

poetry project

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1998 ISSUE #171

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WHAT'S INSIDE

A Nature Walk
with Jack Collom

Clearcutting in the East Village
by John Wright

REVIEWS OF

Cecilia Vicuña
Poems for the Millennium
Heather Ramsdell
John Ashbery
Alice Notley
Charles North
Wang Ping
Edwin Torres

POETRY BY

Bernadette Mayer



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We'd like to thank Anselm Berrigan, Assistant Editor, for his work on the *Dramatic Life* Series at the Edge of the World, and M. He received a grant from Bro... spring.

Your new... are former... Brenda Coultas, curator of... Eleni Sikelianos, odd hours, best to provide... taining and... of updates,

The Poetry Project Chapbook and 25 copies of winning chapbooks by Anderson Berrigan, submitted cover letter, address, publication titles, published brief biographies, fee. Make Pavement Series must be published 20th. See Saw Press James Stre Pavement Series it organization writers such as Will Alexander and many

announcements

New Staff

We'd like to welcome **Anselm Berrigan** as the new Program Assistant at the Poetry Project. Anselm is the author of *Integrity & Dramatic Life*, forthcoming this fall from Edge Books. He will be coordinating the Monday Night Series at the Project this year. His work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Talisman*, *The World*, and *Mike & Dale's Younger Poets*. He received his MFA in Poetry from Brooklyn College this spring.

Your new Newsletter Editors are former Program Assistant **Brenda Coultas** and current co-curator of Wednesday Nights **Eleni Sikelianos**. All year, and at odd hours, we will be doing our best to provide you with an entertaining and informative assembly of updates, reviews and gab.

A Contest

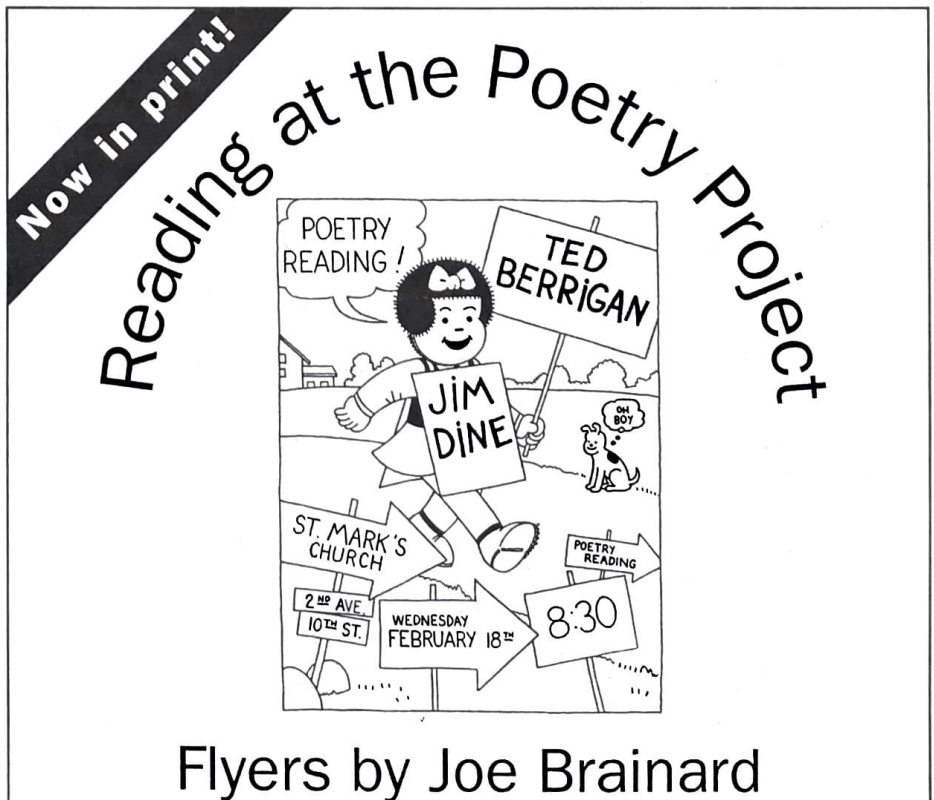
The Pavement Saw Press Chapbook contest awards \$500 and 25 copies to the author of the winning chapbook. This year Ruth Anderson Barnett is the judge. To enter, submit 32 pages of poetry, a cover letter including name, address, phone number, poem titles, publication credits and a brief biography, and a \$7 entry fee. Make checks payable to Pavement Saw Press. All entries must be postmarked by December 20th. Send entries to: Pavement Saw Press Chapbook Contest, 7 James Street, Scotia, NY 12302. Pavement Saw Press is a non-profit organization who has published writers such as Robert Grenier, Will Alexander, Joshua McKinney and many others.

Grant Workshop

On Tuesday, September 22nd, at 6 pm, the Poetry Project in conjunction with the New York Foundation for the Arts will be hosting a free seminar on Artists' Fellowships. This year, NYFA offers awards in Computer Arts, Crafts, Film, Nonfiction Literature, Performance Art/Multidisciplinary Forms, Poetry, Printmaking/Drawing/ Artists' Books, and Sculpture. The information seminar will address questions about the application process and also inform artists about funding opportunities. For more information about the Fellowship seminar or to receive an application, please call NYFA at (212) 366-6900.

Aimée Grunberger 1953 - 1998

Poet Aimée Grunberger died of cancer this spring. The author of *Ten Degrees Cooler Inside* (Dead Metaphor Press), she graduated from the MFA program at Naropa, and her poems have been published in magazines like *Exquisite Corpse* and *The American Poetry Review*. "She made a place for herself in my...memory by her sheer vivacity, exuberance, extravagance, back in the early 70s—a natural performer—her vitality overflowed and made a mark on me, and on many others," writes Henry Gould. At her wake was a cake which read, "Good luck in your new location."



Flyers by Joe Brainard

Reading at the Poetry Project: Flyers by Joe Brainard
A folio of 11 classic Brainard flyers and one full-length comic strip, with a special introduction by Bill Berkson. Printed in an limited edition of 250. 8 1/2 x 11 inches. Available from the Poetry Project. \$14.95.

regional updates

PARIS

For some two decades, American poets visiting Paris have made a primary port of call at Le Divan bookstore, once just behind the church of St. Germain-des-Près but now moved to the 15th arrondissement. They would put their questions about current French poetry to one person in particular: Renée Saint-Ramon, a spry, lively woman who ran the poetry section. Renée's death some time ago was the saddest poetry news in Paris. It removed from the scene a personality of great courtesy, enthusiasm, literary judgment, and kindness. She was the linchpin. She covered the old St. Germain shop with photos of French and American poets and was always right up to date with publications and information. Dominique Fourcade has just published a delicate, fine-boned "strophe" somehow capturing her spirit. With tender and exquisite paradox, it begins: "Si j'étais vivant je lui dédierais cette strophe de prose ..."

Otherwise, I hole up in spring and summer, so I can do no more than signal an evening for *Action Poétique* magazine held at Beaubourg and the continuation of Franco-US poetry translation contact through the Royaumont organization on the outskirts of Paris. Usual pleasure to see Kenneth and Karen Koch at a small party given him by Anne and Bertrand Dorny. Jennifer Moxley and Steve Evans are in town, and Laird Hunt, Eleni Sikelianos, and Jonathan Skinner breezed about for part of the summer. Alice and I have just been week-ending at Grez-sur-Loing with Anselm Hollo and Jane Dalrymple-Hollo, who have a six-month residence at the Hotel Chevillon, patronized by the Barbizon and Glasgow schools of painting in the 19th century. Ah, the old days! We had dinner outside in the grounds sloping to a peaceful river, an old, often-painted bridge, geese honking. Then you can play at being Robert Louis Stevenson,

POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER
cross the patio, and peer through the dining room window as if seeing Fanny Osbourne and (says RLS) falling in love at first sight. He is supposed to have dreamt up *The New Arabian Nights* there, with cousin Bob's help. The locals find Anselm, with his grey ponytail and Australian straw hat (thought to be a Texas stetson hybrid), a typical American writer, and Jane is hard at work in a riverside studio.

—Douglas Oliver

BOSTON

On July 17-19 about fifty poets and people amused by poets gathered in a small not very well air-conditioned room in Cambridge to take part in the first (annual?) Boston Alternative Poetry Conference. Our host and sponsor, Aaron Kiely (who bears a strong resemblance to Rob Lowe), ran an intense 3-day program with events starting at 9 am (I never got there before noon) and usually ending around 10 pm. There were many highlights: John Taggart gave a talk on poetry in memory of Oppen. Kristin Prevallet explained how Helen Adam wrote plays while riding a bicycle. Douglas Rothschild rode home from a

WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

Poetry Workshop taught by Stephen Rodefer (Tuesday evenings, 7-9 pm: 10 sessions, begins October 20)

Letters, syllables, spelling, words, shape, selection, morphs, figures, combination, mistakes, sound, phonemes, lines, margins, stanza, meaning, genre, beds, generation, vocabulary, ideas, theories, writing—the whole shebang, Lit'rature (*lit et rature*). Lower limit speech, upper limit song, the billiard ball spins standing still. And no sum is ever equal to your own selection. Look in the hearth (street, page, book) and write.

A student of Charles Olson and Basil Bunting, Stephen Rodefer is the author of *Four Lectures*, *Emergency Measures*, *Passing Duration*, and other books. He has taught at the University of Cambridge, University of California at Berkeley, and New York University.

Poetry Workshop taught by Frank Lima (Friday evenings 7-9 pm: 10 sessions, begins October 23)

In this workshop, participants will do assignments, read poets such as Henri Michaux, Frank O'Hara, Francis Ponge and Kenneth Koch, and learn how to rigorously edit and review their work. Rick Pernod from Exoterica says, "Frank Lima was an outstanding teacher and provided insight, encouragement and a deep knowledge of his craft to our workshop participants."

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

Continuing To Be Inspired by Inspiration taught by Maureen Owen (Saturday afternoons 12-2 pm: 10 sessions, begin October 24)

An eclectic collection of poems and texts will be introduced, read, discussed and drawn on for inspiration. The focus of this workshop will be to use this framework to get a lot of writing done. There will be much in-class reading of works and in-class writing—a river of words—generated by that inspiration. The class will intermittently publish and distribute a workshop magazine with works from the participating writers.

Maureen Owen's latest book, *American Rush: Selected Poems*, was published by Talisman House this summer. Her other books of poetry include *Hearts in Space*, *Amelia Earhart*, and *Untapped Maps*. She is the editor of Telephone Books and *Telephone* magazine.

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.

party in the hatch of a rented Dodge Shadow, and when the car was stopped by the police his body remained undiscovered, though it was only veiled by a windshield. Lisa Jarnot made us feel both happy and sad with her Chinchilla poem. Will Alexander pointed to his head when he read the word "comets" in his poem. Lewis Warsh warned us of the secret police in Brooklyn. Christian Bok read poems in Klingon (amazing!). Caroline Knox expressed her excitement for the word "oops" in the poetry of the First Generation NY School. Wendy Kramer, the NYC Librarian, showed us that reading poetry boxes is just as much fun as reading cereal boxes in the morning. Rosmarie Waldrop read from the final book of her trilogy and made me want to be a better poet. Much thanks to Aaron for his time and effort and "resources" in organizing what was the best summer poetry event this year.

— Magdalena Żurawski

LOS ANGELES

Aldon Nielsen, author of *Black Chant*, and other penetrating studies on the Afro-American psyche, is also Professor of English at Loyola Marymount University, and will be co-editing with Lauri Ramey of Hampton University, a double anthology of Black innovative poetry since World War II. He will also be conducting a reading series at Loyola Marymount for the 98-99 season featuring poets such as Susan Wheeler, Joe Ross, and myself. Poet Martin Nakell will initiate a reading group called Los Angeles Experimental Poets Society in October on ways of approaching new poetry, and will include amongst its initial members, Chris Reiner, Todd Baron, and Guy Bennett. Sun & Moon remains at a pinnacle in American publishing, recently issuing Myung Mi Kim's book *Dura*, Fanny Howe's absorbing novel *Nod* and an anthology of international poetry. Forthcoming will be translations of Andalusian poems and a collection of love poems by Adonis, both translated from the Arabic. I have been conducting a workshop over the past 20 weeks at Beyond Baroque, and the Los Angeles County Museum, which includes poets, painters, scholars, and translators. Its previous two incarnations were entitled *Psychic Fiesta*, and *Passion & Ethics*. Its final incarnation is tentatively titled *Impulse & Nothingness*.

