into a person. When a foreign language is imposed upon a people it causes confusion. Two languages constantly floating next to each other can become very taxing on the person on the street. Bilingualism is a great gift in the hands of the writer, but it could create chaos in the population as a whole. In poetry what is important is the spirit of what you are saying and its proximity to music, the cadence of your concept, the things you feel in rhythm. We are really language. That's what the Bible says. Spanish or English. What is important is how the blood is circulating. The salt of the air in the vision.

*Sheila Alson is the author of five books of poetry and the founder and member of the women's multi-cultural poets' theater group, Coyenne. A former member of the Poetry Project's Board of Directors, Sheila was an editor of A Gathering of the Tribes magazine at the time of this interview.*



# books received.

ALICIA ASKENASE

**The Luxury of Pathos**

Texture Chapbooks (Norman, OK), 19 pages, \$6.00.

DENNIS BARONE

**Echoes**

Potes & Poets Press (Elmwood, CT), 1997, 180 pages, \$14.00.

DODIE BELLAMY

**Hallucinations**

Meow Press (Buffalo), 1997, 28 pages.

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE AND KIKI SMITH

**Endocrinology**

Kelsey Street Press (Berkeley), 1997, 28 pages, \$17.00.

**The Best American Poetry 1997**

Edited by James Tate, Scribner, 269 pages, \$13.00.

STAR BLACK

**October for Idas**

Painted Leaf Press (New York), 1997, 73 pages, \$12.00.

LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY

**Three Early Books of Poems: 1967-1969**

Time Being Books (St. Louis), 1997, 205 pages, \$16.95.

LEE ANN BROWN

**The Voluptuary Lion Poems of Spring**

Tender Buttons (New York), 1997, 8 pages.

TOM CAREY

**Desire**

Painted Leaf Press (New York), 1997, 75 pages, \$12.00.

ADRIAN CASTRO

**Cantos to Blood & Honey**

Coffee House Press (Minneapolis), 1997, 152 pages, \$12.95.

ANDY CLAUSEN

**40th Century Man**

Autonomedia (Brooklyn, NY), 1997, 190 pages, \$8.00.

MARG COHEN

**Mecox Road**

The Groundwater Press (Port Washington, NY), 1997, 80 pages, \$12.00.

JACK COLLOM  
**entering the city**

The Backwaters Press (Omaha), 1997, 77 pages, \$12.00.

VICTOR HERNANDEZ CRUZ

**Panoramas**

Coffee House Press (Minneapolis), 1997, 187 pages, \$12.95.

CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY

**Concordat Proviso Ascendant**

The Figures (Great Barrington, MA), 1997, 40 pages, \$7.50.

WILLIAM ELLIOT

**Words in Edgewise**

Heine Inc., 1996, 55 pages.

**English Poetry from Israel**

Edited by Karen Alkalay-Gut, Lois Ungar, and Zygmunt Frankel, Israel Association of Writers in English, 1997, 72 pages.

DEANNA FERGUSON

**ddilemma**

hole books (Vancouver), 1997, 20 pages, \$5.00.

THAISA FRANK

**Sleeping in Velvet**

Black Sparrow Press (Santa Rosa, CA), 1997, 220 pages, \$15.00.

KATHLEEN FRASER

**il cuore: the heart**

**Selected Poems 1970-1995**

Wesleyan University Press (Hanover, NH), 1997, 212 pages, \$35.00.

KENNETH GOLDSMITH

**Soliloquy**

Editions Bravin Post Lee (New York), 1997, 281 pages.

MAKETA GROVES

**Red Hot on a Silver Note**

Curbstone Press (Willimantic, CT), 1997, 67 pages, \$10.95.

**The Herbert Huncke Reader**

Edited by Benjamin Schafer, Morrow Publishing, 1997, 374 pages, \$24.00.

**Hey Lew: homage to Lew Welch**

Bolinas, California, 1997, 101 pages, \$12.00.

JON JILER

**Sleeping With The Mayor**

Hungry Mind Press (St. Paul, MN), 1997, 382 pages, \$25.00.

SOR JUANA

**Love Poems**

Translated by Joan Larkin and Jaime Manrique, Painted Leaf Press (New York), 1997, \$12.00.

PENELOPE KARAGEORGE

**Red Lipstick and the Wine-dark Sea**

Pella Publishing Company (New York), 1997, 87 pages, \$10.00.

KEVIN KILLIAN

**Argento Series**

Meow Press (Buffalo), 1997, 32 pages.

KENNETH KOCH

**I Never Told Anybody: Teaching Poetry**

**Writing to Old People**

Teachers & Writers Collaborative (New York), 1997, 259 pages, \$14.95.

JOHN KOETHE

**Falling Water**

HarperCollins (New York), 1997, 70 pages, \$12.00.

JANE KRAMER

**Allen Ginsberg in America**

Fromm International, 1997, 202 pages, \$14.95.

PATRICIA LANDRUM

**Mary & Other Ordinary Women**

Cayenne Press (Brooklyn), 51 pages, \$10.00.

JOAN LARKIN

**Cold River**

Painted Leaf Press (New York), 1997, 43 pages, \$12.00.

