



THE POETRY PROJECT

DECEMBER 2015 / JANUARY 2016 ISSUE #245

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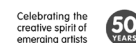
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Cover Image by Kaia Sand: *“I was crime I will be poetry” (Lagoa, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)*

Letters from the Director and Program Director



Letter from the Director: Stacy Szymaszek

Dear All: it's New Year's Day Marathon planning season! My letter for this issue always serves as reiteration and reminder about how we plan it. The Marathon is, of course, our signature benefit event. Tremendous audience, volunteer, and artist support has made it so. As an event, it exaggerates what we want each reading during the season to do—to provide a site of collective agency, and create a communal and generative space for the audience and the poet to experience new work. I'll also add something directly from our mission statement: to create an opportunity for public recognition, awareness and appreciation of poetry and its relationship to other arts.

The Project receives many requests to perform in the Marathon, and we feel fortunate that so many people want to help us meet our fundraising goals. We only have about 150 spots and a seemingly unlimited

artistic community to draw from. Here is some basic information about our selection process. The Marathon is a curated event, i.e. not run open-reading style where people can sign-up. Invitations are issued by our Programming Committee made up of Poetry Project staff, a few board members, plus all of our series coordinators (positions that rotate every 2 years). The final schedule consists of people who are in one or more of the following broad categories: performers who have a longtime connection to The Poetry Project and/or the Downtown arts scene (poetry, music, film, dance, but poetry in particular); poets who are actively participating in the NYC literary arts scene by giving readings, publishing books, organizing readings, editing journals, etc.; and/or performers who have never participated in a Marathon before.

Each year we feature 3050 first-timers, which means

that many who performed in prior years aren't going to be able to participate again. If you are invited one year, it doesn't mean that you will get invited every year. This is not to be taken personally. We need to conduct our benefit in a manner that best suits the organizational needs of each year. Lastly, reading is just one way of participating in the event. There are volunteer opportunities (about 100 are needed) to help sell books, food and drink, assist in checking in readers, etc. It's also an opportunity to meet or catch up with other writers/artists and support the Project's mission. We deeply appreciate your support and your understanding of the effort it takes to present this feat of a fundraiser.

—Stacy Szymaszek

Letter from the Program Director: Simone White

Dear People:

If you missed the kickoff event of our 49th season, the release of Eileen Myles stunning *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems* and reissue of *Chelsea Girls* (an audience in the Sanctuary of 525, the largest in recent memory), not to worry! Programming continues into the real New York winter this December and January with a wide range of readings, special events, workshops and experiments to keep your spirits high and the rest of you warm for at least two hours. I won't list all this terrific stuff here – you can find the complete calendar in these pages and at poetryproject.org – but please mark your calendars for highlights like the memorial reading for Bill Kushner, readings by Prageeta Sharma, Montana Ray, Brian Fuata, Jim Dine, Susie Timmons & Patricia Spears Jones, Che Gossett, a poets on (ESP) TV taping, a mold-breaking Master Class with Ammiel Alcalay, and what we hope will be a lively exchange of ideas and proposals about the persistence of what's been come to be known as the “white room.” & MORE. & you decide. But please make your way to the Parish Hall one chilly evening very soon.

—Simone White

Notes from the Project

John Perreault 1937-2015

Many Poetry Project Newsletter readers are familiar with the work of poet, art critic, and artist, John Perreault. If you aren't, he was the art critic for *The Village Voice*, and from 1975 to 1983 he was Senior Art Critic and Art Editor at *The Soho News*. His books of poetry are *Camouflage* (New York: Lines Press, 1966); *Luck* (New York: Kulcher Foundation, 1969); *Harry* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1966). His fiction was collected in *Hotel Death and Other Tales* (Sun & Moon Press in 1987).

His obituary in the *New York Times* notes, "For the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, he recited a long poem, "Hunger," as color slides were projected on his back. He also did a series of street projects with Vito Acconci and, with Hannah Weiner and Eduardo Costa, organized the Fashion Show Poetry Event, which featured clothing made by Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Alex Katz and other artists."

Alexandar Alberro provided an account of the models in his essay on the event, which we found via Kaplan Harris: "Perreault had Anne Waldman, the famous poet, dress in an outfit consisting of two unites of long hair that could be tied as a veil over the face, separated and tied under both arms as sleeves or joined again at the bustline as a hairy mini dress." Thank you for the expansiveness of your work, and rest in peace, John Perreault.

2015-2016 Poetry Project Fellowship for Emerging Writers

The Project's open call for submissions for Emerge-Surface-Be, fellowships for NYC-based emerging writers, just closed. Poet-mentors Lee Ann Brown, Tracie Morris, and Tan Lin, will spend the next few weeks reading applications and deciding who they would like to work with. Each fellow receives an \$2,500 award, 9 months of one-on-one work with their mentor, inclusion in Project programs and more. Check the next issue to learn the names of this season's fellows!

Weekly E-Newsletter

If you would like to receive up-to-the-minute announcements about Project news and events, please visit our

homepage (poetryproject.org) and sign up to receive our weekly email. Scroll to the bottom of the page, and look to the right.

Donate your Time Or Things to Marathon #42

Feeling generous as the holiday season approacheth? Well, it's the perfect time to let your generosity shine upon The Poetry Project! January 1, 2016 marks the 42nd year of our Annual New Year's Day Marathon, which features at least 12 hours worth of readings and performances by over 140 poets, dancers, musicians, and performers. All funds raised at our New Year's Day Marathon go toward putting on The Poetry Project's 65+ readings/events per season and—most importantly—to support the honoraria of the 130+ poets and performers who give us reason to host these events in the first place.

And where does your shining beam of generosity needeth most shine, you ask?

1. Volunteering. The Poetry Project staff needs your help—along with at least 119 others—to make sure our most prized, annual fundraiser runs smoothly, in order, and on time! Volunteer shifts are 2 hours in length and, in exchange for your time and hard work, you'll receive free admission for the day.
2. Donations. We'd be ever grateful for food and/or drink donations from local

restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops, breweries, wineries, and individuals; books and chapbooks from publishers big and small; as well as any donations—think memberships, gift certificates, a pair of tickets to a performance—to include in our raffle, which was quite a hit last year!

If you'd like to contribute in any way—as a volunteer, food, book, or raffle prize donor—please contact Laura Henriksen at LH@poetryproject.org.

See you at the 42nd Marathon!

End of the Year Appeal

If you see the Project's logo in the corner of an envelope (and/or a link in your inbox) we hope you'll open it. There is a good story inside, and an appeal for a year-end contribution to The Poetry Project. By being subscribers, readers, writers and attendees, you've made it clear to us that you value what we do, and have been doing since 1966. Keep the love coming by considering a fully tax-deductible year-end contribution in whatever amount is significant to you. Your gift will help the Project to sustain its legacy, plan for the 50th Anniversary, and build opportunities further into the future. Given the possibility that you are too eager to wait for our appeal letter, you can make your contribution now by visiting <http://www.poetryproject.org/donate-now/>. Thank you!



2015-2016 Poetry Project Staff Pictured above (L to R): Nicole Wallace, Simone White, Laura Henriksen, Betsy Fagin, Ariel Goldberg, and Stacy Szymaszek. Not pictured, Monday Night Readings Coordinator Judah Rubin. Photo by John Priest.

In Memoriam

Stephen Rodefer (1940 - 2015)

“My father is a sphinx and my mother’s a nut. I reject the glass.
But I’ve been shown the sheets of sentences and what he was
Really like remains more of a riddle than in the case of most humans.
So again I say rejoice, the man we’re looking for
Is gone. The past will continue, the surest way to advance,
But you still have to run to keep fear in the other side.”*

A man of words, of excesses, lover of clothes, lover of love, Stephen Rodefer was born November 20, 1940, in Bellaire, Ohio, to Dorothy and Howard Rodefer. The youngest of three, brother to Rik and Judy, Stephen was raised on the hilltop, athletic with a racquet, springing into the world from the shadow of the family factory. He died in Paris on August 22, 2015, at home amongst the trappings of his genius, exhausted books and wild paintings.

He was educated at Amherst College (BA), SUNY Buffalo (MA, ABD), and SFSU (MFA), going on to foster the pen of so many others, teaching around the world at the likes of UC Berkeley and San Diego, University of Cambridge

(Judith E. Wilson Senior Fellow), the Pratt Institute of Art, and San Francisco State.

Stephen was devoted to his writing above all else. He was a brilliant passeur of thought and beauty, taking on L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E, reinventing Villon, working on traditional themes and form while always pushing well beyond. In recent years, he took to his prolific brush, generating and showing an arsenal of language paintings, the art of wordplay.

Stephen leaves behind many clusters of friends made around the globe, interspersed networks coupled by his life, his narrative. He is survived by three sons, Benjamin (with granddaughters Melina and Natalie), Felix, and Dewey, and now beats his drum beside his fourth, D(ear) J(esse), so missed during his final stanza. Our father’s sons, progeny of verse.

At Père Lachaise on September 2nd, a group of family and friends paid an emotional tribute to the poet, the father, and the friend. Comrades from London provided lapel pins with Fuck Death—a language painting by Stephen for guests to wear. The sentiment’s appeal was confirmed when the Père Lachaise attendant asked for one afterwards and was seen wearing it as she walked the grounds and met with other funeral parties. His wry words provide a crisp opening flirtation to his

new neighbors, colleagues at rest in eternal dialogue.