— Will Alexander

SAN FRANCISCO

The weather in San Francisco is the same every August ... Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot with Readings and Poets and Books! Speaking of hot, our President has been sexually liberated on the air. As dirty dresses pour into Kenny Starr's Roasters, the otherwise sleepy city is filled with Lit-life. On Aug 2 Dawn Baude and Bob Grenier tag-teamed Cody's Books in Berkeley to celebrate Dawn's return from Paris to the Bay's clutches. Dawn read works under the influence of Egypt's gauze. Bob presented his new color-xerox Monograph (\$120, and he apologizes for this) of hues words; airs and suspension; words in landscape's cast, letter reverting to symbols. On Aug 13, New York Hobo-Enfants Terribles Greg Fuchs & Brendan Lorber read at Adobe Books, part of the 9 X 9 Industries long-running Thursday series there. Fuchs's work is expected from Buck Downs' Books any day, and Lorber's LUNG-FULL! remains the only magazine in this country to be brilliantly, enthusiastically compiled, as well as **waterproof**. Attendees included celebrated Chiapas activist/poet Jeff Conant, John & Ann McNally (and baby Marin, who threw up for both readers with great enthusiasm and interest). Kit Robinson followed, smooth and vast as he covered the terrain of more than twelve books, including the soon to be published *Cloud 8: Collaborations 1971-1998*, written with longtime pal Alan Bernheimer.

— Edmund Berrigan
& Brandon Downing

BOULDER

While the coasts went on vacation, the Big Tent went up once again, indefatigable, at the foot of the Rockies for an especially exciting month of "landlocked" writing events. The first week's focus was experimental writing in the Objectivist lane. The gnomic Carl Rakosi (spry at 90 & the high altitude) evoked himself as "an early lover of Yeat's moonshine period," before twirling his comico-satirical one-liners for us, "tragic satchmo events," like so many helium barbells. Poems which led us through a kind of Nietzschean inferno, seen from the millennium's, and a life's, end: "corporate man ... a self-made man/who loves his creator... sits by the waters of time/studying his odds." Rakosi's refreshing mix of wit

Rising Café Reading Series

October 6 @ 7:30 p.m.

Lisa Buscani
Lydia Cortes
Dominic Hamilton-Little

November 3 @ 7:30 p.m.

Merry Fortune
Eileen Myles
John Wright

December 1 @ 7:30 p.m.

Nick Carbo
Denise Duhamel
Edwin Torres

All readings + open mike
\$4 suggested

∞

Rising Café
186 5th Avenue
Brooklyn NY 11217
(718) 789-6340

and weight upped the tone for the week. During the next day's colloquium he spoke easily, of the "Objectivists:" "Jeez, they were all Jews!" Zukofsky? "He didn't know how to ride a bicycle." Reznikoff? "He chirped away like a sparrow ... it was impossible to suspect that Reznikoff was not sincere." Oppen? "We used to picnic together." Fortunately, little time was wasted on definitions of 'Objectivism.' The consensus seemed to be the lack of consensus, and a healthy circulation of ideas. A bemused Rakosi: "It's a tough business." Some of the younger poets began to wonder if 'Objectivist' meant anything more or less than "the poets who call themselves so." Niedecker's presence was strong, and dissenting—scholar Jenny Penberthy reminded us of Niedecker's marginal relationship to Objectivism, highlighting her surrealist tendencies and engagement with "poetry as the folk tale of the mind." By the week's end you couldn't make it to the bathroom or the canteen without getting caught in a crossfire of lively, spin-off conversation.

— Jonathan Skinner

A Few Crumbs
from the
 Houston Street Median-Stripe
 Naturewalk

by
 Jack Collom

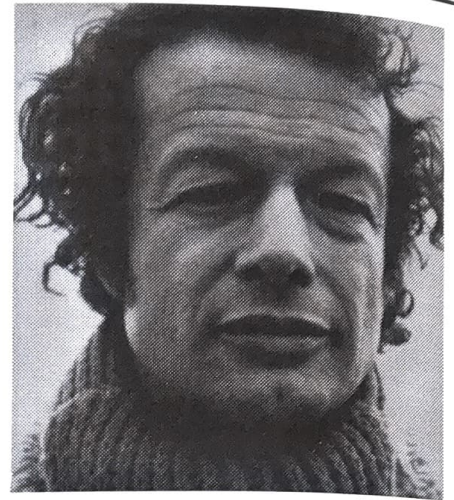


photo by Nat Collom

THE GARDENS of Alphaville are going through a sea-change of City regard—at first when greenery springs up in the rubble of a bombed-out block, Authority smiles upon the patches: nice that the folks are improving things; plants are nicer than destruction.

Then, when the healthy, unified effort of gardening has “kicked the place upstairs” to the threshold of protogentrification, and commercial value looms, the City says, “Get those grungy weed-scabs outa there so decent guys can do some damn business!” Perhaps this progress is a breathless compression of The Story of Civilization.

Then an image goes
 inside, along the tightened quiet of the limbs,
 and in the heart stops being.

—Rilke, from “Der Panter”

Astonishing! Everything is intelligent!

—Pythagoras

Like various lights
 just west of Katz’s deli...
 shard of Rolling Rocks

—Basho

The Pueblo understood the thing as it was — the squash blossom, grasshopper, or rabbit itself could never be created by the human hand. Ancient Pueblos took the modest view that the thing itself (the landscape) could not be improved upon. They did not presume to tamper with what had already been created. Thus *realism*, as we now recognize it ... did not catch the imaginations of Pueblo people until recently.

—Leslie Marmon Silko

For their names are those which, floating, reach a different place.

—//Kabbo (Bushman)

DIRT

D eclares that life without buffers of miscellany
 I sn’t
 R eal but an incomplete
 T hought

Nature cannot be dismissed on the basis that the person who loves it has an identifiable background. Or lives across some psychic gulf or wears tennis shoes. Nature exists beyond that throwaway mind. And, however uncertain the definition of nature, vast aspects and portions of it do factually represent, if not lovability absolute, then complexity of a most enduring order.

The poet, too, plays God. That’s the nature of gesture. Big Business has learned all too well to gesture in the greater fields of the Earth’s crust — why not poets? Just tweak that psyche and roll up and over the old epigenetic ridge. It’s like the twitch into heliocentrism—a saving grace of perspective to semi-balance the power that’s rolled further and further out past our fingertips.

You can still close-focus in a larger field — just takes breathing exercises.

SIMILITUDE

Sittin’ in the kitchen
 with cold cash,
 planets collide with a splash,
 stars in a flash.

HAIKU

Magician pulls tablecloth
 of soil
 everything falls
 —Shiki

But totally ASIDE from the fact that the human

world's internecine squabbles and curlicues are going to look like flakes of paint when the larger picture caves in on them in a grandchild wink of geologic time, ASIDE from life-&-death need, that is, there's an intimacy of ecology and poetry, of nature and poetry, an overlap, just waiting to welcome the leading edge into the maze of edges that form its proper surrounding.

the birds flying, tree
cloud, stems, rain,
to be mostly, leaf
hulls, to pass the ocean

deeps, green, black

the constant energy, the head
flight, voice, at the top of a gutter
the blue continues to dark
—Larry Eigner

We utilize the new definitions of nature while mouthing the old. The very key is that there is no very key, except in probability, "is" no is. Sense of truth has been shapeshifted from linear-way-station ontologies to emphases of indefinable bushy cladistics. Diversity is the bones of nature but skin-deep to us.

In other words, any good poem or poetics is (sizzle) an ecology, a relational charge-zone. The basic poststructural revelation, in culture, is the dominance of context, and this is old hat in nature. Aesthetics and societies are being dragged, kicking and screaming, into harmony with the loomings of physical science.

With a ballad, with a ballad, a rebound
Off trundled timber and scoops of the hillside
ground, hollow hollow
hollow ground:
The whole landscape flushed on a second at a sound.
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, fragment

All this does not abolish precision, it just cezannes it. Earth and Theory are wrestling in a punctuated chaos equilibrium. Nature poetry need not be gentlemanly speeches addressed to a small child.

O Cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?

And let's dive "now" into where you (homies) live. A cubicle for bed and bookcases and your living room is the city. Reznikoff and Richard Wright are your grizzled nature guides. Eileen Myles megaphones the tourist attractions and horrors of the everyday. You're hotfooting along, shooting up cheesecake, thinking two inches post-Baudrillard ('scuse my antique mimicry, I'm an

amer-hick) and what are you? A blip of nature. Your amazingly intricate culture is at most bounced out from the rest of nature by a naughty squeak (or lovely flash of formalism). Libraries could be written about the waves-cum-particles of your little finger, and each library'd fit in a fat cell. But you're on straight Big-Brain and the unadulterated milieu! You're not only post-hip you're post-everything: you're just post. You're cynical, sentimental and kind. What now?

Lizards of every temper, style and color dwell here. They dart about on the hot rocks, swift as dragonflies. The eye can hardly follow them; but they never make long-sustained runs, usually only about ten or twelve feet, then a sudden stop, and as sudden a start again; going all their journey by quick, jerking impulses. These many stops are necessary as rests, for they are short-winded, and when pursued steadily are soon out of breath, pant pitifully, and are easily caught. Their bodies are more than half tail, but their tails are well-managed, never heavily-dragged nor curved up as if hard to carry; on the contrary they seem to follow the body lightly of their own will. Some are colored like the sky, bright as bluebirds, others gray like the lichened rocks on which they hunt and bask.

—John Muir

In working with schoolkids a lot for a quarter-century, one develops an omnium-gatherum of approaches to poetry. The approaches resemble an ecosystem in themselves. Any one of them may lead to a poem-cluster, which resembles an ecosystem. And each poem itself is like an ecosystem (as well as a gateway to Deeper Forces). A poem is nominally linear but actually a field, whether or not the author is consciously Olsonian. Some of the avenues to poetry especially attuned or attuneable to "nature" in my workshop repertoire are:

Acrostics and phrase-acrostics—keying strata—piles of lines
Anatomy poems—personifications of body parts
"Captured talk"—gleanings of language from all around
Chant poems—rhythms, repetitions, incantations of nature
—all these do strike up natural forms ...

Collage—grafting
Compost-based poems—(after Whitman)—rot (deconstruction) & life

Concrete poetry—language forming aural or visual shapes
Creative rewrites—personifications, etc., of science or lay science texts

Definitions—play of ontology and nomenclature
Earth poems ("Things to Save")—my first eco-assignment—poem as list mingling ecology and the personal
"Going inside" poems—the penetration of essence that all poetry is, played with in concrete terms

Haiku and haibun—nature-based, image-focused & economical
"How I write"—examining one's own process

Internal rhyme & other stream-of-invention forms

—just read about evolution & you'll be making up forms

—just read about chaos & you'll be peering under the rug to see what's been hidden

I remember poems—memory is the catchall
"Last-words" poems—The Last Words of Your DNA, etc.

Letters—to a mitochondria (resident alien)—the whole thing is extending the scope of exchange

List poems of all kinds (list the kinds)—each 20 C poem is a list of thoughts

Lunes—simplified haiku

A raindrop falls.

It falls on my nose —

delicate, light, transparent.

—Grand Island (Nebraska)

High School Student

Metaphors—imaging ecology (relating to the relational)

Nomenclatural synecdoche—stories of the letters of your name

No-warmup deliveries—the spontaneous

Odes—like sunrise, ceremonial praise

On poetry—a slow flash of light, etc.

Origins (after Jacques Prevert's lyrebird poem)—playful accumululus of reverse minimyths:

The music teacher turns back to music.
—1st grader

Outdoors poems—obviously—circle or path of observations

Pantoums—exemplifications of cycles

Picture-inspired poems—from light to symbol

Place poems—many roads to anyplace

Political poems—as obvious as all outdoors

Portrait or sketch poems—a muskrat in place of Gertrude Stein's head

"Process poems"—Mac Lovian or other workings as analog to natural probabilities

Collaborations of all kinds—what could be more relational?