JAMES LAUGHLIN

**The Love Poems of James Laughlin**

New Directions, 1997, 64 pages, \$14.95.

ANN LAUTERBACH

**On A Stair**

Penguin, 1997, 89 pages, \$14.95.

MICHAEL LEDDY

**Inventories**

Oasis Press (Amman, Jordan), 1997, 14 pages.

ANDREW LEVY

**Continuous Discontinuous (Curve 2)**

Potes & Poets Press, (Elmwood, CT), 1997, 136 pages, \$13.50.

LYN LIFSHIN

**Selected Poems 1970-1996**

Black Sparrow Press, 1997, 277 pages, \$14.00.

FRANK LIMA

**Inventory: New and Selected Poems**

Hard Press (West Stockbridge, MA), 1997, 201 pages.

RICHARD LIVESEY

**Summer Daze**

Funky Diction Publishing (New



York), 1997, 6 pages, \$1.00.

**LEZA LOWITZ**  
**old ways to fold New Paper**  
Wandering Mind Books (Berkeley, CA), 1997, 95 pages, \$10.00.

**HAKI R. MADHUBUTI**  
**Groundwork: New and Selected Poems**  
Third World Press (Chicago), 1997, 329 pages, \$29.95.

**PAUL McDONALD**  
**Write of Passage**  
APOCRYPHA/GrisGris Press, 1997, 37 pages, \$7.00.

**LISSA McLAUGHLIN**  
**The Grouper**  
Avec Books (PENGROVE, CA), 1997, 57 pages, \$8.50.

**CAROL MUSKE**  
**An Octave Above Thunder: New And Selected Poems**  
Penguin, 1997, 200 pages, \$16.95.

**JOEL OPPENHEIMER**  
**Collected Later Poems**  
Poetry/Rare Books Collection/  
University at Buffalo, 1997, 506 pages, \$14.95.

**ROCHELLE OWENS**  
**New and Selected Poems 1961-1996**  
Junction Press (San Diego), 1997, 192 pages, \$20.00.

**The Prescott Street Reader**  
Edited by Vi Gale, Prescott Street Press (Portland, OR), 1997, 169 pages, \$20.00.

**re: Chapbook 3**  
featuring Laynie Browne, Camille Guthrie, and Mary Angeline, reference: press (Providence, RI), 1997, 36 pages, \$5.00.

**ELENI SIKELIANOS**  
**The Book of Tendons**  
Post-Apollo Press (Sausalito, CA), 1997, 33 pages.

**JOEL SLOMAN**  
**Stop Poems**  
Zoland Books, (Cambridge, MA), 1997, 92 pages, \$19.95.

**JOSEPH SOMOZA**  
**Sojourner. So to Speak**  
La Alameda Press (Albuquerque), 1997, 98 pages, \$12.00.

**NICO VASSILAKIS**  
**Sequence**  
Burning Press (Lakewood, OH), 1997, 20 pages, \$7.50.

**JANINE POMMY VEGA**  
**Tracking the Serpent**  
City Lights Books (San Francisco),

1997, 191 pages, \$12.95.

**ROSANNE WASSERMAN**  
**No Archive On Earth**  
Gnosis Press (New York), 1997, 107 pages.

**BARRETT WATTEN**  
**The Bride of the Assembly Line**  
Impercipient Lecture Series #8, October 1997, 36 pages, \$5.00.

**KAREN TEI YAMASHITA**  
**Tropic of Orange**  
Coffee House Press (Minneapolis), 1997, 270 pages, \$14.95.

**GEOFFREY YOUNG**  
**Admiral Fever**  
Sailing After Lunch, 1997, 43 pages, \$10.00.

### Magazines

**Blade #5**  
Spring 1997, Isle of Man, 47 pages.

**Chain #4**  
Honolulu, New York, Philadelphia, Fall 1997, 258 pages, \$10.00.

**Crayon #1**  
Festschrift for Jackson MacLow's 75th Birthday, 144 Union Street, Brooklyn, NY, 11231, 313 pages, \$20.00

**First Intensity #9**

Summer 1997, Lawrence, Kansas, 166 pages, \$9.00.

**Nexus**  
Volume 32, Spring 1997, Dayton, Ohio, 140 pages.

**Poets On The Line #6 & 7**  
Vietnam Veterans issue, <http://www.echonyc.com/~poets>

**PoetryKanto #13**  
Summer 1997, 100 pages.

**6ix**  
Reading, Pennsylvania, 1997, 70 pages, \$6.00.

**Synaesthetic #3**  
New York, 1997, 103 pages, \$10.00.

**Talisman #17**  
Jersey City, Summer 1997, Eileen Myles Issue, 240 pages, \$7.50.

**Tinfish #5**  
September 1997, Kaneohe, Hawaii, 55 pages, \$5.00.

**Verse**  
Volume 14, Number 1, Frank O'Hara issue, 1997, Williamsburg, Virginia, 142 pages, \$6.00.

**Washington Review**  
Volume XXIII, Number 1, June/July 1997, 26 pages, \$2.50.

**The World #53**  
1997, New York, 128 pages.

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