To articulate in such failing words, albeit words of love, the life of a master of phrase would bring him a sly smile and some editorial joy. But go read for yourself, from *VILLON* to *Four Lectures*, from *The Bell Clerk’s Tears Keep Flowing* to *Left Under A Cloud*, go read his everlasting word, his imprint on us, his mark on the world.

“Underneath you wear a flowing red robe, and I am an adoring suitor. My name is love, my dead body will be the rising sun, the day will last forever. I have always carried with me an urge of great melancholy, like a black cloth gardenia. It is an inheritance of heart and nerves. Here the maestro himself puts down his pen.”**

*Pretext from *Four Lectures* (1982) by Stephen Rodefer

**Show a Little Emotion, for the granite from *The Bell Clerk’s Tears Keep Flowing* (1978) by Stephen Rodefer

Felix Brenner was born to Stephen and Summer in 1973, raised in Berkeley, educated in Northern California, and now lives in San Francisco with his wife Jackie.

Photo Courtesy of Felix Brenner.



In Memoriam

Bill Kushner (1931-2015)

I first met Bill at the Poetry Project in a workshop run by Maureen Owen in November of 1981. Bill would have been fifty, me thirty-two fresh from Philly. I was lucky because I never take workshops and Maureen's got me writing, which was what I wanted it to do. I'm one of those who thinks he can go it alone, but Bill had a need to be writing in private and public, putting words into the silence, and workshops kept him sharing, learning and collaborating, something he did till the end of his days. When I first saw Bill, I think it was the first time everyone else was beginning to see him too because his incredible invisible yearning was about to become visible on the printed page in a remarkable book of poems Bill was writing called *Head*. He was soon to appear, kind of like Venus in her shell, a poet fully formed from the streets of New York.

The last time I saw Bill, two weeks before he died, we took a walk. Walking was part of our friendship. In Philly we'd walk from Independence Hall past City Hall out the parkway to the art museum; in NY from the Met through Central Park, or MOMA, or Chinatown, or, as Bill grew older, more and more staying in Chelsea closer to home. Bill was tired. We sat on several benches, lingered at a farmer's market, then over to the galleries. In his later years he carried a plastic bag with his wallet, keys, pen, notebook and what he was reading in it. I thought someone would snatch it, but no one ever did. He wrote in his notebook, "I think a lot," and chuckled, "That'll keep them guessing." I told Bill I was stuck, had stopped writing sonnets. "Write a line for every block you walk," he suggested: "Fourteen blocks and you've got it."

Bill had a heart attack and died instantly hitting his head when he fell. I went to his apartment to gather his belongings as quickly as I could because the landlord, anxious to get a rent controlled apartment back, was ready to throw everything out. There was a lot of blood. Someone had thrown a blanket over it, but the dried flowing surpassed the edges. His flip flops by the bed were stuck in it. Walking back and forth so much I finally knocked one of them loose.

His unpublished papers and notebooks filled three twenty-seven gallon plastic containers, each so heavy they were almost impossible to pick up, writings from the sixties and seventies, stuff written on the backs of flyers and receipts; he wrote on anything where he was when the spirit moved him. I collected all his books and put them into boxes to be handed out later at his memorial on November 16 at the Poetry Project. *Night Fishing*, his first, is sexually closeted. His next book *Head* is anything but. Every rift is loaded with ore just like Keats

said—or in Bill's case every street is loaded with it—jam-packed, exciting, pornographic, to the point, optimistic, funny bursts of bright reflected New York City life and light. It's a miracle of perfect pitch, it really is. There is a Bill before *Head*, and a Bill after it. Before, he was ashamed and hiding, showing up at a nephew's Bar Mitzvah with a woman on each arm, suicidal although when he did throw himself in front of a car, the driver swerved. After, he accepted who he was and only got happier and, if it's possible, hornier. "I wrote with a hard-on," he said, "my dick dipping in red ink." At the time Bill was writing *Head*, I saw him at the Gaiety, a porno movie theater on Third Avenue near Fourteenth Street; he was in the front row in the light of the giant screen, head bent intent on getting his thoughts down on paper writing while in the seats all around him men in all the stages of dress and undress were having shadowy sex. I was there for fun or love but stopped what I was doing and watched him.

It started to piss Bill off that people liked *Head* so much. "I wrote other



photo by Ted Roeder

stuff, ya know.” And he did. His apartment was full of all his books and I carefully gathered them. *Love Uncut*, where the sonnets continue. *He Dreams of Waters*, *That April*, *In the Hairy Arms of Whitman*, *In Sunsetland With You*, and *Walking After Midnight* where the spirits of an expansive Whitman and a playful Dickinson guide him, and he leaves the gay themes he struggled so hard to own to write about childhood, dreams, visions, a loving mother and a father who never spoke, beginning to address that silent father with longer flowing poems.

Bill liked Shakespeare, Donne, Keats, Frost, and his two main squeezes, Whitman and Dickinson, and, of course, every New Yorker from O’Hara and Schuyler to the present day young and old, not too many Beats though, though he did have Orlovsky’s *Clean Asshole Poems*, and there was Corso, and many books of workshop mentors: Notley, Mayer, Carey, Owen, Godfrey, and Lewis Warsh who encouraged Bill to write *Head* and published it. In *Nothing For You*, I read this inscription: “for Bill Kushner, my fellow historical figure on the Lower East Side & the World, w/ affection & respect, Ted Berrigan.” And then there was *Glad Stone Children*: “For Bill, the sexiest poet in NYC, best, Eddie B.” I even came across the first draft of my novel, a draft I didn’t remember from the eighties. Where I’d written, “I started,” he crossed out and wrote, “I was shocked,” changing my ambiguous three weak syllables into a successful anapest growing into recognition. I asked him once if he ever thought about meter. “Never,” he said with a grimace, but Bill didn’t have to because he was meter, innate and/or started by his two older sisters who got him to read, write, jitterbug, waltz and rumba, and sing along to Stardust and Stella by Starlight, songs whose yearning lyrics Bill longed to write, just then a little

kid growing up during the Depression in the Bronx.

Bill, the youngest child and only son of Russian immigrants who never learned English well, made the vernacular divine, what was everyday he sent to heaven. He was a hoarder though. A year ago, he stayed with me while his apartment was being cleaned and painted. Like a vacation, he lounged around naked reading a book by Alice Notley that he’d found, a signed copy of *A Culture of One* inscribed to me, which he took and kept reading, leaving it only to write in his notebook. When I went to his apartment to teach him how to cook healthy food after his first heart attack, he opened the door naked. At readings he took off his clothes and for photos naked as his poems, the day he was born, innocent as Eden before the snake comes.

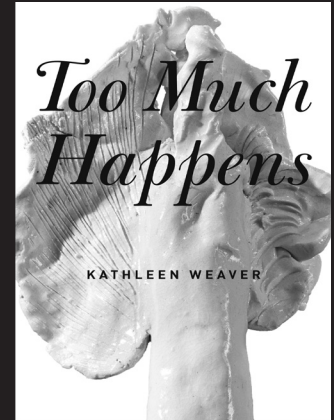
As I cleaned and gathered his belongings, getting ready to leave, I kept looking for that plastic bag with his last notebook and my Notley in it, but they weren’t anywhere to be found. I think Bill took them with him.

Don Yorty has two published collections of poetry, *A Few Swimmers Appear* and *Poet Laundromat*, and one novel, *What Night Forgets*. He lives in New York City.

New!

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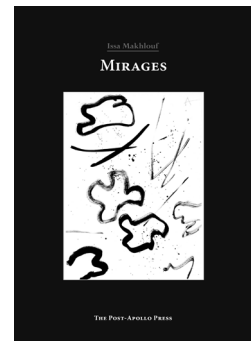
Once you step in between these lines, you know you’ve reached home: heart-and-mind, the body-and soul of why poetry matters.

— Al Young

Poetry \$18 978-0-942996-86-9

Issa Makhoulf

Mirages



Translated Alicia F. Lam

In *Mirages*, Issa Makhoulf mingles thought, observation and meditation to develop themes of travel and absence, violence and beauty to question nature, its creatures and mysteries.

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Poetry: Krystal Languell

(I had a system) (it worked)

(I did not then have New York City)

(I did not have (a net-work) (city cousin) (inheritance) (savvy))

(I stapled) (could learn by working)

(long arm stapler) (copied Adobe Suite in the back of mentor's van)

(a folder with pouch of disks)

(I am no astronaut looking back at the globe) (am planet-life)

(ultimate earthrise) (very much planted, stationary)

(other systems w/ code and formula) (mine: exhaustive / vertical)

(I am no astrolabe) (or astrocyte) (glue cell)

(then came time)

(My sister was this) (she worked)

(She did not then have spirit gear)

(She did not have (property of) (points) (bonus / combat pay))

(She worked in bulk) (she still does)

(My system) (lacked) (style)

(it was bulk) (memory says (twenty) (in a list) (a mile))

(fight the mill) (the job) (jog on tread) (pestle metaphor)

(My apology) (for (space) for (wind)) (the long walk I took)

(the arroyo (yes) (I followed the arroyo)) (and my guts) (mutinied)

(My sister (she) drives on the ice) (without difficulty)

(and (here) (comes) (climate)) (to place) (your life) (in context)

(The policy was private) (after all)

(five x five x five (sometimes four)) (foraging postage)

(I didn't think) (I swam alone) (kept secrets)

(Automated how I live) (not established (with trim))

(Besides) (in the library basement) (mispronouncing) (attn morale)

(was another inch (routine)) (crates drip (meltdown) from cold storage)

(Congressional Record)

(for a few dollars) (Later) (later) (the bulldozer) (as usual)

(Later the policy) (became matter) (coursing)

((a note) (a dial) (a photo) left inside the screen door) (Pause)

(to set aside) (that work you do (only scalar quantity))

(It did not (account)) ((frantic nature) into (common surprise))
(A goal to be everywhere) (live a life in every house along the highway)
(Its vast imaginary) (What about after survival)
(What about (other) (twists) (other funded) (her agenda))
(The business of) (double agency (It preferred neutral) (when the nest) (burned))
(I would) (keep (at) (the))
(keep on about) (a little sporting) (a whistling tune)
(What its own self (a priori) (dictated) was host (needs to depart))
(It (the game of prizes) having cash in sight) (What prestige in gaze
(on)looking)

Krystal Languell is the author of the books *Call the Catastrophists* (BlazeVox, 2011) and *Gray Market* (1913 Press, 2016) and several chapbooks, including *Diamonds in the Flesh*, a collaboration with Robert Alan Wendeborn, (Double Cross Press, 2015) and a collection of interviews, *Archive Theft* (Essay Press, 2015). She's published the feminist poetry journal Bone Bouquet since 2009 and has been part of Belladonna* Collaborative since moving to NYC in 2010. She has received fellowships and residencies from The Poetry Project and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and is employed by Pratt Institute.