Questions without answers—"where do all the noises go?"

Recipe—how to make a horse, a planet

Spanish/English poems—languages as ecosystems

Talking to animals—Tyger, Tyger & other possible conversations

Thing poems—developing a multiplicity of perceptual angles on one thing (the hand, sky, river)

Things to do in...—the brain of a cockroach, the bottom of the sea

"13 ways of looking at..."—variations within a focus

Used-to-be-but-now poems—saltations

with & against cause-&-effect

Water poems—"Everybody has a water story!"

WCW imitations—red wheelbarrow's haikuishness, "plums" drama condensare, but also say:

A tender catalog of circumstance in its own shape,

as the following poem by William Carlos Williams, in "ordinary" language and short lines, but the rhythm, if you graph it, especially varies as nature does, as the knottiness of a tree, the dramatic verticality, adduced bit by bit of actual shape, that swings like the molecular sycamore tango,

YOUNG SYCAMORE

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height—
and then

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides—

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top

—WCW

THE DANSPACE PROJECT

Oct 1-4 City/Dans: Sara Pearson & Patrik Widrig

Oct 8-11 City/Dans: Karen Graham

Oct 15-18 Global Exchange: Marta Renzi with Anna Sedlacková (Slovakia)

Oct 22-25 Global Exchange: Yoshiko Chuma & the School of Hard Knocks with the Aska String Project (Tokyo)

Oct 29-Nov 1 Global Exchange/Danza Libre: Tiempo de Bailar (Mexico City)

Oct 30-31 Safer & Secret (Late-Night Halloween Special)

Nov 6-8 Food for Thought

Reservations/Info. 212-674-8194
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
2nd Avenue & 10th Street

Or such lovely ground as Levertov's

and the butteryellow glow
in the narrow flute from which
the morning-glory
opens blue and cool on a hot morning.

—from "Pleasures"

WHALES, ETC., IN SILVER LAKE—Images

Since we've evolved this big brain, might as well use it to spread our awareness in time, as the whales use theirs to spread their awareness in water. They take the medium of sound. So do we. Different patterns and content.

What flashes past the bus window.
Talk about nature tends to disappear into its spaces.

We should discriminate, in literature, case-by-case and not by morphic type. We can't afford to "like" only certain types of writing. All styles are useful.

EAGLES ARE FOREVER—this bumpersticker doesn't state a biological truth (species and genera are transitory) but announces, gestures, a poetic truth. The sky-blue letters emphasize the synecdoche role of the EAGLES—bits of the sky. Even that blue is the expression of a passing atmosphere, yet easily within our subjective "forever." The whole slogan is what you

might call a dance-truth.

Images haunt my life,
haunt all lives, serve as mental
icons for the religions of memory.
Even science thought now finds
itself in the processual Oz.

In a silver lake, what's the rush?
—Reed Bye

I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
—Elizabeth Bishop

FRIED CHICKEN, ET AL Reasons

Poetry about a cause is like
birds "about" fried chicken, or
the rest of human economy. But
everything eats and gets eaten.
And the Causes need Effects.

One function of poetry is
to preserve the doings of the
world. An important, contrary
sense is that of constant change—
recognizing there is no stable
recognition. Emphasis on transi-
tiveness that gulps subject and
object, sophisticated Uncertainty.
In this accurate light, "to save"
sinks.

These two senses form a
prime axis of poetry. To rescue
something from harm (process),
to preserve it artificially in the face
of entropy, means: a closed sys-
tem. Growth and death point up
museum folly.

But folly is of the essence.
A retinal afterimage is forever.
Fight folly *with* folly. To get outside
paradigms would be to get outside
life.

I mean "to save" has a
legit life in poems. Within itself
it contains all the motion brains
can register. It's proportional
(real).

So when the tag team of
technology and greed comes
gobbling up the moment, the
platform, the ropes, the audi-
ence— hit it with the folly of a
"save." Evolution, for all its
selection, lets fly with the sec-
ondary use of desire. Everything
goes but we don't know where.
Double-scoop brains into uni-
verse of beautiful by-products...

Einstein alone has glanced upon
beauty bared;
Once and for all it is $E=mc^2$.
—Alexander Pope

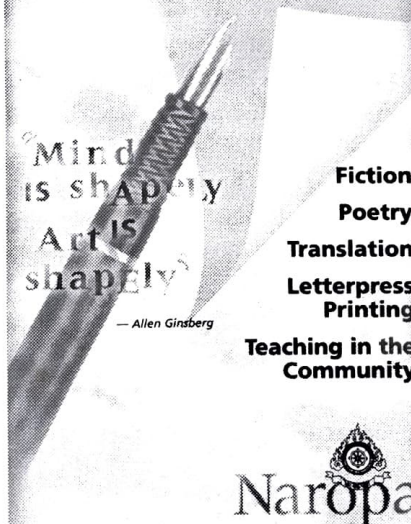
Abdomen, eggs in
Abscess of the foot
Amputation of wattles
Antiseptics, poisoning by
Bacillary white diarrhea. See Pullorum
disease
Barley, scabbed, feeding value of
Beak, necrosis of
Bile ducts
Blood cells, stippling of, in lead poi-
soning
Blowout, or prolapsus
Bones, failure to calcify
Bumblefoot
Canker. See fowl pox
Cannibalism
Caustic potash
Cloaca, absorption of water from
Copulatory organ, rudimentary
Crazy chick disease
—from a poultry-disease index

CLIMBING ONE VERTICAL INCH Shapes and movements

The quality of poetry is
largely climbing one vertical inch
above habit (for a slightly breath-
taking new horizon). Since
nature has tended to fall, like any

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reckoning of the unfamiliar (like science fiction), into a few simple habits, there's plenty of room for poetry beyond the pale. Once that inch is achieved, familiarity is conceived.

Nature is Postmodern by its very nature, which is time-expansive. Poetry that takes to nature will tend to divide and divide, long before it unifies.

Human feeling has too long circled around its own heart, forming the half-cooked shields of psychology, coalescing terms toward a comfy salvation. Emotion breathes when it leaves its own labels and simply serves perception, in a "heaping up" (*cinoti*, also the Sanskrit root of the word for poetry).

There are precedents in nature for any move the Big Brain might make, as from solid directly

to a form of air, when the heat is on. Or sheer numbers.

Let's assume the word "nature" is a complex of its quaint removals and ferocious force on one hand and the fact that it reveals itself as Everything (thus nothing) on the other, and *then* see it curling about the translucent orthogonals of the urban crust. Like color.

2088 A.D.... Everybody will sit around all day punching the keys of computer terminals connected to everything there is, and sip orange drink through straws like the astronauts.

— Kurt Vonnegut, in a VW ad.

RECOMMENDATION I

Observation. Like Ed Sanders:

The chickadee
Biting & shaking
the cluster
of maple seeds

like six tiny
mountain maracas

wherein focus and reference quiver at the surface. Observation is pure ego but no problem. Observation is a form of sex. The complications language brings are like 20 years of childcare, but poets tend to do it quicker. By the way there's plenty of nature-nature in the city to observe. You can see 80 kinds of birds in a whirl around a refuge in Jamaica Bay in season (take the A train to Broad Channel) (with 50 kinds of Kennedy Airport reverberations syncopating your synesthesia). Central Park (The Ramble is a treasure-box of native exotica); big wilderness in the Bronx full of foxes; trees-of-heaven sway outside your window (perhaps a Canada warbler glistens through it); peregrine falcons dive from skyscrapers; eight gull species dip into New York Harbor; fungus grows on your collected Dickens; greenery bursts out of every crack; the "other" living organisms in New York teaspoonful or apartments outnumber people by a factor made of so many zeros you couldn't tattoo them onto Giuliani's face with an atom-smasher, etc.

I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.

—Elizabeth Bishop

POETRY FROM GRAYWOLF PRESS

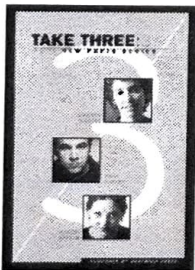


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RECOMMENDATION II
Language Happens on the Frontier

surrealism
street and kitchen oral riffs
laments
experiment
rambles
jokes
journals
fantasies
glossolalia
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permutations
headlines
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gossips

myth
soft classics
flicks & flecks
exhortations
mongrels
screams
scare stuff
sweet & sour nothings
alphabet stews
babytalk
drips
anthropomorphia
mysteries/rebuses
chains & fables
kisses of death
waves

RECOMMENDATION III

Study: Biology/ Evolutionary Theory / Your house, in scales.
Drink Environmentalism, but when stirred make poem hip
to its own playful energies first, then you can say, "Pretty
please with sugar on it" or "Save a leaf" or "Plant a tree on
your neighbor's head."

Study: local geology, weather, water history or what
parts of these large matters you can manage.
(Anselm Hollo says, "Poets should know everything.")

Play.

Stare at things.

It's a matter of familiarity. You can truly find as
many echoes (thus fun complications) in the "natural"
"world" as you can socially or sociologically— your own
reality is as closely related to a family of foxes as to riffs of
culture.

And in those foxes you can find, in fox liver cells or
fox quarks or fox behavior, the most up-to-date workings
time can belch or foreshadow at you.
May I call you citizen?

in a given moment in the life of a squirrel,
there's a particularity of entirety,
as well as all the particulars.
& there's probably one particular
or bunch of particulars
that defines the moment,
i.e., leads to the nest. Such as
"out the branch."

"Quien Sabe? It might fetch some fireworks you're not
figurin' on," said Nevada, moving over from his heaving,
foam-lashed horse to get in the shade of a pine.

—Zane Grey

Plant those gardens (i.e., discover them)!

— Jack Collom, Summer 1998

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shake all who read her work out of their compla-
cency. The poems in *Bathwater Wine* demon-
strate once again both her wry political aware-
ness and humor as well as a memorable and
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CLEARCUTTING THE EAST VILLAGE

by
John Wright

One need never leave the confines of New York to get all the greenery one wishes...

—Frank O'Hara

ST. MARK'S Church in the-Bowery occupies a prominent place among the scarce green spaces of lower Manhattan. With its mature grove of sycamores and understory trees, including fruit trees planted in honor of Frank O'Hara, W.H. Auden, Michael Scholnick and Paul Blackburn, the Church, like the parks and community gardens, is a public green space used for artistic performance. Because of its status as a sacred space, the former site of Peter Stuyvesant's dairy farm chapel is not likely to be bulldozed any time soon. Such is not the case, however, with the 60 or so community gardens in the neighborhood.

New York's community gardens were built up from the rubble of city-owned vacant lots, back in the day when the city was told to Drop Dead and low income neighborhoods became no-go zones, triaged out of the social contract. Thousands of buildings were destroyed, the result of landlord neglect and government "planned shrinkage" policies designed to reduce low income housing stock and clear neighborhoods for future speculation. In spite of these assaults, people began to clean up garbage and plant gardens atop basements filled with rubble.

Community garden styles are diverse and eclectic. While many gardens feature square raised beds worked by individual members, used mainly for growing vegetables, others have evolved into sophisticated botanical gardens and sculptural environments. Some gardens have over 25 years of work put into them, but they can be swept away in a few hours of city-sponsored destruction.

The city currently owns over 11,000 vacant lots and thousands of empty buildings, yet they seem fixated

on the 700 or so gardens on city land. The magical ability of community gardens to deter crime, increase property values, reweave the fabric of community, and bring hope to run-down areas has long been known, so it seems foolish for the city to destroy civic assets that cost virtually nothing. Gardens are targets because they are autonomous zones, areas free from consumption and mediation, at a time when the very idea of public space is under assault. In a rapidly segregating city, gardens are some of the few spaces where people can transcend their narrow demographic boundaries in a common interest. At the same time, many gardens are displays of specific ethnic pride, especially the Latino-centric gardens with their casitas, flags and shrines.

In Walt Whitman's Mannahatta of the 1850s, the people fought for open spaces and fresh air, for safe places for working class families to hang out, for fresh food, beauty, music, poetry, a patch of dirt to call one's own. Our privatized culture, despite its seemingly endless goods and services, is incapable of providing these basic human rights for the majority of New Yorkers. In Whitman's day these needs were somewhat met by the spectacular beer gardens and recreation grounds of the time, augmented by public parks, which were conceived as a way to bring pastoral WASP aesthetics, values and recreation to the urban masses.