Photo by Kaia Sand: "Not everyone has a price" (Vila Autódromo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Photo Essay: Kaia Sand

Poetry in public space can manifest in infinitely many forms: as inquiry, engagement, critique or resistance. Our engagement with language, even when misinterpreted, maps our lived experiences as it maps our landscapes and streets. Poet Kaia Sand is currently living in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and has been documenting language she's encountered in the landscape as the city is transformed in preparation for the upcoming Olympic games.

Upon our arrival in Rio de Janeiro this August, we quickly noticed poetic language painted throughout the metropolis on walls, doors, benches, and ledges. Everywhere we walked, the city's surfaces formed pages. We were the interlocutors, passersby, curious readers of our new city. Since we first began researching *Landscapes of Dissent: Guerrilla Poetry and Public Space* more than a decade ago, we have remained attuned to how poetry claims public spaces, and how we might wander as the inadvertent audience. A month or so into our stay, we learned that this language connects with the *pixação* (also written *pichação*) tradition in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, so named because in the 1930s and 1940s, politicians would paint the streets using tar, or *piche*.

One of the most-repeated patches of language around the city is *Não Fui Eu*. Such an ambiguous, melodic phrase creates an ongoing test for how we, as newcomers, might encounter

the city as a book. While one local artist suggested to us that the phrase was merely a naïve claim of personal exemption, we read it more as a political critique of blame and responsibility. Indeed, another friend surmised that the phrase had something to do with the corruption of Eduardo Cunha, the speaker of the lower house of Congress. The right-wing politician and rival of President Dilma Rousseff has been implicated in the Lava Jato corruption scandals involving Brazilian oil giant Petrobras, a mess of cold cash, questionable construction contracts, and crooked politicians. Cunha has been accused of receiving millions of dollars in bribes. An online search reveals plenty of examples attaching “*não fui eu*” to Cunha, whether as a tactic, as a nickname (Eduardo “*Não Fui Eu*” Cunha), or as a direct quote. The ambiguity of the phrase, and the way context informs it, foregrounds how language in public space can showcase an uneven cultural terrain,

as Rodrigo Toscano once put it. New to Rio de Janeiro, but bringing our particular areas of research (poetry, oil, Olympics), we form our own, idiosyncratic audience, attuned to particular references and likely mistaking plenty of others—the creativity of misprision. A similar sentiment is depicted in the language, *Todo Mundo Mente, Menos Eu* (Everyone Lies, Except Me), which we found scrawled across the city: on a temporary plywood wall, a Clear Channel billboard, and the back of a seat on a city bus.

We were particularly aware of the poetic qualities of the language on the streets of Rio. Soundplay is underscored in *escrevo, esqueço* (I write, I forget); *sinta a vento* (Feel the

wind); and *a rua é tua* (the street is yours). Sentences such as *Coisas belas são difíceis* (Beautiful things are difficult) are ambiguous and provocative, as well as a possible alternative slogan for the upcoming Rio Olympics.

Poetry is sometimes referenced explicitly. One of the most compelling examples of this is the expression *Fui crime, serei poesia* (I was crime, I will be poetry). The phrase is painted across the city. We've seen it on a park bench alongside the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, a much-polluted lake and site of the Rio 2016 Olympic rowing competition; as well as in a middle-class neighborhood in Botafogo, where the language often appears astride other art.



Photo by Kaia Sand: “*I was crime, I will be poetry*” (Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Most recently, we found it written on a staircase in the Vila Autódromo favela in the western zone of the city near Barra da Tijuca. The staircase ascended to open air; the building that once surrounded it was reduced to mounds of rubble. It was a staircase to nowhere, but also a monument to erasure.

One of those occupants, Heloisa Helena Costa Berto, faces an impossible situation. As a spiritualist in the Candomblé tradition, she is daughter of Nanã, a goddess on whose land she lives and cares for. On 18 October 2015, Heloisa and other occupants of Vila Autódromo invited the

passed abundant language scrawled on the recent ruins of Vila Autódromo. Most of this language articulated resistance.

Creativity abounds, with one panel reading “OLIM(PIADA),” the Portuguese word for joke (piada) nestled inside a

justice does not become a business counter or a puppet theater).

Vila Autódromo, with its abundance of social writing, provides a stark example of how the language is written with multiple audiences in mind, fortifying neighbors in their acts of resistance, speaking to the power brokers, and communicating to those coming in solidarity. As we wander Rio de Janeiro, we amble as active readers of poetic, political language making claims on public and community spaces.

—Kaia Sand with contributions from Jules Boykoff. Sand and Boykoff, who co-authored *Landscapes of Dissent: Guerrilla Poetry and Public Space* (Palm Press 2008), are working on its updated reissue.

“This language articulated resistance.”

Rubble is everywhere in Vila Autódromo because the Rio government is demolishing people’s homes to make way for Olympic structures and high-end hotels.

Vila Autódromo, a small, working-class favela along the Jacarepaguá lagoon, was founded as a fishing village in the 1960s. While 90 percent of the occupants have left, about fifty people are steadfast, refusing to budge.

public in for a Candomblé ceremony to bless the lagoon as they continue their standoff with Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes and the Olympic development he’s spearheading. Dressed mostly in white, they danced and drummed, then led a processional to the water’s edge where they released large bouquets of white flowers to drift into the lagoon. As we walked through mud made from the previous night’s rain, we

word for Olympics. One still-standing two-story house had two phrases scrawled in spray paint across its front “Quero ficar / Vamos lutar!!!” (“I want to stay / We will fight!!!”) and “Não Deixe a Vila morrer!” (“Don’t let Vila die!”). Another takes on an epistolary form: Srs. Desembarcadores cuidem para que a justica não vire um balcão de negocios nem um teatro de marionetes. (Sirs, Take care so that

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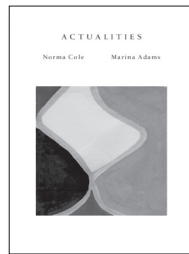
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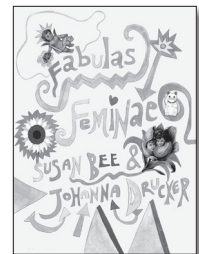
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Photo by Kaia Sand: "I was crime, I will be poetry" (Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)



Photo by Kaia Sand: "the street is yours" (Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Interview with Jerome Rothenberg & Pierre Joris

In the exploration of borders and boundaries of poetry, I can think of no better guides than Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris. They both graciously agreed to participate in a discussion of what's happening in poetry at the moment—poetry as outsiders, what identity can mean, where and why boundaries are erected and dismantled.

Following are excerpts from an email exchange I had with Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris that we hope will serve to inspire further conversations. —Betsy Fagin

BF: I originally approached you both in hopes of generating a discussion around international poetry, poetics and poetry communities and I just have a few symbols of what's happening at the moment that keep coming to mind: wall, border/boundary, refuge. One thing I'm curious about and would like to examine is how the current poetry scene here in the U.S. interacts with or is immune/oblivious to this political moment: border walls (U.S., Gaza Strip,

boundaries erected and crossed? How seriously do we defend our borders and why? I'm asking what sound like political questions, and they are, but I feel like related, relevant patterns and answers can be reflected in the microcosms of our poetry worlds.

JR: For myself the issue of an international or global poetry came alive in the late 1950s and still more so in the 1960s, while the great event for many of us as poets was the emergence of

Williams had it, was good enough as far as it went, but for me there was always the wider world, and my roots, like Williams' for that matter, went back to other places, other times. The disparity, if that's what it was, was brought home to me, in a conversation with Donald Allen, shortly after his big anthology appeared. What I carried away from that was Allen's telling me that I was, in contrast to the poets in his book, part of an "international school" of poetry. That description stung at first but I later grew to love it.

PJ: In a strangely or not so strangely inverse movement, I saw myself ab initio as an "international poet" in continuous exile and nowhere at home given that I chose to write in my

way—I cannot escape my "native internationalism," if I'm permitted a punning oxymoron.

I'm in Europe right now, and your mention of "walls" and "borders" immediately resounds: if the major political and cultural effort for the half century after World War II was to break down walls and create an open European space, this seems to in great danger right now. The wall between the two Germany's may have come down in '89, but meanwhile some fifty new walls have been built: hundreds of miles of them, from the Spanish "possessions" in North Africa to Denmark! Walls and borders are right now as an area of investigation for geographers, philosophers, political scientists, economists—and maybe it is time for poets to make thinking about these actual walls reemerging at a time when we also believe ourselves to live and work in the real? fantasy? world of global accessibility via internet and social media.