Despite this paternalism, the masses appropriated the small urban parks near St. Mark's, Tompkins, Union, and Washington Squares and sacralized them into powerful loci for mass political gatherings and countercultural manifestations. Today, however, these "public" parks are as regulated as suburban malls, heavily policed, scanned by hidden cameras, landscaped to break up and isolate crowds, maintained by workfare crews, with artistic expression available only under the aegis of government and corporate sponsors. Without a license or logo, unautho-

rized poets, painters, and musicians are quickly arrested. The gardens are some of the only patches of land left where people can express their individual and communal creativity.

In 19th century Paris, Baron von Haussman slashed wide boulevards through the city, supposedly for beautification but mainly to aid the army in crushing insurrections. His 20th century disciple Robert Moses carpetbombed New York City with freeways and unlivable housing projects, turning vibrant working class neighborhoods into slums. In New York's current Haussmanization, gardens, despite their many benefits to society, are seen as nuisances, scary pagan groves that threaten the strict fundamentalism of The Market. New York's posturban planning that destroys gardens, while seeming to be a rational march of technocracy and progress, in fact resembles primitive psychogeographic wars of the past: the enclosure of the commons, New England Puritans hacking down the devil's forest, salt sowed in the earth, the scorched earth tactics of conquering armies.

Some may see the gardens as exercises in romantic nostalgia, a bucolic reaction to city life, but in truth they are a hardheaded and practical response to urban living, wholly integrated into the human ecology of the city. Community gardens are as much community as garden, and while many call the gardens idyllic patches of "nature," they are as intensely built up and worked as any other human artifacts in the city. Gardens provide a rare public space for people to meet and socialize. Many of the gardens feature sculpture and murals and a number of them (notably the 6th and B Garden, La Plaza Cultural and the late Chico Mendez Mural Garden) host music, theater, and poetry performances.

In late July the city sold off four more Lower East Side gardens (listed as "vacant lots") and more are on the auction block. Many local poets are active in the garden movement, and on October 16th the Poetry Project will host a reading in support of community gardens. For more information, call The New York City Coalition for the Preservation of Gardens at 212-777-7969 or the Green Guerrillas at 212-674-8124.

THE GARDEN

for Adam Purple



The East Village Garden Parade, photo by Brenda Coultas

Close to a house on a piece of ground
For the growing of vegetables, flowers & fruits
On fertile well-developed land
Is a delightful place or state, a paradise
Often a place for public enjoyment
Where grows the alyssum to cure our rage

Oriental night of the careless developers
Carpet of snow of the drugged landlords
Basket of gold the city's confused
Royal carpet of its bureaucracies,
Bored with bombs
Political ones of the complicated governments
Now stick up the very orb
For its nonmetal yet golden remains

Competing with the larval corn borers
The salaried test-borers
Imminently lead anti-sexually down to the foundation
Of the annihilation
Of a circular garden in which live members of
The mustard family
The tomato or nightshade family
The poppy family
The geranium family
The aster family
The mint family
The thistle or aster family
The violet family (heartsease)
The lily family
The cucumber or gourd family
The rose family
The composite or daisy family
The parsley or carrot family
And other families
(I don't think the pokeweed family lives there,
It earns too little or too much money per year)

We are told to swallow not a rainbow
But like the celandine the juicy proposal
That the lemon balm of low income housing,
Applied like ageratum to the old Lower East Side
(As early matured as the apricot)
And probably turned by deeply divided leaves
Like a rape of grapes before it's all over
Cannot coexist with the gleaming black raspberries
In an ancient abandoned place
Around Eldridge, Foresight and Stanton Streets

We're asked not to think, like pansies do
That the pinnately compound, ovate, lanceolate, non-linear,
lobed, compound, toothed, alternate, opposite,
palmate, heart-shaped, stalkless, clasping,
perfoliate, and basal rosette-ish leaves
Can heal like the comfrey
And cause to grow together
The rough hairy leaves of the city's people and
the rough hairy leaves of the sublimity of
a gardener's art
Made with vegetarian shit & free as cupid's darts

If all our eyes had the clarity of apples
In a world as altered
As if by the wood betony
And all kinds of basil were the only rulers of the land
It would be good to be together
Both under and above the ground
To be sane as the madwort,
Ripe as corn, safe as sage,
Various as dusty miller and hens & chickens,
In politics as kindly fierce and dragonlike as tarragon,
Revolutionary as the lily.

— Bernadette Mayer

book reviews

CECILIA VICUÑA

QUIPOem—The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña

Edited by M. Catherine de Zegher, Wesleyan (Hanover, NH), 1997. 235 pages, \$30.00.

QUIPOem, an art-poetry text by Cecilia Vicuña, and *The Precarious*, a collection of critical essays on Vicuña, are two books in one: interior and exterior, circular, front-and-back. This manifests Vicuña's idea that the connection of space, weight, voice, throat to the existence of text/art leads to spiritual, spatial and political change. The thread, *hilo*, and *quipu*, (a cord inscribed with knots as an ancient Andean text), are central concepts. Threads spin out from the artist, as threads are spun out to her to establish a web of attention and possibilities. "Metaphor Spun: A Conversation with Cecilia Vicuña" in *The Precarious* gives an idea of the depth of her thread-like exploration of art and space:

I'm connected to the world of feeling. A feather? I am a feather. A piece of yarn? I am a piece of yarn. An animal?

I am an animal. But I pause here at what you say because I had an invitation from a group of women to contribute to a new journal, one called *Chain*, and they wrote me saying that they saw my work as a paradigm for them. Their call for work asked 'how does the topical world filter through the word?' Thinking of this question I discovered a geometric mark on my thigh that I had never seen before. All of a sudden I realized that it was exactly the same mark I had inscribed on the earth in a place called Purmamarca, which I consider the earth's thigh!



Her body conveys the rope of continuity from history and geography. Perhaps it is important to see Vicuña perform live before reading *QUIPOem—The Precarious*. She demands an avid connection from the audience to the breath, sound, word and space—attention to how the floor may slope, or the walls respond to air movements. It is an experience which

might illuminate the complexity and depth of histories and philosophies in *The Precarious* and *QUIPOem*. At first it is strange to reconcile so immediately the heaviness of critical language in *The Precarious* with Vicuña's work in *QUIPOem*, which is so simultaneously and intricately weighted. But as a group the essays convey a sense of genuine devotion to Vicuña's work, and a desire to present that work to a larger audience.

QUIPOem moves in a chronological progression of pieces created by Vicuña through the 60s and up to the 90s. These pieces are installations, texts, sculptures, photographs, performances, collections. Vicuña questions concurrent political upheavals, the assassination of Allende, and exile in London with the exposure of the peripheries of life: detritus, throwaways, previously invisible existences. One haunting piece is *A Diary of Objects for the Resistance*, which Vicuña explains in accompanying text: "After the attempted coup of June, 1973, I began keeping a journal of debris, little prayers;///the diary of a life in litter." A few pages later, Vicuña is in London, in exile from her native Chile after Allende's assassination: "Of

the world that had been there remained only/a few photos, the books burned,/the bodies disappeared," from *(The Black Page of a Black Book)*.

Vicuña discovers presences in unwatched areas of society: threads floating in a street puddle, feathers left over from a bird nesting, shells on top of a fire hydrant. Her discoveries, these careless edges of life, become strongly evocative of the geography and history in which they are. On the disappeared elevated West Side Highway, she writes "si" and "PASIÓN" in bright chalk. The colors, words, and action of

Mostrando la hilacha, by César Paternosto

writing, seen in the harsh New York light on the empty highway inscribe "pasión" and "patire" (to suffer) on a city's neglect and ultimate destruction of a public space. In Bogotá, a glass of milk spilled down a sidewalk incriminates a government's carelessness in allowing contaminated milk to poison children. In San Fernando, Chile, threads spun across a corral delineate the space in her piece *The Corral Grid*.

Vicuña's very persona, name, body, voice—*la vicuña*—becomes the expression of deep and creative histories in constant flux: *la vicuña*, sacred Andean animal who sings "Eeee" in the mountains and whose wool is used for weaving. History becomes a limiting word; in experiencing her work, one needs to create a new word, as Vicuña herself frequently does: geograhistomyth? Hilogeograhist? Or perhaps just *quipu*, memory, transformation.

In the Andes, leftovers are collected in order to throw out evil.

The knots are changes and exchange generates the cure.

Continuity in obliteration. In death, resurrection.

Debris, a past to come: what we say about ourselves.

An object is not an object. it is the witness to a relationship.

A thread is not a thread, but a thousand tiny fibers entwined.

The word, unravelling in the air, begins again.

"Arte Precario," *QUIPOem*

— Marcella Durand

Marcella Durand is the author of *Lapsus Linguae* and most recently *ROSE*.

JEROME ROTHENBERG AND PIERRE JORIS, EDITORS

Poems for the Millennium: The University of California Book of Modern and Postmodern Poetry: Volume Two

University of California Press, 1998, 871 pages, \$24.95.

Anthologies are long, but email reviews are quick; already, the second volume of Jerome Rothenberg's and Pierre Joris's *Poems for the Millennium* has attracted fierce attention on the Buffalo Poetics List, both for its lacunae and for its astonishing breadth. Ron Silliman's attack on the

John Ashbery
Frank O'Hara
Kenneth Koch
James Schuyler

They took poetry on a joyride.

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— Charles Simic, author of *Walking the Black Cat*

"Lehman...writes about lives as if they were poems, and poems as if they were alive."

— John Hollander, author of *Tesserae*

anthology's credibility, for the absence of work by Jack Spicer and others, and the corresponding defenses of the book by its editors, resembled nothing so much as an on-line family quarrel; Rothenberg even closed his response to Silliman with an "Affectionately (for all of that)." As this quarrel between proponents of the international avant-garde continued, long lists of genealogies were brought to the virtual table

under Silliman's subject line, "The Book of Absences," a remnant subject line that oddly remained as a heading for Rothenberg's and Joris's responses.

I'd like to cut through this concern with individual names, if I can, and address some of the larger issues raised by this volume. The first *Poems for the Millennium* was in many ways "safer" for its representation of (mostly dead) poets from the movements of English Romanticism

poetry project

Calendar

events

OCTOBER

5 MONDAY

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

7 WEDNESDAY

Jim Carroll & Darius James

Basketball Diaries author Jim Carroll will read in celebration of the publication of his newest book, *Void of Course* (Penguin) and the release of his new CD of songs and spoken-word performances on Mercury Records. Carroll is also the author of *Living at the Movies* and *The Book of Nods*. Darius James, aka Dr. Snakeskin, is the author of *That's Blaxploitation!*; *Roots of the Baadassss*; *Tude and Negrophobia* (St. Martin's Press). He is a regular contributor to *The Village Voice*, *Spin*, *Esquire* and *Details*.

9 FRIDAY

How I Spent My Summer Vacation: Travel Writing

Featuring tales of India, Japan, France, a trip on the Siberian Railroad, diving for great white sharks in Africa, and more. Participants include: Karen Volkman, author of *Crash's Law*; musician, former motorcycle racer and Penthouse photographer Christian X. Hunter; journalist Harold Goldberg; Gillian McCain, author of *Tilt* and co-author of *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*; and Tom Lee, co-author of *the play Flight*. Poet and filmmaker Lee Ann Brown will screen her film *Cycles of Desire*. Surprise guests! [10:30 pm]

12 MONDAY

Katy Lederer & Tim Griffin

Katy Lederer is the editor of *Explosive Magazine* and the author of *Faith*, forthcoming from the Idiom Chapbook series. Tim Griffin's poetry has recently appeared in *Lingo* and *Kiosk*. He is the co-editor of a collection of interviews with William S. Burroughs forthcoming from Semiotext(e) and the senior editor of *Art on Paper*.