In the U.S. unhappily it feels right now as if much thinking, or rather, much bickering that passes for thinking, has to do more with identity squabbles, personal, ego-identities using perceived and often imagined walls as fake hindrances to vault over, while neglecting to analyze or engage with actual walls, borders, barriers at the level

national(istic) focus is of little help—
either in matters of politics or of culture,
including poetry

India/Pakistan, Ireland, Cyprus, N./S. Korea, EU. etc.), efforts to exclude or accept refugees (Syria) and migrants, newly opened boundaries (Cuba).

Maybe we can start off by discussing what these images can mean or represent in relation to the contemporary avant-garde poetry scenes we know and love. What are the borders around poetry right now? Where is refuge? How are

the "new American poetry," in which I also played an active if still subsidiary part. For the American side of it we experienced the emergence and assertion of a poetry that drew strength from the culture and language in which we shared most immediately, an American moment that seemed sometimes to obliterate the traces of other contemporary languages and cultures. Being "in the American grain," as

fourth language and moved from Europe to the U.S. in 1967 (though I did keep on moving, as the song says...). German, French and francophone poetics were there from the start. If in the late sixties I had one aspiration, it was to become an... American poet, and so I intensely studied and tried to imitate Ginsberg and Williams and Olson to enter that "American grain." Doesn't seem to have worked out exactly that

of one, of, more accurately, of of many “we’s,” as they affect communities world-wide. And world-wide has to be the focus; “national(istic)” focus is of little help—either in matters of politics or of culture, including poetry.

In this sense it may be useful to reexamine the very concept of border. Even the word is not unambiguous as a quick etymological tour (something that behoves poets to undertake) tells us: in Spanish and other Latin languages such as French, the word “frontera/fronrière” goes back to military vocabulary, i.e. a violent face-to-face, a confrontation. In English the “border / boundary” complex insists more on the markers (boundary stones), concrete incarnations of an abstract border-line, while also calling up the notion of being bound, linked—which puts both sides of the border into play and insists on connectivity rather than on separation.

Today’s borders are not simply separators between countries one crosses with the help of a passport. Borders touch and involve the totality of the territory, not only its edges, i.e. the place where they separate sovereign nation-states. The border thus no longer as fixed (natural or artificial) immaterial line of separation, but as a moving, mobile space that is a mixed territory in and by itself—mixed in that it immediately contradicts what was ab origine its ontological claim:

to separate the national/citizen (who belonged inside the border) from the alien/non-citizen (who belonged outside the border.)

This means that one is never inside “safe” borders, one is always on territory that is both familiar and foreign, with signs, signals, languages we know and don’t know, i.e. with an ongoing need to learn to read new signs and

languages. That is where we live, the territory we live in and on and which we can simplify, reduce to one common parlance or language only if willing to falsify the real to create a comforting fiction. Now poetry, I would suggest, has always been a foreign language and thus one of its core invitations has been to push the reader into learning a or many new, ways to read and discover other, stranger world(view)s. In this sense, much harm has been done by an approach to poetry that insists primarily on its perceived role in locating and fixing identity—which too often becomes a solipsistic reinforcement of sameness and excludes otherness, or better, othernessness, by creating or recreating real or imaginary borders between self and others. To avoid this it may be useful to rethink

the concept of borders, to realize (and a quick glance at the real borders, at the multidimensionality reality of borders will help) that borders are:

1. Always porous: by definition they have holes in them to go through, or they can be vaulted or circumnavigated;
2. They are not abstract lines but actual spaces; they

the “nomadic” poetics I developed in various essays, but I believe it is also central to Jerry’s project in his writing, translating and anthologizing. I think that we would both agree that it is this cultural richness that can and does renew poetry in a day and age when poetry is all too easily shoved into the margins of the socius. The violence Amilhat Szary speaks of is both the actual violence

“one is never inside “safe” borders, one is always on territory that is both familiar and foreign”

are territories in themselves (at times even specific ecosystems: see the rabbits and plant-life between the German walls);

3. They are mostly mobile: which means they are everywhere inside a given “national” territory (and why not, inside a given “mental” territory) and not only at its edges.

This characteristic, as Anne-Laude Amilhat Szary suggests in her book *Qu’est-ce qu’une frontière aujourd’hui*, makes them into “violent spaces, because one can find oneself as if imprisoned in this intermediate space, the crossing/traversing of which never ends.”

Now, this may be personal to my own history and development while being theoretically core to

against the “other” in the various nation-states—essential thus to support an organization like Black Lives Matter, or the various pro-refugee movements in Europe and elsewhere—and also the cultural violence implied by necessarily complex identities.

It is too easy to think of internationalism as an interest in or liking of “foreign” books, poets, etc. We have to move beyond the idea that we’ve done our job by importing a few foreign masterpieces, translated into accessible English, and that in fact do little more than satisfy a need for exoticism, i.e. internationalism as a peeping tom titillation to see how the neighbors are doing it.

Earlier I criticized identity politics of/in U.S. poetry and I confess that it is

somewhat distressing to see how unaware many current young practitioners seem to be of much of the boundary-breaking work done by the two or three previous generations. Be that in terms of the recent discussions on conceptual poetics, where the fact that this kind of work is at least a century old and was not recently invented in NY or LA goes mainly unnoticed. Or, just as surprising to me is the neglect or ignorance of the amazing work done toward a “multicultural” (maybe better the “internal international”) poetry going back to, say, someone as radical as Gloria Anzaldúa, who forty years ago defined herself as a “Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds.”

Anybody writing today, anybody trying to come into a poetry that wants to go deeper than the toxic MFA-mix of identity and confessional, should be familiar with the term and concept she promoted: **Nepantla**, the Nahuatl word for the in-betweenness, for being in the middle of different things, languages, cultures, etc. As Maria Fránquiz put it: “The world is in a constant state of Nepantla.” Or looking beyond America, the Arabic word I used as title of my latest collection of poems, “Barzakh” points to the

same realm of in-betweenness, of uncertainty, of multiplicity, of non-unity. It would be very instructive right now to reread or read for the first time the vast oeuvre of Edouard Glissant, both the poetry and the essays as an insightful correction to over-simplified nationalist identities. Here’s a quotation:

“Fixed identities prove harmful to the sensibilities of contemporary humans involved as they are in a chaos-world and living in creolized societies. A relational identity or a rhizomatic identity, as Gilles Deleuze called it, seems more adapted to the situation. Difficult to admit, but it fills us with anxiety to question the unity of our identity, the hard and unbreachable core of our personhood, an identity closed on itself, afraid of otherness, associated to one language, one nation, one religion, at times to one, race, tribe, clan, one well-defined entity with which one identifies. But we have to change our outlook on identity, as we have to change our relation to the other.”

JR: What Pierre does here is to provide some specific markers for the circumstances in which we find ourselves right now—the latest installments in what has been for many of us an ongoing struggle. For myself “the real work,” as Gary Snyder named it, began in the late 1960s when I was given a free hand (by a commercial publisher

no less) to compose *Technicians of the Sacred* as an assemblage of traditional and outsidered poetics from Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania, and to put those in the context of the newest and most experimental poetry that we ourselves were then creating. I thought of poetry—the most inbred and localized of languages or language arts—as the field in which I could provide a difference, taking nothing for granted and opening my mind – and ours—to everything. But the real trick here was also to keep my own doings open to question. The major steps in the overall project went from *Shaking the Pumpkin* (traditional American Indian poetry) to *A Big Jewish Book* (“from tribal times to present”) to the *Poems for the Millennium* series that Pierre and I launched in the middle 1990s. As the work expanded my name for it evolved from ethno-poetics and the domain of the oral and indigenous to what I’m now calling omnipoetics, as a grand assemblage or collage of “everything.” My latest workings in that regard are *Barbaric Vast and Wild*, just published as volume five of *Poems for the Millennium*, and an expanded version of *Technicians of the Sacred* (in progress) along the lines I’ve just described.

Jerome Rothenberg is an internationally celebrated poet with over ninety books of poetry and twelve assemblages of traditional and avant-garde poetry such as *Technicians of*

the Sacred and *Poems for the Millennium*, volumes 13, the latter with Pierre Joris and Jeffrey Robinson. Recent books of poems include *Concealments and Caprichos*, *A Cruel Nirvana*, *A Poem of Miracles*, and *Retrievals: Uncollected and New Poems 1955-2010*. His most recent big book is *Eye of Witness: A Jerome Rothenberg Reader*, and *Barbaric Vast and Wild: An Assemblage of Outside and Subterranean Poetry from Origins to Present* has just been published as volume 5 of *Poems for the Millennium*. Scheduled for 2016 is *_A Field on Mars: Poems 2000-2015_*, to be published in simultaneous English and French editions by Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre.

Poet, translator, essayist and anthologist **Pierre Joris** has published some 50 books, most recently, *Barzakh: Poems 2000-2012*; and *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry of Paul Celan*. With Jerome Rothenberg he edited *Poems for the Millennium*, vol. 1 and 2: *The University of California Book of Modern and Postmodern Poetry*. He lives and works in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with his wife, performance artist Nicole Peyrafitte. They are currently at work on *Talvera: A Millennium of Occitan Poetry (Poems for the Millennium, vol.6)*.

Calendar of Events

All events begin at 8pm unless otherwise noted. Admission \$8/Students & Seniors \$7/Members \$5 or free. Visit poetryproject.org for more information. The Poetry Project is wheelchair accessible with assistance and advance notice.