14 WEDNESDAY

Robert Grenier & Jerome Rothenberg + A Secret Location

Robert Grenier is the author of *OWL/ON/BOUGH*, 12 from *rhythms*, *What I Believe* (Potes & Potes Press, 1988), and many other books of poetry. His work has been included in *In the*

accompanied by music. Night of de Sade will be produced by Hal Willner, the producer of *Lost in the Stars—The Music of Kurt Weill*, Allen Ginsberg's *Holy Soul Jelly Roll*, and the recent *Closed on Account of Rabies—Poems & Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*. Tentative list of readers includes Diamanda Galas, Gavin Friday and Chloe Webb [Admission: \$15, \$12 (students with ID) and \$10 for Project members].

23 FRIDAY

Cuz Editions

A celebration of Cuz Editions, a new chapbook series edited by Richard Hell. Maggie Dubris, poet and guitarist/songwriter for the band *Homer Erotic*, will read from *Willie World*. Michael DeCapite, who will read from *At the Track*, is the author of *Through the Windshield*. Susan Noel, the author of *Bronze Age*, will read from *Autobiography in Words*. Richard Hell will read from *Weather*, a twelve-poem series of variations on one short lyrical text. [10:30 pm]

24 SATURDAY

Book Party for Clinch: Poems by Michael Scholnick

A celebration of the just-released *Clinch: Poems by Michael Scholnick* from Coffee House Press. Readers and speakers will include Eileen Myles, Ron Padgett, Elinor Nauen, Yuki Hartman, and the four editors of the volume: Gary Lenhart, Steve Levine, Greg Masters, and Bob Rosenthal. [3 pm]

26 MONDAY

John McNally & Magdalena Zurawski

John McNally is the author of *Exes for Eyes*, forthcoming from Subpress Books. His poems have been published in *Open 24 Hours*, *Talisman*, *Washington Review*, and *OBLEK: Writing from the New Coast*. Magdalena Zurawski is a member of the rock band *The Sleeves*, and has had poetry published in *The Germ*, *Crayon*, and *Explosive* (forthcoming). She was the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship to Berlin during 1995-97.

28 WEDNESDAY

Kate Rushin & Alice Notley

Kate Rushin is a poet, teacher and author of *The Black Back-Ups*. She is currently the director of the Center for African American Studies at Connecticut University. Alice Notley is the author of numerous collections of poetry, most recently: *Monsters of Small Houses* and *The Descent of*

Kupferberg, Rachel Levitsky, Lesléa Newman, and Peter Lamborn Wilson. [10:30 pm]

7 SATURDAY

Tribute to Hannah Weiner

A Tribute to the late poet Hannah Weiner, with readings, talks and memories from Charles Alexander, Bruce Andrews, Abigail Child, Mazia Damon, Tina Darragh, Alan Davies, Maurice Finegold, Ernesto Grosman, Bob Harrison, Michael Heller, Henry Hills, Peter Inman, Jackson Mac Low, Sharon Matlin, Bernadette Mayer, Douglas Messerli, Phil Niblock, Nick Piombino, Joan Retallack, Barbara Rosenthal, James Sherry, Ron Silliman, Ann Tardos, Fiona Templeton, Lewis Warsh, Barrett Watten, Lee Ann Brown, Andrew Lewy, and Charles Bernstein. [4 pm]

9 MONDAY

Buck Downs & Judith Goldman

Buck Downs's first full-length collection, *marijuana soft drinks*, is forthcoming from Edge Books. He has done collaborations with photographer Ken Ashton and painter/printmaker Helen Frederick. Judith Goldman's poetry has appeared in *Object*, *Torque*, *The Impercipient*, *Arras* and other journals. She is the author of "adversities of outerlife" (Object Editions) and has work in *An Anthology of New (American) Poets*.

11 WEDNESDAY

Harry Mathews & Pascale Monnier

The author of five novels and several collections of poetry, Harry Mathews has been preparing the comprehensive *Oulipo Compendium* (Atlas Press, 1998) since 1994, from which he will be reading. Through his friendship with Georges Perec, he became a member of the *Oulipo* in 1972. Pascale Monnier is the author of *Bayart*, which is currently being translated into English by Cole Swensen.

13 FRIDAY

Friday the 13th: Good Luck Charms & Bad Omens

Writers sharing their experiences with the fortuitous and the ominous include: Lexa Roséan, who will read from her book, *Sexy Hexes* (St. Martin's Press); Marcella Harb is a teacher and poet published in *The World*, *Baby Fish Lost Its Momma*, and *L'Aventura*. Brendan Lorber is a poet and the editor of *Lungfull* magazine. Bina Sharif is an actress, playwright, director and Joseph Jefferson Award nominee. Her most recent one-act play is *Come Home for Lunch*. [10:30 pm]

16 MONDAY

Matthew Rohrer & Chris Stroffolino

Matthew Rohrer's first book, *A Hummock in the Malookas* (W.W. Norton), was chosen by Mary Oliver for the 1994 National Poetry Series. Chris Stroffolino's books include *Stealer's Wheel* (Hard Press, 1998) and *Light as a Fetter*. He is

of Art on Paper.

14 WEDNESDAY

Robert Grenier & Jerome Rothenberg + A Secret Location
Robert Grenier is the author of *OWL/ON/BOUGH*, 12 from rhymans, *What I Believe* (Potes & Poets Press, 1988), and many other books of poetry. His work has been included in *In the American Tree*, *Postmodern American Poetry* and other anthologies. Jerome Rothenberg is the author of over fifty books of poetry, including *Poems for the Game of Silence*, *New Selected Poems 1970-85*, and *The Lorca Variations*. He has edited six major assemblages of traditional and contemporary poetry, including *Poems for the Millennium* (co-edited with Pierre Joris). The reading will be followed by a book party, co-hosted with the New York Public Library, for *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980*. This book, which documents the recent exhibition at the New York Public Library, provides a glimpse into the world of underground literary publishing in New York City.

16 FRIDAY

Gathering for the Community Gardens

A night in support for the survival of our city's community gardens with performances and readings by John Wright, author of *Outlaw and Bookstore Cowboy*. Jeff Wright is the Provisional Governor of Chico West Community Garden and events coordinator of the New York City Garden Coalition. Tom Savage has published six books of poems including the forthcoming *Brain Surgery Poems* (Linear Arts Press). Lola Rodriguez, is the author of *Notes from a Solitary Rhumba*. Elizabeth Morse is the editor of *Down Under Manhattan Bridge*. [10:30 pm]

19 MONDAY

Beth Anderson & Vikas Menon

Beth Anderson is the author of *The Impending Collision* (rem*press). Her work is included in *An Anthology of New (American) Poets* (Talisman House). She edits reference: press chapbooks. Vikas Menon's poems have appeared in *TriQuarterly Review* and *The Brooklyn Review*. He recently graduated from Brooklyn College with an MFA in poetry.

21 WEDNESDAY

SPECIAL EVENT--Night of de Sade

This multi-artist event, a benefit for the Poetry Project, features readings from the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy of the Bedroom*, Juliette, 120 Days of Sodom, Justine and others

28 WEDNESDAY

Kate Rushin & Alice Nolley

Kate Rushin is a poet, teacher and author of *The Black Back-Ups*. She is currently the director of the Center for African American Studies at Connecticut University. Alice Nolley is the author of numerous collections of poetry, most recently *Mysteries of Small Houses* and *The Descent of Alette*, both published by Penguin. She is the co-editor of the Paris-based literary journal, *Gare du Nord*.

30 FRIDAY

Halloween Celebration

Featuring screenings of short films inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe and performances by an assortment of mesmerizers, including: Edgar Oliver, known in the neighborhood as the Poe of E. 10th Street; fortune teller Mrs. Edwin (aka Edwin Torres); filmmaker and experimenter Bradley Eros; and Dame Darcy, hostess of the cable TV show *Turn of the Century*. [10:30 pm]

NOVEMBER

2 MONDAY

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

4 WEDNESDAY

The Defiant Muse: Readings from Dutch Women Poets

A reading by Dutch women poets in celebration of the publication of *The Defiant Muse: Dutch and Flemish Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present* (The Feminist Press). Carla Boogaards's latest collection of poetry is *God Bewogen* (God Moved). Anna Enquist's first volume of poetry *Soldatenliederen* (Soldier's Songs) was published in 1991. Elly de Waard is the leading figure of *The New Savages*, a group of Dutch female poets. Maaijke Meijer is the compiler of *The Defiant Muse* and the associate professor of Women's Studies at the University of Maastricht. Meena Alexander has published seven books of poetry, fiction and literary criticism, including *Fault Lines*.

6 FRIDAY

Don't Follow Leaders: Artists' Take on Politics

An evening of political poetry and prose in celebration of Election Day, featuring: Tom Gogola, Eliot Katz, Tuli

16 MONDAY

Matthew Rohrer & Chris Strofolino

Matthew Rohrer's first book, *A Hummock in the Malookas* (W.W. Norton), was chosen by Mary Oliver for the 1994 National Poetry Series. Chris Strofolino's books include *Stealer's Wheel* (Hard Press, 1998) and *Light as a Fetter*. He is a co-editor of *An Anthology of New (American) Poets*.

18 WEDNESDAY

Kristin Prevallet & Lisa Robertson

Kristin Prevallet is the author of *Perturbation, My Sister* (First Intensity), and a former co-editor of *Apex of the M. Lisa Robertson* is a Vancouver writer and a member of the Kootenay School of Writing. Her most recent book, *Debbie: An Epic* was co-published by New Star and Reality Street.

20 FRIDAY

Poetry & Film: Co-Presented by the Filmmaker's Cooperative

An evening of films created and/or inspired by poets. Films by Henry Hills, Joel Schlemowitz, and others, featuring Hannah Weiner, Sally Silvers, Jameel Moondoc, Jackson Mac Low, Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, et al. This event has been made possible with public funds from the New York Council on the Arts, a state agency. [10:30 pm]

23 MONDAY

Brett Evans & Sianne Ngai

Brett Evans is the author of the chapbooks *The Fast Food Koans* (Green Hill Press) and *Tang Dynasty*. He is a member of the band *Skin Verb*, whose forthcoming EP is *Canal Villere*. Sianne Ngai is the author of *My Novel, Discredit*, and criteria (O Books, forthcoming 1999).

30 MONDAY

Tonya Foster & Jonathan Skinner

Tonya Foster was the poetry editor for *Gulf Coast Literary Magazine* and the recipient of a national Ford Foundation Fellowship. Her work has appeared in *Western Humanities Review*. Jonathan Skinner is the editor of *Periplum*, a journal of poetry and science. His chapbooks include *Fat Sun, A Firebook*, and a collection of old Provençal translations, forthcoming from Heart Hammer Press.

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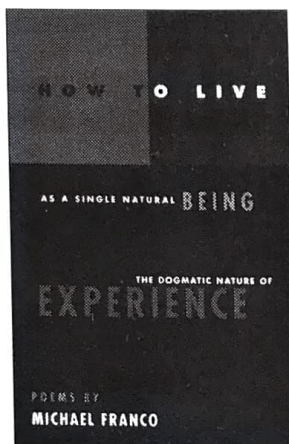
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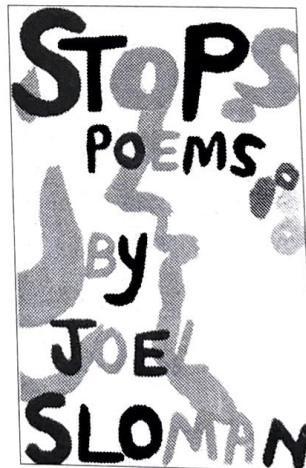
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STOPS

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"Sloman can evoke sensory impressions with thrilling, hallucinatory precision; among them his anxious questions vanish and reappear like pilgrims wandering in an immense but enticing forest."