WED 12/2

**RODRIGO TOSCANO
& MAGDALENA ZURAWSKI**

Rodrigo Toscano's newest book of poetry, *Explosion Rocks Springfield*, is due out from Fence Books in the spring. His previous books include *Deck of Deeds*, *Collapsible Poetics Theater*, *To Leveling Swerve*, *Platform*, *Partisans*, and *The Disparities*. He lives in the Faubourg Marigny (seventh ward) of New Orleans.

Magdalena Zurawski is the author of *Companion Animal* (Litmus, 2015) and *The Bruise* (FC2 2008). Her commentary on aesthetics in the age of *Ferguson*, *FEEL BEAUTY SUPPLY*, can be found online at Jacket2.org. She teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Georgia and lives in Athens (Georgia).

MON 12/7

**ALEJANDRO MIGUEL JUSTINO
CRAWFORD & ORLANDO WHITE**

Alejandro Miguel Justino Crawford is a poet, video artist, and game designer living in Brooklyn, NY. <http://amjc.tv>

Orlando White is the author of two books of poetry: *Bone Light* (Red Hen Press, 2009) and *LETTERS* (Nightboat Books, 2015). He holds a BFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts and an MFA from Brown University. He teaches at Diné College and in the low-residency MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

WED 12/9

**PATRICIA SPEARS JONES
& SUSIE TIMMONS**

Patricia Spears Jones is poet, cultural critic, playwright and author of four major

poetry collections including the recently launched *A Lucent Fire: New and Selected Poems* (White Pine Press.) She served as a Mentor in the first year of Emerge-Surface-Be at The Poetry Project, and is a Senior Fellow at the Black Earth Institute, a progressive think tank. She has taught workshops at The Poetry Project, Poets House and in a variety of academic and community settings. She is a lecturer at LaGuardia Community College.

Susie Timmons was born in 1955. Poetry is her game. She prefers to maintain a low profile, and regards prose as the ultimate form of procrastination. A collection of earlier books entitled *Superior Packets* (Wave Books.) Stacy is her only friend.

FRI 12/11

LARA DURBACK & ALDRIN VALDEZ

Lara Durback is a poet who has been living in Oakland for 10 years. She has published books collectively under NoNo Press and Mess Editions. She is a founding member of the new press collective Material Print Machine at the Omni Commons in Oakland. Her book is forthcoming from Publication Studio Oakland.

Aldrin Valdez is a Pinoy painterpoet. They grew up in Manila and Long Island and currently live in Brooklyn. They have been awarded fellowships from Queer/Art/ Mentorship and Poets House. Their work has been published in Art21 Magazine, ArtSlant, BRIC Blog, The Cortland Review, In the Flesh Magazine, and Uncompromising Tang.

MON 12/14

JERICHO BROWN & MONTANA RAY

Jericho Brown's poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Best American Poetry*. His first book, *Please* (New Issues, 2008), won the American Book Award, and his second book, *The New Testament* (Copper Canyon, 2014), won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and was named one of the best books of the year by *Library Journal*, *Coldfront*, and the Academy of American Poets. He is an associate professor in English and creative writing at Emory University in Atlanta.

Montana Ray is a feminist poet, translator, and scholar. The author of 5 chapbooks and artist books, her first full length collection of poetry, *(guns & butter)*, is available from Argos Books. She's also a PhD student in comparative literature at Columbia University & the mom of Pokémon enthusiast, Amadeus.

WED 12/16

JIM DINE & DOROTHEA LASKY

Jim Dine Jim Dine is the author of the books *Welcome Home Lovebirds* (Trigram Press, 1969) and *Poems To Work On: The Collected Poems of Jim Dine* (Cuneiform Press, 2015). Ron Padgett writes, "The same verve that drives his paintings drives these poems, and added to it are a wonderfully goofy playfulness and a no-holds-barred, slightly scary exhilaration. Arp, Schwitters, and Picabia, move over."

Dorothea Lasky is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *ROME*. She teaches at Columbia University's School of the Arts and lives in New York City.

FRI 12/18 9pm

POET TRANSMIT

Poet Transmit engages in the connections between poetry, transmission, and

performance. The project was launched by artist/curator Victoria Keddie as a way to explore textual practice and modes of transmission. Writer/artist Cat Tyc acts as co-curator, exploring the potential of poetic projection and how it exists in expanded fields of time. This project is inspired by John Cage's statement that "Poetry is not prose simply because poetry is in one way or another formalized. It is not poetry by reason of its content or ambiguity, but by reason of its allowing musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words" (Silence, June 1961). Poet Transmit focuses on artists who use alternative methods of recitation or engage in the elements of music in their process.

With live performances by **Nina Sobell** with **Laura Ortman** (WMAT), **Stephanie Barber**, **Jen Liu**, **Giovanna Olmos**, **Mahogany L. Browne**, **Cathy de la Cruz** and **James Sprang**. The event will be broadcasted live, both within Parish Hall and online via livestream.

FRI 1/1 2PM - 2AM

The 42ND ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON BENEFIT READING

The New Year's Day Marathon is the Project's largest fundraiser and provides support for what we do best – serve as a public venue for the substantial presentation of innovative writing!

Featuring: **Hanif Abdurraqib**, **Julia Alsop**, **Vyt Bakaitis**, **Jennifer Bartlett**, **Jim Behrle**, **Rijard Bergeron**, **Felix Bernstein**, **Edmund Berrigan**, **Jennifer Blowdryer**, **Stephen Boyer**, **Marie Buck**, **Lonely Christopher**, **Yoshiko Chuma**, **Jace Clayton**, **CAConrad**, **Joey de Jesus**, **Ted Dodson**, **Thom Donovan**, **Maggie Dubris**, **Douglas Dunn**, **Andrew Durbin**, **Christine Elmo**, **Ed Askew Band**, **Betsy Fagin**, **Farnoosh Fathi**, **Carolyn Ferrucci**, **Cliff Fyman**, **John Giorno**, **Philip Glass**, **John Godfrey**, **Nada Gordon**, **Stephanie Gray**, **Janet Hamill**, **Diana Hamilton**, **Laura Henriksen**,

Heroes Are Gang Leaders, **Jibade-Khalil Huffman**, **Serena Jost & Dan Machlin**, **Amy King**, **Jaamil Kosoko**, **Ben Krusling**, **Dorthea Lasky**, **Denize Lauture**, **Karen Lepri**, **Kimberly Lyons**, **Filip Marinovich**, **Andriniki Mattis**, **Jonas Mekas**, **Jennifer Miller**, **Thurston Moore**, **Carley Moore**, **Sade Murphy**, **Eileen Myles**, **Martha Oatis**, **Edgar Oliver**, **Dael Orlandersmith**, **Trace Peterson**, **Wanda Phipps**, **Arlo Quint**, **Church of Betty**, **Camilo Roldán**, **Bob Rosenthal**, **Tom Savage**, **Ryan Sawyer**, **Daniel Schoonebeek**, **Sarah Schulman**, **Purvi Shah**, **Evie Shockley**, **Nathaniel Siegel**, **Yvette Siegert**, **Emily Skillings**, **Jesse Smith**, **Pamela Sneed**, **Sara Jane Stoner**, **Christina Strong**, **Nurit Tilles**, **Edwin Torres**, **Tony Towle**, **Anne Waldman**, **Nicole Wallace**, **Lewis Warsh**, **Simone White**, **Martha Wilson**, **Emily XYZ**, **Don Yorty**, **Jenny Zhang** and more tba.

Tickets available the day of for: \$25 General / \$20 Students + Seniors or in advance for \$20

MON 1/4

DESIREE BAILEY & KRISTEN GALLAGHER

Desiree Bailey was born in Trinidad and Tobago and grew up in Queens, NY. She has received fellowships from Princeton in Africa, the Norman Mailer Center, and Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop and is a recipient of the 2013 Poets and Writers' Amy Award. Her work is published or is forthcoming in Callaloo, Best American Poetry, Muzzle, Blackberry and other publications. She is currently the fiction

editor at Kinfolks Quarterly.

Kristen Gallagher's most recent poetry collection is *We Are Here* (2011). Since then: her chapbook *Florida*, (Well Greased Press;) "Dossier on the Site of a Shooting," a multi-platform digital work on GaussPDF, reviewed by Paul Soulellis in Rhizome; "Untitled (Rosewood Trip)," text with screenshots, in Printed Web 3. She is Professor of English at City University of New York-LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York.

WED 1/6

"WHITE ROOM"

"We are, thus, insistent on something structural: at most of the readings we attend, the room is mainly white. This is true even when the readers do not identify as white. This is true even when the readings happen in urban areas with an other-than-white majority. We're also fairly confident the mainly white room defines most of the readings we didn't attend, that it defines any number of different 'schools' of writing, from anything that might possibly call itself experimental to anything that might call itself lyric. From Vanessa Place to Tony Hoagland, a mainly white room. From Brown University to University of Iowa to Holy Names University, a mainly white room. From the 92nd Street Y to the St. Mark's Poetry Project to the Omni Commons, a mainly white room."

–Juliana Spahr & Stephanie Young, "The Program Era and the Mainly White Room"

The reasons for this are what this

"HOW DO I GET A READING?"

Participation in all series is by invitation from the series coordinator. It helps to be familiar with the Project's schedule and what the current series coordinators are interested in (see page 5). While the series are curated, we are always CURIOUS. If you want to get our attention, mail your books and poems to the office at 131 E. 10th St. NY, NY 10003 or email us at info@poetryproject.com. Your email will be forwarded to the series coordinators. Coordinator appointments change every two years to ensure diversity of perspective.

discussion attempts to understand. In response to the findings of Spahr and Young, we'll grapple with audience, in writing, to put forth some proposals.

MON 1/11

OPEN READING

Open readings have always been an integral part of The Poetry Project's programming. They provide a time and space for writers of all levels of experience to test, fine tune, and work out their writing and reading styles in front of a supportive audience. Reading time is approximately 3 minutes. Sign-in at 7:45pm.

WED 1/13

DOT DEVOTA & ANNE TARDOS

Dot Devota was born in St. Louis and travels full time with her partner Brandon Shimoda. Author of *The Division of Labor* (Rescue Press), *And The Girls Worried Terribly* (Noemi Press), *The Eternal Wall* (Bookthug), *MW: A Midwest Field Guide* (Editions19). Her latest work is a dated book about a woman trapped in a woman's body who finds the love of her life and watches a lot of news about war.

Anne Tardos is the author of nine books of poetry and several multimedia performance works. Among her books are *The Dik-dik's Solitude* (Granary, 2003), *I Am You*, (Salt, 2008), *Both Poems* (Roof, 2011), and *NINE* (BlazeVOX, 2015). She is the editor of Jackson Mac Low's *Thing of Beauty* (California, 2008), 154 Forties (Counterpath, 2012), and *The Complete Light Poems* [co-edited with Michael O'Driscoll] (Chax, 2015). A Fellow in Poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Tardos lives in New York.

FRI 1/15

DIANA CAGE & JANE DELYNN

Diana Cage is the author of five books and editor of three collections of fiction and essays. Her most recent book, *Lesbian Sex*

Bible, won a 2015 Lambda Literary Award. Diana lives in Brooklyn and teaches at Pratt Institute. January 15 is the official release of Cage's chapbook, *The Husbands, on Occasional Remarks: Prose Chaps and Audio Tracks*. Chapbooks will be available for purchase at reading; audio download available online.

Jane DeLynn is the author of the novels *Leash*, *Don Juan in the Village*, *Real Estate* (a New York Times Book Review "Notable Book of the Year"), *In Thrall*, *Some Do*, as well as the collection *Bad Sex Is Good*. She was a correspondent in Saudi Arabia for *Mirabella* and *Rolling Stone* during the Gulf War and has published articles, essays, and stories in a number of anthologies and magazines in the US and abroad. Her musical theater works have been performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Encompass Music Theater, and Theater for the New City.

WED 1/20

ELAINE EQUI & GINA MYERS

Elaine Equi's latest book is *Sentences and Rain* (Coffee House Press.) Her other collections include *Click and Clone*, *Ripple Effect: New and Selected Poems*, *The Cloud of Knowable Things*, *Surface Tension*, *Decoy*, and *Voice-Over*, which won the San Francisco State Poetry Award. She teaches at New York University and in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at The New School.

Gina Myers is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, *A Model Year* (Coconut Books, 2009) and *Hold It Down* (Coconut Books, 2013), as well as several chapbooks. She lives in Philadelphia where she works in higher ed communications.

MON 1/25

ERICA AMLING & NIINA POLARI

Eric Amling lives and works in New York City. His debut book *From the Author's Private Collection* (Birds, LLC) was

released in the summer of 2015.

Niina Pollari's first book, *Dead Horse*, was published by Birds LLC in 2015. She is also the author of two chapbooks and the translator of Tytti Heikkinen's *The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal* (Action Books, 2013).

WED 1/27

FRANK LIMA:

INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL IN POETRY

Editors **Garrett Caples** and **Julien Poirier** host a tribute to New York School poet Frank Lima on the publication of his new and selected poems, *Incidents of Travel in Poetry* (City Lights). With **David Shapiro**, **Ron Padgett**, **Tony Towle**, **Wendy Xu**, **Susie Timmons**, **Guillermo Parra**, **Vicki Hudspith**, **Bob Holman**, **Tim Keane**, **Filip Marinovich**, and more.

FRI 1/29

CHE GOSSETT & STEFFANI JEMISON

Che Gossett is a Black trans/femme theory queen in an open relationship with academia and an in an intimate relation with ideas. They have published work in the anthologies *Queer Necropolitics*, *Captive Genders* and *Trans Studies Reader volume II*.

Steffani Jemison's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Drawing Center, LAXART, the New Museum, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, Laurel Gitlen, Team Gallery, and other venues. Her publishing project, Future Plan and Program, commissions literary work by artists of color and has published books by Martine Syms, Jibade-Khalil Huffman, and Harold Mendez, among others. She teaches at Parsons The New School for Design, the Cooper Union, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Other Archer

Lee Ann Brown

Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2015

Reviewed by Gina Myers

“Generous, generative, [and] permission-giving” is how Lee Ann Brown describes the work of Bernadette Mayer in the editor’s note of the 25th anniversary edition of *Sonnets*, published by Brown’s own Tender Buttons Press. And the same could be said for Brown’s own work in *Other Archer*, a new collection from Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre. Running over two hundred pages, this English language collection published by a French press should serve well to introduce a new audience to Brown’s exuberant, life-affirming work.

Divided into five sections, *Other Archer*, gathers poems written over “a dozen or so years” of Brown’s “quest for a family,” she explains in the introduction. They pre-date her finding her partner and continue through pregnancy, marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing up to her daughter’s eleventh-and-a-half year. As such, the book brims with life and a joyous energy.

Throughout the collection there is a characteristic New York School playfulness demonstrated through wide-ranging poems that include acrostics, songs, lists, haikus, and collaborations. The poems incorporate overheard phrases and play with homophonic translations—the way arrows becomes eros becomes air rose, or sorrows to sore rose, and archive to arc hive. The work is permission-giving in its generosity and inclusiveness. In “Beauty Supply,” Brown writes:

“Include everything in poetry”
Even the things you think are nothing

Like the way the new white snowflake
Decoration waves its wild tentacles
against the high blue sky

In “June Full Moon Song of Accumulation,” she asks, “If Frank O’Hara had been a mom / How would he have written this psalm?” And the feeling is perhaps it would look exactly like this.

The largest section of the book, “The Wondrous Field,” is written for and with her daughter Miranda Lee Reality Torn. Chronologically, the poems in this section range from before Miranda’s birth to her twenty-second month. As Ted Berrigan said in an interview, “Most poets are experts in paying infinite attention to their own speech. One must likewise be cognizant and heed the language which reels about everywhere else.” And here Brown is cognizant of and delights in the language reeling around her, especially as she gets to witness and participate in her daughter’s acquisition of it—from “Say You Say,” where her daughter’s first word is “cah-tah,” to “K-T-I-CAHHHH” in “Dear Reality,” to the realization that Miranda can say anything in “Miranda Is Two.”

A number of poems in this section move quickly from topic to topic as if a young child is speaking. Whether it is Brown transcribing her daughter’s speech or crafting her own free associations doesn’t matter. The melding of voices that occurs is reminiscent of other poets who have incorporated their children’s speech into their work, such as David Shapiro with his son Daniel, and further drives home the lesson to “include everything.”

As these poems serve as a document of the years 2000-2012, there are also bleak moments alongside the joyousness that pervades the collection. Brown includes poems that address September 11, 2001 and the devastation following Hurricane Katrina. In “Consider the Removes,” she echoes Adorno: “No poetry after _____.”

And later:

How can I free associate
organically anymore

How can we treat a child thusly

Thrust of this argument

Helps us to imagine how

How can there be poetry

After such stillness after the shock

At moments such as these, it feels like words fail us. For Brown, it seemed impossible to return to poetry, something that clearly gives her so much joy. But it is exactly the joy and love for language that shines throughout *Other Archer*, that indicates there is always a way back.

In the book’s postface, series editor Christophe Lamiot Enos writes, “*Other Archer*, offers a fascinating narrative, one that is potentially of interest to anybody, in any language, even: The story of how language is attention paid to our surroundings, our conditions, ourselves also, potentially everything and everyone.” *Other Archer*, serves as a wonderful reminder that source material for poetry is everywhere if one just pays attention.

The Book of Feral Flora

Amanda Ackerman

Les Figues, 2015

Review by Adjua Gargi Nzinga
Greaves

Seemingly moreso than others beside it, this book is waiting for you on a shelf somewhere. A beastly green humming against a digital orange awaits you. A semi-matte coverstock of computer-generated skin awaits you. Inside, an apothecarian architecture awaits you. All manner of flickeringtricksters await you. Earthwarmth awaits you. Earthwrath, too.

Truly.

Our quests are parallel and intertwined. I have lived with this book—not yet read every word—but lived with and made it alive. Its poetics of utmost porosity model the ferocity all languageusers wield. I need you to know it is as powerful as it looks. You are powerful enough to withstand its energy. Likely you will doubt me. Rage. Curse me. That’s fine. An admirable and respectable response.

Below you will find: First, my early musings created at a distance; Second, my mind broken open by reckless engagement; Third, my first attempts to communicate this experience outside myself. Fourth, where we are now—fresh clarity.

Finally, before we enter REVIEWproper, a word about evolutionl consent l appropriation: I may be wrong about this book.