— Denise Levertov

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(William Blake) to those of Futurism, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Objectivism, and Negritude. The strength of the first volume was not in the idiosyncratic juxtapositions of poetic communities: thus, Surrealism comes before "Objectivists" who come before Negritude. Whatever narratives we construct of these new neighborhoods of the art are off-beat, oddly and provocatively new, even if the editors, for the most part, leave out dates and open their anthologies up to the charge of timelessness that they would otherwise seem to oppose. The second volume, as the editors aver, was more difficult to put together, especially since Rothenberg and Joris confess to being not simply "witnesses" but also "partisans for the works at hand." Volume Two, then, is at once the portrait of international poetry post-World War II and of the anthologists themselves; it is no accident that they give themselves the last two words/poems in the book and that these poems are about nomadic

"poet m[e]n" (Rothenberg) who, as Joris puts it, "speak in voices/ always always/ other people's voices." Rothenberg's poet man "is the only witness to that death [of a murdered woman],/ writes every line/ as though the only witness." That theirs is a poetics of witness is powerfully borne out in the first section of the anthology, one that runs from Charles Olson's "La Preface" to a selection from Antonin Artaud's "To Have Done with the Judgment of God," by way of Paul Celan, Anna Akhmatova, Toge Sankichi, and others. Thus the book opens with responses to the holocaust and to the atomic bomb from an amazing range of voices—as the editors put it, "The nature of that start was not so much postmodern—as it would come to be called—as it was post-bomb and post-holocaust." This is not just a poetics of witness, however, since Rothenberg and Joris (the former more than the latter, I expect) include a good deal of spiritualism with their politics; there is a

lot here of what one might call the *Sulfur* school of nomadic "primitive" (post-primitive?) religiosity.

To my mind, the absolute wealth of what follows this first section is part of what makes the book problematic; Rothenberg and Joris leap from "Continuities" (Joyce, Stein, et al) to the Vienna Group, the Tammuzi poets, Cobra, concrete poetry, some "Beat" poets, manifestos, oral poets, postwar Japanese poetry, neo-avanguardia, "Language" poets, Misty poets, and cyberpoets, with dozens and dozens of poets who fall between the cracks of these larger groups of poets. Even with the excellent commentaries, I often felt overwhelmed by voices I had never heard before, as by their juxtapositions with other voices, although, as with the first volume, there are again surprising next-page neighbors such as Edward Dorn and Adrienne Rich. Some of the categories are more permeable than those in the first book, as well. The section devoted to "Some

new in 1998

burning deck



Alison Bundy: DUNCECAP

"Bundy's wonderful book brings to mind words like 'mystery,' 'wonder' and 'magic.' Like fairy tales, they are antidotes to the oppressive and monstrous fictions...that close off the imagination. Bundy invites the reader into the narrative. An outstanding piece of work." —Dallas Wiebe, *Sulfur*. "Rich comic writing, delicate and sure, touched at times by a wistful longing as a kiss might be touched by irony. Or life's violence by the tenderness of dream." —Robert Coover on *A Bad Business*. "The Inheritance' is delightful." —Rita D. Longsdon, *Eclectic Book Reviews*. Stories, 112pp., ISBN 1-886224-23-4 paper \$10

Peter Gizzi: ARTIFICIAL HEART

"In his visionary quest, his raw emotion, and his New York school spontaneity, Gizzi performs a clinamen that relates him to O'Hara, Ashbery, and, beyond these poets, to Rimbaud and Hart Crane.... a master of the mot juste and of sound structure. Most of the book's poems...are as memorable as they are moving and spare." —Marjorie Perloff, *Boston Book Review*. "[The poems] shift the balance of emotion and expression so that the inescapability of form dominates." —Beth Anderson, *Poetry Project Newsletter*. Poems, 96 pp., ISBN 1-886224-21-8 paper \$10

Xue Di: HEART INTO SOIL [trans. from Chinese by Keith Waldrop with Wang Ping et al.]

Landscapes of exile and identity, where memory appears as the ground of daily existence, and what is felt reveals the incompleteness of the present moment. From solidity to great emptiness, then back into solidity, memory, writing and the world exist in unstable liaison, within shifting "plains of consciousness/ in a fullness of light/ where every object/ vanishes/ reappears/ metamorphoses." Poems, 96 pp., ISBN 1-886224-32-3 paper \$10

Anne-Marie Albiach: A GEOMETRY [Série Supplement #3, trans. Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop]

"I live the text as a body," says Albiach. Literally, as breath, voice, the physical next-to-each-other of words. But the images are reined in, the sentences broken off abruptly, the cut edges rough, giving off sparks like live wires. Poems, 28 pp., ISBN 1-886224-31-5 paper \$5

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Oral Poets," for example, includes work not only of a Mexican shaman, Maria Sabina, and by Robert Johnson and Miss Queenie (a Jamaican poet), but also David Antin's "Endangered Nouns." The editors' definition of "oral poetry," then, is quite loose, based more on questions of performance, really, than of composition; Antin's work has at least as much writtenness about it as orality, and is only possible in a print culture.

But let me return to Rothenberg's final poem for a moment to get at what I find most disturbing about this anthology (Juliana Spahr has written on another email list about the macho nature of this poem). Rothenberg's male poet witnesses and speaks for a murdered woman. This is certainly a noble gesture, and frames the volume, which began with the aftermath of world war, very nicely. But what struck me most forcefully in my initial encounters with the book is the paucity of women. Those women who are featured in volume two are often included as women poets, even if there is no "feminist poetry" section in the book. Thus Adrienne Rich's and Rachel Blau DuPlessis's manifestos speak out on the condition of women poets. Joris and Rothenberg quote Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," "And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society . . . the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative." And so Alice Notley is included for her "female epic" and Anne Sexton emerges "as one of the key American figures in the opening of woman's consciousness, seen as a force, a power, long suppressed, now forging its own forms." Muriel Rukeyser is quoted as writing about Sexton's poem in celebration of her uterus, "[It is] one of the few poems in which a woman has come to the fact as symbol, the center after many years of silence and taboo." What causes me cognitive dissonance about the inclusion of Sexton on these grounds is that Rothenberg and Joris do not then include one of her poems of anger and despair about suburban housewifery, but instead selections from "The Jesus Papers," a poem in which the speaker is not a woman, but Jesus. Granted, Jesus is talking about his mother, yet this seems a far cry from any direct "opening [of] woman's consciousness." So, too often in this book, one sees and hears the echoes of Rothenberg's lines, "Speak to the poet's mother,/she is dead now," where the feminine is voiceless and "The poet sees her breasts shine in the mirror," while he is fed "the milk of paradise,/the dream of every poet man/of every poet bride." I don't know how many poet brides share in this vision, but my guess is Rothenberg's vision here is masculine rather than feminine. The commentary to other poems of his, included in an earlier section of the book, describes Rothenberg's reaction to Auschwitz and

Hiroshima, but not to the gender politics that has been so crucial to this century's history—as to this anthology. A similar argument could be made, I think, about the inclusion of poets of color, but I will leave that for another time.

In sum: this is a book of marvels. Its confusions are also its strengths, since readers cannot but search elsewhere for extensions of the scattered texts found here, texts located geographically and psychically around the globe. It is also a book whose absences are profound, not merely in the names that are missing (interesting that the "absence" most often noted in the email wars is that of a man, Jack Spicer) but more importantly, in the fact that, while this book does not present a movement called "feminist poetry," that is one of the few categories of poetry by women that enters its bounds. Buy it and beware. Then read other books and follow the myriad of paths opened here.

— Susan M. Schultz

Susan M. Schultz is the author of *Aleatory Allegories*, due out soon from Folio Press.

HEATHER RAMSDELL

Lost Wax

University of Illinois Press, 1998, 64 pages, \$9.00.

In the justifiably famous opening to his book *Three Poems*, John Ashbery writes, "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave it all out would be another, and truer, way." This suggestion is taken to heart with striking results by Heather Ramsdell in her first book of poems, *Lost Wax*, selected by James Tate as one of the winners of the 1998 National Poetry Series. Recognizing the impossibility and perhaps even falseness of trying to put it all down, Ramsdell has written a thoughtful, ironic and sometimes haunting book that creates poetry out of the most mundane possibilities in ordinary experience.

A great deal of pain, often prompted by social limitations but at times directly personal, seems apparent through much of the book. Yet this pain remains, for the most part, an unstated background--instead, Ramsdell often suggests that such pain forms the ground from which a given poem can explore the possibilities and limits of experience. In "Closet I," for instance, Ramsdell moves past the psychology of the speaker in order to investigate the material conditions that shape and are shaped by that psychology, and the questionable philosophical underpinnings that create commonly held notions of people and material. Using, as her poems often do, everyday objects, "Closet I" opens with the speaker's closet becom-

ing metaphor for her experience and consciousness:

I thought I'd say more about the closet. The closet—my god, the closet is a tangle of sleeves, I could go in but even dreams avoid it. And something is bound to come from that. Some of the shit stacked up in there. Some of the shit stuffed in—I could go on.

But she does not go on about the closet as maze; instead, having established the ground of this poem as the unsaid history of the closet, the speaker moves out from it to the other materials that make up her day-to-day reality:

I could just go but everything I need I have right here, this [a spoon] and I have this [dress] and here [it's a brick] to show you holding the brick to show you letting go of the brick in a way that is fast, is red or silver, what brick is silver—there is no time now; would you like me to scare you? To show you everything?

Here, the "everything" implies not only the speaker's own experience; it suggests also the environment in which she lives. Yet this often disgusting environment (with its "mice rats bald rat tails") is itself a complex phenomena, maze-like and uncertain: "From which place the whole horizon, no footprints leading in, leading out, no center to move out from." It is a place which offers no easy answers to problems of history, culture, and the material world. Problems between personal feeling, everyday objects, and the ideological frameworks that underlie both reoccur throughout the book, with Ramsdell consistently questioning the theories of experience and knowledge that help create such problems. These theories seem dealt with in most detail in the ten-part poem "Bridge Segment," which through its discontinuous and disconcerting sections takes apart any notion of selves and their experiences as unified or containable, as the

opening of the poem makes explicit:

From abutment from abutment, in a series of angled turns the path of the circle goes awry.

I keep finding my half on the doorsteps there where the path, if it is a path, without formal grip of perspective, too abruptly arrives. As in the step from a subway.

While never forgetting material specifics ("the subway"), Ramsdell shows the impossibility of having a stable perspective on what the experience of the subway (or any other "abutment" for that matter) means. In so doing she forces us to recognize that subjectivity and materiality remain philosophical concepts. Ramsdell's willingness to explore the philosophical conditions of poetry (as well as the poetic conditions of philosophy) shows some influence from the poetry of her teacher Anne Lauterbach. Yet Ramsdell's approach is distinctly her own; her work stubbornly insists on an everyday shabbiness that seems very much born of the excess and emptiness of the 1990s. Much of the material world in Ramsdell's work seems the meaningless toys of endlessly mass-produced banality, and she frequently uncovers the sham artifice and shoddy construction of most material things. That *Lost Wax* was chosen for the National Poetry Series by James Tate, one of the more interesting contemporary mainstream poets, may be cause for some skeptical hope that establishment poets might be willing to pay attention to work that challenges normative MFA conventions (although it remains to be seen whether such attention would be a positive thing). With their sometimes long, elegant lines, Ramsdell's poems have at moments a traditional sophistication that easily matches any Yale Younger Poet Prize Winner of the last decade. Yet Ramsdell always quickly undermines such moments with

rhythmic jaggedness; the structure of her poems often emerges in a tension between flow and conscious misstep that places her work firmly, if subtly, in the field of poetic innovation. *Lost Wax* is an impressive debut from a restless poetic intelligence that will undoubtedly have more to offer in future.

— Mark Wallace

Mark Wallace's *Temporary Worker Rides a Subway* won the 1998 New American Poetry Prize and is forthcoming from Sun & Moon.

JOHN ASHBERY *Wakefulness*

Farrar Strauss, 1998, 80 pages, hardcover
\$20.00.

Lots of poets and poetry fanatics, especially those associated with "language" writing, are nostalgic for a John Ashbery poetry that subsidizes their ideas on the upending of syntactical sense and the "fracturing of the author-figure" that is, the notion that a poem or text is more a tapestry of voices than it is a stable expression of a single writer. Reading John Ashbery's latest book *Wakefulness* is a sweet, hilarious, and strangely unsettling experience unless you're one of those people who is still picking up a John Ashbery book and hoping to find the same kind of wackiness you found in his second book *The Tennis Court Oath*. *Wakefulness* is not the Ashbery who once wrote things like "The stand...Velocipede/ Pergolas next to the chance of numb hitting." While *Wakefulness* continues to help us reel from debauched lines and rethink our relationship to language, it at the same time makes us cry, believe in love, and get all gooey'n sentimental. Which is to say that *Wakefulness* is a terrific book.