{I AM LUSH WITH THE ABUNDANCE OF THE ETERNAL DRAFT}

come learn with me, dear audience

The title’s promise dream emerges in an instant—Serene and rogue at the margins, developing autonomous avant garde suppleness, the floral beings within
beast

with abandon. When procured by a reader for promise alone, a title may flicker through enchantments and tauntings as the dream of it waxes and wanes. Amanda Ackerman’s *The Book of Feral Flora* scintillatingly promised plantlife allowed to gleefully transgress

a most fundamental taxonomic divide their perceived order and stasis,

and then within its material object flickered into a structural account of this floral ferality. Just like Richard Hardack “*Not Altogether Human*”: *Pantheism and the Dark Nature of the American Renaissance* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) in an instant promised the catharsis of

righteous indignance at its rigid and broken colorism, and in the next offered the sweet conceptual relief of its goal to expose this very failure of framing {?}

Both thrilled toward a creature comprehension of subjectivity. More and more there is a need within to know the creature self, and somewhere in that craving, flora may make themselves known as an aid in this. The promise of a wilding recreation for an industrialized self through this slow and supple statue company, these breadgivers, these calmest—these decorative—beings.

I am the Review.
I AM THE ANCIENT ADOLESCENT
iamstraightupcontagiomaniawatchout
i am the softest way possible
I am paratext.

I am also the things others have said
I am also the past.
{I am also first whispers from this dream realm.}

My debt sick cement weary
convalescent mind dared
my

debt sick cement weary
convalescent body to

LET THIS DEADLINE WILD ME
INTO A FERAL HEALTH THAT WILL
PROTECT AS A TRUER MEDICINE

It was the most generative dare,
and I assure you the effects have been
staggering.

whale songs only please
voidlight only please
plantspeed only please
ANNIHILATION, AUTHORITY,
ACCEPTANCE.

The Book of Feral Flora is a trickster
The 2015 Bulletin of Wilderness and
Academy is a trickster.
but

Damnit, Ackerman, you tricked me
with my own trick.

The I Broke Myself Too Beautifully
Wilderness Relocation Session
is

immanent

imminent

_____ scoffed, she knows you don’t
name the child until you’ve gotten to
know them

It was far too easy to become the
Vandemeer of my imagination. This
must just be what nature does if you
let it.

{It’s all unschool it’s all unschool it’s all
unschool}

The language {REDACTED:
UNAUTHORIZED APPROPRIATION}
spilled from my citymouse self before I
knew that it was prophecy.

This body was so pissed, SJ! And
the decision was that if we have to
destroy bacterial invaders when all we
want to do is create something about
another creation, it’s going to be on a
battlefield made of wet witch dreams,
where the only thing destroyed will be
Destruction, and in both of those first
terrible days of convalescence, I would
read about plant-sisters living inside
a whale during the day, and at night I
would lay my chaos head on the pillow
to sleep and know that I probably
wouldn’t be able to, but that if I was,
then I wanted to have the most feral
dreams possible.

Those nights were excruciating and
exhilarating: Throughout—I think?—I
slept in flickers, dreaming that I was
having insomnia. And in the morning
I would leave the bed with all this new
information from dreamland.

the boundaries seem to have blurred
irrevocably

I mustn’t forget to be clear about the
following—

{REDACTED:
UNAUTHORIZED APPROPRIATION}

**Alien Abduction
Lewis Warsh**

Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015
Review by Ryan Nowlin

“Our poetic tradition is purgatory”
—Phillipe Sollers

In his latest book of poetry, *Alien Abduction*, Lewis Warsh incorporates and/or reconfigures the myth of “extraterrestrial visitation” so that it conveys other unintended meanings. One of those meanings suggests an in-between place like a purgatory or a kind of non-place where the subject is exhausted by his own resources. The poems in this book are grounded in a tradition of realism whereby crucial experiences are recounted with objective distance. In “Superficial Things,” the poem which opens up the collection of *Alien Abduction*, a reference is made to something Rousseau reportedly said, though we never get to know exactly what that was, other than the fact that it can result in “a fat lip.” As the title of “Superficial Things” suggests, the possibility of inherent value in meaning cannot be separated from the act of arranging language into minute particulars. What sort of material practice is free from ideological bias? Maybe it’s best to follow the accents of the projected intelligentsia proffered in “Dear Communard”: “So there’s no sense of completion and only an occasional/ Word crossed out, deleted, ‘no completion’ seems/ to be the order of the day.”

Perhaps a hit song by Dean Martin, “Memories are Made of This,” might provide the soundtrack for a sojourn out of the city in the poem, “Hello Stranger.” Warsh’s poignant “preoccupation” with his and other people’s memories of a place seems negated by his sense that “[his] words seem to stand for something else.” Still, what remains intact after some distancing occurs are the images themselves: “The scene is frozen in/the back of my mind, like/shredded lettuce left out in the cold” or this lovely image, “Each leaf might/be a map of light/in paradise—out the car window/ at night.”

For Lewis Warsh pastiche is a critical tool for describing opaque distances. Take for example, the curious line from “Attachment, Detachment”:

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Ammiel Alcalay’s recent books include *Islanders*, and *neither wit nor gold: from then*. He is the initiator and General Editor of *Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative*, a series of student and guest edited archival texts emerging from the New American Poetry.

“ I am he who boarded a plane to Athens (1969) and I am he who pauses to catch my breath on the landing (1995).” Within the context of the poem, this seems to suggest a “discontinuity” of narrative, sort of like the “missing time” which alien abductees report to have experienced. In the aforementioned paratactically arranged poem, the sentence becomes the predominant mode of presentation. The etymological root of parataxis is “soldiers standing side by side.” Likewise, sentences standing side by side are not subordinated to a larger narrative form/frame nor are they thrown together at random. Another instance whereby Warsh creates tonal dissonance through parataxis would be the poem “Dark Study.” The autonomous meaning of each sentence in this poem is heightened, questioned, changed by the degree of separation or connection that the reader perceives with regard to surrounding sentences. For instance,

There is something we don’t know
about that’s happening elsewhere
A photo by Weegee of a corpse on the

streets of Paris
An emergency call from the school
nurse went unheeded

The connectivity of thought in the sentences throughout this poem may not always be immediately apparent, but when read as a totality they elicit a very plausible if not palpable sense of unease that what is happening elsewhere could occur anywhere. Lewis Warsh as a poet takes himself out of the work. His methods of inquiry pay fealty to the objects of his desire, yet in this matter of the visible everything is a trap. Hence, the reportage of “Dark Study” calculates a tubular darkness. The trade-off is: “We can trade identities for a few hours and you can feel what it’s like to be me.”

This brings me to the title poem, “Alien Abduction,” which is organized as a grid of materials in nine parts, each respective section is addressed to a mysterious other within the given context of an unnamed city. This organizational principle proves to be a viable apparatus for arranging a sequence of poems. The opening

stanza begins as such, “The line of least defense has melted away.” Throughout this poem, one can see a restless intelligence moving laterally and deeply through a poetic process which dates back at least to Warsh’s 1963 serial poem, *The Suicide Rates*. A landscape of desire is evoked, where starting a new life with another person is no more significant than eating or drinking; yet the thought of leaving always enters into the picture, as it does in this stanza:

Brackish water cascades from faucet to cupped hands and then disappears into drainage system of old-fashioned tenement apartment. Don’t complain.

You can love someone without lying.
You can love someone with equal intensity. You can sink into the sickness of infinitude and never return.

Another factor impacting the way one reads *Alien Abduction* is the quick, deft movement from line to line, as shown in this line from “Attachment, Detachment,” “Fast—you must move

fast through the lines of the poem—down the page—until the words fill your mind with color.” This would suggest that the poems in *Alien Abduction* are constructed to emit colorful signals sort of like a Brion Gysin inspired “Dreamachine.” Thus, any possible circumstance of language is a possible circumstance of poetry. Finally, in *Alien Abduction* one can find the occasional rejoinder indicative of Warsh’s frame of mind as in this line from “Difference”: “There’s a difference between being with someone and being alone, but I can’t tell what it is.”

Superior Packets
Susie Timmons
Wave Books, 2015
Review by Laura Henriksen

I had this dream The Poetry Project was a beach and I was a lifeguard. There were weird military-looking structures in the water, like a version of Fort Tilden, and I was standing on

the sand in a terrycloth windbreaker, telling everyone not to swim out too far, but Susie Timmons kept swimming out as far as she could. I would follow her out, and as soon I caught up with her, we would start laughing and swim back.

Sometimes I imagine Timmons as a mysterious camp counselor, leading her cabin on nature hikes in the afternoon like, “We are the Spanish Harps,/ We certainly hope you like us./ We are the Spanish Harps,/ Vwing, Vwing, Vwing.” Kind of impish and funny, a singer whose each line unfolds its strangeness into focus, and as it happens you wonder, how long have I been here with you at the Club Hibiscus? Forever? But even as she guides you in, making you laugh, it’s clear that she has more in mind. It will not be a simple trip to the Club Hibiscus. The nature hike will not go as planned.

The curiosity in Timmons’ poems, their questioning, is not with a childlike sense of wonder, but with

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an awareness and a sort of knowing sadness. Often they ask what would it have been like to be someone else, and what made that so impossible? “She gathered up her telegrams and/ set them apart// More emeralds. I wish I were here/ I wish though that I were you.” Timmons confronts the complete pain of trying to live—in New York or wherever—when your worth is measured by your ability to accumulate wealth. “every day is an ‘Ill Day.’” she writes, “I have the career I have always/ wanted// it’s called// mañana” she writes, a fuck-you to being defined by how and how well you labor. “On the wall of my new office, no windows.”

Timmons challenges ideas of success in poetry too—how that doesn’t represent a clean break from grosser forms of competition. She doesn’t describe being an artist in New York as some perfectly equitable utopia. “I wish while I was watching I wasn’t jealous of her./ I kept thinking she’s not as good as I am, but because/ she seems better, everyone’ll love her more, I guess/ she’s the new one now, they’ll be really glad to get rid of/ me, BACKWARD ACCULTURATION.”