Much of *Wakefulness* reads like a love poem to a lover and to Ashbery's readers, especially the readers that have stuck with J.A. from the beginning and who may resent him for moving towards writing relatively short, quasi-narrative lyrics.

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Ashbery wants us to stick around, as he says in "Homecoming" (the final poem in this collection): "I need your disapproval, /can't live without your churlish ways." As if in response to those critics who point to Ashbery's early work as exhibiting poststructuralist conceptions of authorship as a collage of decentralized voices, Ashbery comes into *Wakefulness* with a definitive cry of "I Am!" though he never actually gets that corny. Instead, he is cool, sweet, and tentative about it, as we see in the very first poem, "Wakefulness":

And if I put a little
bit of myself in this time,
stoppered the liquor
that is our selves'
truant exchanges, brandished
my intentions
for once? But only I get
something out of this memory.

True, there is a big "but" here;

Ashbery continues to question notions of universality and "objectivity." The "I" has no control over the mother-lode of potential interpretations that comes with a bunch of people reading a poem. Nevertheless, at least Ashbery gets something real out of "this memory," which kicks in what seems to be a general theme of the book, a re-evaluation of sense and nonsense, truth and babble, in part initiated by a leisurely look across time and space at what has been written and said before.

And what about nonsense? From the same poem, Ashbery writes "Little by little the idea of the true way returned to me." I took this as an invitation to revisit the first page of his earlier work "The New Spirit" from *Three Poems*. There, Ashbery wrote, "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the /thought came to me that to leave all out would be another, and truer way." *Wakefulness* may very well be a record of Ashbery's gradual waking up from a weird dream-world of indeterminacy (albeit a sophisticated one, with cocktails) in order to introduce a relatively stable note into his later work; to use poetry as a way of telling some complicated "truths," to start putting things in as opposed to leaving them out.

I remember hearing about an introduction Ashbery gave to a James Schuyler reading, where he said in a tone approaching jealous awe: "He makes sense, dammit!" In *Wakefulness*, Ashbery deals with this frustration by at least shaking hands with Sense, an act which is partially illustrated through Ashbery's emphasis on actual things. Remember the poem "Leaving Atocha Station," from *The Tennis Court Oath*, which gave us lines like "the clean fart genital enthusiastic toe prick album serious evening flames"? From *Wakefulness*, we now have a poem called "At the Station". In "At the Station," J.A. sings "I was just thinking /it was time

to go back, pick up the pieces, /place them on a stand." Ashbery might be wondering here about the fragmentary nature of his past writing. Should he make the fragment whole, make things make more sense, or at least a little more orderly? These notions of coming back to "sense" and forming a sort-of stable authorial subject reappear again and again in *Wakefulness*, and the writing offers us many treats. From the poem "Outside My Window The Japanese...", we have the lines "And you wonder/why I came back? Perhaps this will refresh your memory, /skateboard, roller skates, the binomial theorem picked out in/ brutish, swabbed gasps." It's as if Ashbery is coming back to what Williams reminded poets of a long time ago: there are no ideas but in things (though Ashbery uses the poems in this book to insist that ideas like "the binomial theorem" are things too!)

It's not just Williams who is alluded to in *Wakefulness*; lots of writers including Ron Padgett seem to pop in. The first line in the poem "Bogus Inspection" solves the mystery set up by Padgett's sonnet "Nothing in that Drawer" (which repeats the phrase "Nothing in that drawer" fourteen times) by reminding us that the drawer did in fact have things in it in the first place; "The things that were in the drawer were dispersed a long time ago. /Some were wetted by snow. Others were dry but could not refract the light." From the same poem, Ashbery brings Williams (and his red wheelbarrow) back with the line "I shovel all the things you want to hear/ into a wheelbarrow and leave it on your front step." It's still up to the reader to decide what to do with all these words, since Ashbery continues to refuse responsibility for the effects of poetry; "Perhaps some of it will reflect on me, on you, hell, /who knows what will jump out of it?"

Who knows, indeed? Ashbery doesn't go so far as to write

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typical narratives or speak resolutely of sense, and it would be limiting to read *Wakefulness* simply as a reevaluation of past writing practices. Like much of Ashbery's work over the past 4 decades, the poems in this book are gorgeous and strange on a purely sensual level; Ashbery's ability to maintain brilliant surfaces continues to astonish. Example? Well, the poem "Laughing Gravy" makes no sense, yet it is tremendous we've got laughing gravy, we've got J.A. noticing "this lobe on your ear," and we've got the final couplet:

All the wolves in the wolf factory paused
at noon, for a moment of silence.

This "moment of silence" grants us the time and luxury to enjoy a delightfully absurd "wolf factory," and there are similar moments found throughout the poems in *Wakefulness*. What can we get from such moments? Visceral pleasure for one, and sense of delight that someone like Ashbery is around providing us with wolf factories that run smoothly inside of funny, philosophical, complicated, and oddly sensible poems.

—Daniel Kane

Daniel Kane is presently at work on a literary history of readings and mimeo magazines of the Lower East Side.

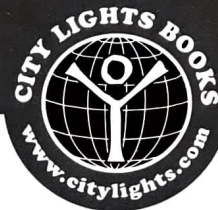
ALICE NOTLEY

Mysteries of Small Houses

Penguin, 1998, 139 pages, \$14.95.

Mysteries of Small Houses by Alice Notley is one of the most memorable books of poetry of the decade. This set of poems crystallizes her longtime concerns, such as how the enclosures of the body, home, and space, inside and outside, can be rendered in poetry. Those readers who have perhaps been puzzled by the long, difficult works of recent years, may find that these poems reverberate with the conversational particularity of past writing and in some poems, the intense word enjambment of *Alice Ordered Me to Be Made*. Most importantly, *Mysteries Of Small Houses* should bring many new readers to her work.

"This is an experiment, Monsieur Buffon/in whether or not I'm yours or anyone's or my old idea of myself/the answer is I am not, I've thrown those away." Notley narrates a personal history in *Mysteries*, not tightly bound by confession or big incidents. Her childhood in a small town in the American southwest, early New York years, marriage, motherhood, a series of personal losses and a complex social life among communities of writers and artists yield introspective perceptions that glitter within episodes. "Lie back and look up at green and blue lace/éclat of light in small bursts



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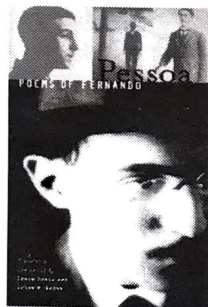
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through."

In previous works, Notley investigated incidents of daily life and utilized memory in a more improvisational, sprawling manner. The formal structures she experimented with allowed for overheard conversations, quick observations, dream accounts, direct address. Lengthened and spread out in inclusive generosity, her line has always realized the rhetorical potential of the poet's curiosity. The poems in *Mysteries* proceed at a new speed, unfolding rapidly and with the precision and confident rush of language initiated in "At Night the States." Language telescopes memory and immediate sensation, yields hard-won, complex truths: "...knowing a new thing, that/the universe is ruled by love and counter-valent sorrow/Grief's not a social invention/Grief is visible, substantial, I've literally seen it." There's revelation here, a hope and belief that the poem on the page might be a soul-to-soul encounter.

Readers of current experimental writing might initially be impatient with the singular self that speaks in this book. And Notley weighs in on arguments around the organizing "I." "But in order to be honest? I must change my poem/Drastically, can't get here this way? I am now the poet in the story." There is a telling strung out in these poems, yet chronological progression is only one level. Angles of perspective are explored for their psychic charge. "And I become a vantage point watching us all." This complicates and enriches the narrative. A fluidity of identity is articulated: "no I'm/cave in head writing to be sense of/self. What was I, fear to be no one here/you aren't you and I'm not I/but that's why I came here to see how I'd change." The process of writing loosens boundaries between self/other (s). "And so face it now face it/what I am, infinite and all those bodies." Ecstatic presentness shifts self's shape and realizes a psychic color field: "...exquisitely realized in the present as/the present, and this is a waking dream/my parallel present/not jewels of thought but unthought/emerald continuum, Doug says."

Notley's concern with the body's actual zones of knowledge emerge in numerous instances in these poems: "I live on with a fragile necklace of demarcation around my/neck between the world the irrational above and/the vast rationality beneath hidden within me" and constructs a beautiful and intuitive metaphysic: "we have our own intellects made our own finity which can be subdivided into infinite parts to rearrange why that's infinity enough." From "Office," "Love/is the substance I am most/which releases/me not from/the body/but form its enculturation/as senses sights signification." Exciting critical writing of past years has set forth a feminist theory around how the social and sexual experience

of the female body shapes women's writing. Notley's work would provide much to study.

Earlier writing, such as in *How Spring Comes*, worked talk into lyricism. In *Mysteries* a more intimate, complete circuit of thinking inter-poses incidents and conversation: "I mean like that car riding river-wind moment/'Death's good,' I say, and am infused with/incipient terror as intensity." Emotions of rage, envy, sorrow; trauma from war, loss; references to feuds, and complaint, energizes and shifts language from lyrical and Elizabethan phrase inversions to a syntax that is uniquely Notley's in how it cuts back and forth from internalized reverie, argument, to a rush of talking that is American and contemporary in its vernacular. This is no dreamy, neutral "I" floating in a phenomenological universe. Her memory of a set of locations; her grandparents' house, Parisian streets, a ravine in the desert; a par-

ticular clump of dust, a shelf in an apartment, evoke a strange and exquisite mix of words, intimate arcs of sight and texture, what Notley has called "word love." "Language dusks smoke making feeble trays of vision?" Words for obdurate objects, "marbles and grooves ... red steel and glass," function as ciphers of sensation, encapsulating in sound the intricate, imprinted surfaces that fascinate the poet and channel (in all of the contemporary senses of that word) her vision.

—Kim Lyons

Kim Lyons is the author of *Mettle* published by Granary Books in 1996.

Editor's Note: On the same book:

Brilliant, edgy, mediumistic trance-gossip, a light-and-shadow map of self and soul laid bare, Alice Notley's inspired, challenging *Mysteries of Small Houses* leaps out of the contemporary experimental-writing landscape with the arresting gleam of an opal in the outback.

—Tom Clark, from a review published in *The San Francisco Chronicle*

CHARLES NORTH

No Other Way: Selected Prose

Hanging Loose Press, 1998, 171 pages, \$13.50.

In one of the earliest essays in this collection, dated 1976, Charles North notes, "It seems to be the rule, of late, that interesting poets shy away from the business of literary criticism." North never did enter the business. Most of these pieces are occasional and were obviously done for love, not money. But strung together (for the most part, arranged chronologically) in this book, his occasional essays amount to the best literary criticism yet written about the New York school, a tag (North explains) "which everyone associated with tries to snip off (with only moderate success and properly so)." As one of those associates, North's discomfort shows in his juggling the term with alternatives such as "New York poetry scene," "St. Mark's,"

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"the Poetry Project," and even "New York Schools." Fortunately, we needn't rely on the tag to know who North is talking about.

At the heart of this book are four essays about James Schuyler, whose poem provides the book's title and who, throughout the volume, serves as North's measure for what poets might aspire to. It is while talking about Schuyler's "Light from Canada" that North says, "I could, I think, maintain that all exciting poetry has something of this surprise element, this apparently magical leaping from order to a higher disorder because born somehow out of nothing that could have been foreseen."

Whether finding something new to say about a canonical figure such as John Ashbery, taking a new look at a poet of obscured reputation such as David Schubert, or appreciating the distinction of a contemporary such as Jim Brodey, North is always at his strongest when talking about the specific qualities that he admires in a particular poet or artist. He pays persistent attention to craft elements such as meter, rhyme, genre, surface, tone, detail, music, and line breaks. The essay "Kenneth Koch in Public" is a brilliant exposition of the democratic poetics that underlie Koch's poems (and pedagogical writings) and his sympathetic bond with Allen Ginsberg, which I suppose could be traced to the inspiration both drew from Shelley. In the same essay North summarizes with characteristic precision the socioliterary assumption shared by all the poets he writes about, "the encouraging notion that writers are always and properly inspired by other writers; and moreover, that arbitrary rules (including 'gimmicks') can stimulate the imagination as forcibly as more conventional rime, metrical, and structural patterns."

Also included in the book are essays on writers Barbara Guest, Elizabeth Bishop, F.T. Prince, John Hollander, Frances Waldman, Joe Ceravolo, Paul Violi, Tony Towle, John Godfrey, and Edward Barrett, and artists Richard Tuttle, Edith Schloss, Aristodemos Kaldis, Fairfield Porter, and Trevor Winkfield. As is clear from that list, the range is local; North's version of the New York poetry scene doesn't extend to Brooklyn. But by confining himself to an intimate landscape, North proves the wisdom of Socratic humility. Though the quality of his attention tests poems at every syllable, this book is refreshingly free from bluff. Compared to North, Geoff Ward's treatment of the New York school is remote and superficial, Helen Vendler's reading of Schuyler crabbed and spurious, Harold Bloom's version of Ashbery crudely reductive.

As implied by those comparisons, this book is not only an appreciation of the New York poets. It is also a cogent and persuasive argument with the dominant criticism, which in North's view plunders poems for whatever

conceptual capital the critic may find there. In that way, North's beef with Vendler or Bloom is not different from Proust's with Sainte-Beuve. It is the poet's perpetual frustration with the coarse advertisements of idea vendors. As North puts it, "This is by no means to allege that criticism is futile, but it is to suggest that overconfidence can be self-defeating, and that developing this or that set of meanings out of this or that poem is at best a clever, helpful paraphrase, and at worst a thorough distortion or reduction or both." North identifies several principles to guide the kind of practical criticism he advocates (and demonstrates). In the tradition of Fairfield Porter, the concluding essay pleads for "a willingness to take poems on their own terms."

Nowhere will readers find literary criticism practiced with more sensitive insight, greater imaginative sympathy, more refined taste or acuter wit than in these essays. North's own poetic standards are uncompromising and ambitious. Though understanding that "poets need to write badly, as well as middlingly and well, in order to produce the 'highest thing'," his loyalties never cause him to refrain from noting where even our most accomplished poets falter. I only regret the single sense in which North underestimates the vitality of the Poetry Project and the wider New York poetry scene. I wish he had addressed a more sociologically diverse group of poets, because you will never read those considered in this book in more thoughtful and discerning company. For not only is this the richest and most suggestive study of the New York School, it is also a sustained defense of the intellectual beauty that animates their poems.

— Gary Lenhart

Gary Lenhart is the author of *Light Heart*.

Wang Ping
Of Flesh & Spirit

Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1998, 102 pages, \$12.95.

Wang Ping's *Of Flesh & Spirit* works by an internal mechanism of paranoia as a point of view, where every detail of daily life becomes hyper-meaningful or is perhaps imbued with a new meaning, twisted into a shape that can't be recognized. That great Spanish painter Salvador Dali called this the "critical paranoiac," where the landscape becomes the nightmarish creation of the artist. *Of Flesh & Spirit* is not without volcanic anger and strong emotions. It is perhaps difficult and maybe unnecessary to draw parallels between the life of the author and that of Salvador Dali, who emigrated from Fraguera, Spain to Paris and reshaped the surrealism movement, yet Wang Ping's writing (she is also the author of two works of fiction published by Coffee

House) brings a breath of fresh air and authenticity to Chinese-American literature especially in light of the primary offerings (*The Joy Luck Club*, for example). There are 27 poems in this beautifully printed volume, nine of which are in prose or contain major prose components.

Here commonplace objects and phenomena of Chinese daily life trigger the chain of emotional rather than analytical, personal rather than cultural or sociopolitical transformations. "Golden lotuses" (a name for bound feet), suppressed and perverted sexual sensibility, absolute obedience of the children to their elders, humble wives and daughters-in-law, female virginity, desperate poverty or loss of personal freedom: these are your stereotypical orientalist or standard anti-communist entries. However, these objects now take the form of vivid, almost autobiographical accounts and metamorphose into haunted nightmarish stories of personal hardship or worse, persecution, made convincing by her realistic writing:

When I was seven, I became crazy about *wuxiang dou* — five-spice beans. My grandmother would give me only two or three each time, five if I was good. So I began to steal coins from under her pillow, one at a time. When I got fifty-seven fen, I went to the store and bought a half a kilogram of beans. I took the bag to the kitchen and poured it onto the greasy table. I put my arms around the pile. This was all mine. I didn't have to share it with anyone else. I didn't have to pretend to be a selfless daughter or an elder sister. I could eat it quickly or slowly, standing or sitting or lying down, any manner I fancied. I could throw or give it away. I was the master of those beans. The kitchen was dark; the sun was shimmering in the sky of the summer noon; the beans smelled seductive. I filled my

mouth with a handful and chewed until my jaws ached andnumbed. Tears rolled down as I thought life is so good and wouldn't it be better if no one ever woke up from their nap to interrupt my happiness.

— from "Flash of Selfish
Consciousness"

In the mind of the child, her immediate family (grandmother, parents and sisters) become the force of evil and oppression for no apparent reason. Every detail of neutral reality (however bleak it may look to an American eye) takes on meaning—usually a nightmarish one. You are made to believe in the existence of evil by being drawn into a psychic world created out of routine by a convincing hand. From the title piece, on Chinese sexuality:

I was a virgin till twenty-three, then always had more than one lover at the same time—all secret.

...

When I saw the first bra my mom made for me, I screamed and ran out in shame.

For a thousand years, women's bound feet were the most beautiful and erotic objects for Chinese. Tits and asses were nothing compared to a pair of three-inch "golden lotuses." They must have been crazy or had problems with their noses. My grandma's feet, wrapped day and night in layers of bandages, smelled like rotten fish.

The author's personal encounter exposes the real fragrance of the infamous "lotuses" from a feminist point of view. Being a writer from China, living in New York and writing in English, Wang Ping is in a position to examine cultural differences. Simultaneously she can achieve objectivity in both languages, which is demonstrated in the opening poem of the book:

She walks to a table
She walk to table
She is walking to a table
She walk to table now...
Language, like woman
Look best when free, undressed
— "Syntax"

The missing articles and the verbs without tense, a syntax borrowed directly from Chinese, may widen poetic possibility in English. *Of Flesh & Spirit* is perhaps more flesh than spirit. Yet readers who enjoyed her previous works will definitely appreciate this new earthly accomplishment.

— Zhang Er

Zhang Er is the author of *Winter Garden*, published by Goats and Compasses.

EDWIN TORRES
Holy Kid CD

Produced by Jordan Trachtenberg, Kill Rock Stars, 1998.

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our minds, you and I," says Edwin Torres, locating his audience in the poem/song "Gilded Rat." As a self-designated "gilded rat for the populace" he becomes what's made beautiful by art glorification, the real decorated into fantasy. We who live in our minds respond to the fantasy and trust Torres because of the real.

The incredibly rich and varied *Holy Kid*, provides an opportunity to focus on the work of Edwin Torres who is primarily known for his live performances. Working experimentally, Torres' performances are like broad sketches for a final work, providing continuity from performance to performance. *Holy Kid* is like a painting, a final product, yet wonderfully escapes generalization, because it is about the variety of ways an artist can exist in a place, by combining fragments, sounds and stories.

Citing Kurt Schwitters as an influence, Torres embraces his philosophy that "one never knows." The focus in Schwitter's collage work is on how much fragments do, or don't touch. All is elusive, except for the degree of intimacy between parts. This creates a feeling of lightness; the work defies gravity and eliminates borders. Contact between parts in abstract art, visual or aural, intensifies its power: the desire of the viewer/listener to relate one to another.

When Torres says "nor? YES!" in the piece entitled "fictionary of deafeningition," a hypnotic rift of countless contradictions amid a creamy musical float, the "yes," like touch, works as an agreement, a handshake, and then all is elusive again. We float from the clarity of yes, on a "raft ride," viewing non-words and actual ones on the horizon with equal interest. "Yes" is specific, positive, yet oddly intrusive in the flow.

Where Torres parts from Schwitters, where he is in a place of his own creation replaying his cerebral history, it is wide open, and you

can enter at any part. All the parts are familiar; the newness is in the sequence of sounds. What comes next is a modern knowledge that Torres shares with his listeners.

While Schwitters worked during the "age of printed matter," incorporating ticket stubs and poster fragments into his collages, Torres works in the age of information, and in an entirely different political climate. While the source of evil during Schwitters' time was clear, now passivity might be the adversary. "Frog boys," performed in a deep humming vibration, combines passivity with a departure from passivity; we drift through this piece due to the artful orchestration of Edwin Torres "falling between the crevice of apology and anger."

—Josie McKee

Josie McKee has poems forthcoming in *Lungfull!*.

ROQUE DALTON

*Small Hours of the Night:
Selected Poems of Roque Dalton*
Edited by Hardie St. Martin, translated by
Hardie St. Martin et al. Curbstone Press, 1996,
201 pages, \$14.95.

Roque Dalton was an El Salvadorian revolutionary and poet whose father was a member of the bank-robbing Dalton gang. His ideas and actions did not always please the incumbent powers, and sometimes they didn't please his co-revolutionaries, by whom he was sentenced to death and executed in 1975. Here is an excerpt from the poem "Time for Ashes":

This afternoon, for instance,
in my gray hands I hold
beautiful books I don't understand,
I can't sing even if the rain has stopped
and the memory of the first dog I loved
as a boy hits me out of the blue.

—The Editors

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Altercation with Andromeda #9

Editor: Jack Collom, (1838 Pine St, Boulder, CO 80302), free.

Appearances #25

Featuring Jim Feast's "Cool My Daisy" (165 W.26th St., NY, NY 10001), 30 pages, \$5.00.

Black Dirt #1

Midwest Farmer's Market, Inc. Elgin Community College, (1700 Spartan Drive, Elgin, IL 60123-7193), 175 pages, \$6.00.

Chicago Review, Volume 44 #2

Poetry Editor: Devin Johnston, (5801 S. Kenwood Ave., Chicago, IL 60637-1794), \$6.00.

Explosive Magazine/Spectacular Emotion [Summer 1998]

Editor Katy Lederer (420 E. Davenport St. #2, Iowa City, IA 52245).

Fatstick [Spring 98]

Editor: James Wilk (23 Clinton St, #2C, New York, NY 10002).

Napkin Apologies

Duck Martin, The All Bohemian Review (3003 Ponce De Leon St, New Orleans, LA 70119), \$2.00.

Fence [Spring 98]

(14 5th Ave 1A, New York, NY), \$8.00.

Front [May/June 98]

Editors: Kerri Embrey & Andreas Kahre (Western Front Lodge, 303 E. 8th Ave, Vancouver, B.C. Canada V5T 1S1).

Kenning Premier Issue

c/o Patrick Durgin (418 Brown St. #10 Iowa City, IA 52245). 20 pages, \$4.00.

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Editor Brendan Lorber (126 E. 4th St #2, NY, NY 10003), 134 pages, \$5.95.

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Pop Literary Gazette #1

Editors Karl Wencas & Max Sitting (POB 02071, Detroit, MI 88202), 60 pages \$3.00.

Primary Writing

Editors Phyllis Rosenzweig/Diane Ward (2009 Belmont Rd. NW, Washington, DC 20009) 6 pages.

Small Press Review Vol 30, #5 & 6

Editor Len Fulton, (POB 100, Paradise, CA 95967).

The Prose Poem: An International Journal, Volume 7

Editor Peter Johnson, (English Department, Providence College, Providence, RI 02918), \$8.00.

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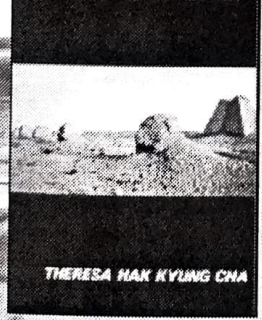
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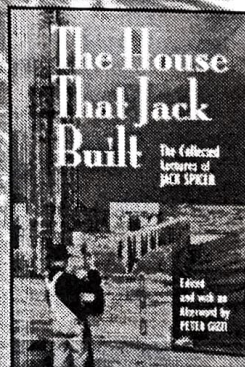
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