But none of this is ever separated from the phenomenological experience of being in the world, sometimes wishing you were someone else, wishing you had done different things, even as you wish you didn’t wish that. Or even just wondering for a minute what it would have been like not to have sacrificed whatever it was you ended up sacrificing along the way. “I want to speak French/ don’t want to study it/ hurts my teeth, to be so ignorant/ of all the rooms in this/ magnificent palace./ Ice skating. You should/ know how! You might need to use/ that skill to get away, make your getaway.” Yet even in those moments of wonder and doubt, she can stand in the snow and be sure that most of it really won’t matter, something like total satisfaction won’t ever be achieved, but that’s not the end:

winter won’t be here forever, but
I don’t feel like I want to tell myself a lot of
lies about what’s going to happen when
spring comes
life’s going too fast, and with all this

recent gazing backward I wish time would
slow down
It was just back then, recently, there’s no
division
between my present and my childhood
I’ve always been myself, same as I was
After talking to you I felt better, did you
feel awful?

To be large and happy like the sun/ with
ne’er a dread nor worry!

These poems all feel like worlds to me, full and complex, but even in their tremendous fullness there is something unifying and steady. *Superior Packets* spans 30 years, and yet there’s this consistency to it. Not an unchanging consistency, but more the consistency of days becoming a life, who you are, who maybe you’ve sort of always been. The poem I just quoted from is “For Eileen,” about talking to Eileen Myles on the phone, and in *Inferno*, after getting off the phone with Timmons, Myles writes:

Susie’s true work is her voice. I don’t mean it in that corny craft way, but the poetry erupts from a place that sounds just like her. And she plays it. It’s this crazy incredible body, her work. She brings the feminine to an all time low then she just stands there and screams. You can’t help laughing at her work in all its purposeless bravery. It reminds me of children’s books, then suddenly turns all romantic or Marxist obscure; abject. By being small but everlasting. Like a bright crazy battery.

Susie Timmons is as great and as true a poet as any poet can be, imagining a world and giving it away, swimming out too far, permanently ahead, yearning, fucking around:

all I ever wanted the only thing I ever
wanted
the one thing I ever wanted out of life
was to be King of the People

Burn incense to be like you.
wear Tyrian Purple. retire early
all I ever wanted the only thing I ever
wanted
the one thing I wanted out of life
was to feel you up

and burn you up, baby, if I may be so bold

detergent.

Life in a Box is a Pretty Life

Dawn Lundy Martin

Nightboat Books, 2014
Review by Karen Lepri

There is no worse open secret in this country than the ongoing, systemic violence against black men, women, and the gender non-conformant. Whether from the location of the prison cell or the body itself, how do you undo these mechanisms of containment, unmap their coordinates? Dawn Lundy Martin’s *Life in a Box is a Pretty Life* resists any x-ray-like read on the unknown. It scrambles any easy science of the insides, the in and the into, the innate, the inmate, even the intimate lyric itself. “We are told about excavation as an ideal,” as Martin bares personal trauma interlaced with the institutional, these “Filament traces in the historical body.” Yet Martin hacks at this historical construction of the abjected black body, and destroys the usual path to trauma’s interior. The book’s ultimate success is forgetting or disappearing the abject, holding up “Hair, a spare mass of grief.”

In the speaker’s grip, the reader touches the eerie massiveness of grief and rides its shifting voices and desires from race science to Carrie Mae Weems’ photography to the poet herself. Reflecting on blackness as an experience of containment not only from without but within, Martin writes, “Capacity dominated / their entire / being. Shaped // citizens determined men’s lives.” The period between “being” and “Shaped” stalls the desire for “Body as concavity. As excitement. As instigator.” This “excitement” is where Martin trips us up—dare I say, joyfully, in this book as in her previous *Discipline*—with the speaker’s will to shed the skin, the “living form that is bark,” the cold metal box, and to lick its walls. She pushes: “Here’s the thing about being a prisoner, it’s transformative.”

Moving between these positions, and between discourses, is perhaps how this work aims “To close the distance between the abject and bliss.” This hazardous drive begins with the title’s “pretty” and thrives through testing discipline’s lure. She writes, “An alignment is an affection,” as in it affects you and it likes you. In Martin’s writing, ideal beauty or pleasure bottoms out. With a keen eye to the bottom’s nefarious abuse, Martin points to an underground route, a wild leak, “A desire to rip the bottom out of experience—these bodies, they say, are ungovernable.”

The book’s deft movement between broken lines and long ones, a perfect “poemy” moment and a hard crack on the ear (say, “Trauma sack”), harbors no romanticism. Instead it insists on how aesthetics are born out of the politics of racism, capitalism, and unfreedom. One of many marquees reads, “WHEN WE ARE INSIDE THE PRISON / WE CAN ONLY THINK OF BEAUTY.” Through Martin, we see that thinking “life on the inside,” the prison that structures the very way some of us walk “free,” blows the metaphor of containment to terrifying proportions that implicate anyone beauty-struck.

The reader’s shock at “PRISON”’s capital paradox filters through Martin’s own ironic grammar and message:

A dead fawn under machinery. I am the machinery. Am also the end of the sentence. In heat, they want me, also to lap at their crotches saying thank you because their syntax wants definition of this body. All the colors.

I’s innocence denied, definition denied, parole denied, again and again. At the end of Martin’s figurative sentence, we reach bottom and face a poetic space of dissonance: “I dig into it, open space, and fall through other side, to black sound, a black stone, familiar thieves, Urdu or the last language we spoke before mother’s milk.” Through the poem, we arrive at the unmapped, the un-sensible jumble before “body” has a name. Alongside Martin, we take up the surge of being, “heads hanging

outside apartment windows.” In an interview Martin remarks there is no freedom in this book, but “There is writing and then there is this cut, this whelm”—the window of the poem cracked open. It is surely never so simple as to say, the writing gets us on the outside again, because the body, like any house or box, stands for what transpires inside.

Shorthand and Electric Language Stars **Stephanie Gray**

Portable Press @ Yo-Yo Labs, 2015
Review by Thom Donovan

I know but I don’t care
Then I know but I don’t see
Now I see but I don’t know
I care but I don’t care
—Blondie

I heard your tone from way back here
in the diner, even with my back to you,
even though I didn’t know what you
were saying, but I knew what you were
saying.

—Stephanie Gray

This past spring I taught a course on “The Poetics of Disability.” On the first day of class, I asked the students to define “disability” and, if they wished, to describe any ways that they identified as disabled. In prompting the students, I acknowledged the risks of “coming out” as disabled, and that there were many urgent reasons not to do so. Going around the table there were a range of responses. Some identified as disabled through a particular impairment, while others referred to disabilities that were less visible and recognized: for instance, taking prescription medications for depression and ADD; having grown up with a developmentally disabled sibling; not being a native English speaker in the USA; having brown or black skin.

Following from this exercise, we spent a good deal of time unpacking how race and gender-based oppression intersects with ableism, whereof, as Tobin Siebers writes in his book

Disability Theory, “It is as if disability operates symbolically as an othering other. It represents a diacritical marker of difference that secures inferior, marginal, or minority status, while not having its presence as a marker acknowledged in the process” (6).

When my turn came going around the table, I recalled being in elementary school and having to see a “specialist” to assess if I had a learning disability. During the testing, the specialist played tapes of conversations and ambient sound while she asked me questions. When conversations were too discernible—when they did not become part of the background noise—I could no longer concentrate on the specialist’s questions. Following the tests, which determined that I had an “auditory processing” disability, my parents were determined to keep my disability off my “official record” and to teach me to hear “normally.” As late as college, I still remember the disability making itself present at crucial moments. During a job orientation the summer following my freshman year, for instance, I became hopelessly confused when asked to carry on two conversations simultaneously while performing a series of simple tasks, to the surprise of my coworkers.

What is the relationship between disability and aesthetics? And to whaae to answer them for myself. I wonder sometimes if we do not become poets because we don’t speak “correctly”—“normally”; which is to say, because dominant uses of language are not “ready-at-hand,” but rather present themselves as “conspicuous,” “obstinate,” and “obtrusive” (Martin Heidegger’s terms)? To write in this case is to push up against the limits of language’s “official” usages; those policed and guarded carefully by those with power. So many poems I have written, looking back on them, are attempts to listen, to hone my attention, recalling a state of concentration against the constant distraction and confusion to which my auditory processes necessarily tend. Disabled within and before language—by the embodied, social condition that

language is—perhaps one discovers expressions and uses of language that resist the current sensual regimes of our domination, control, and subjectification. At the very least, one brings to the foreground the extent to which the built environment depends on the regulation and containment of linguistic difference.

Approaching Gray's newest collection, *Shorthand and Electric Language Stars*, the reader is situated in a space that is as intensely aural as it is visual and dialogic. In many of the poems, Gray will reiterate a certain word or phrase, exhausting its "aspects" (Ludwig Wittgenstein). There is something pleasant about this purposive exhaustion, which resembles a practice common to New York School poets of making lists, as well as the "insistent" grammars of Gertrude Stein and her imitators. However, I read these poems more specifically, through a communication problem/process. In their slippage, they get at mishearings that most hearing people have experienced routinely, especially navigating an urban environment. They also explore the problem of context—the cultural-bodily situatedness of meaning production. Entering conversations with only partial information; having to glean aurally, to fill-in the missing parts; watching for contextual clues, what Erving Goffman calls "cuing," more closely. Gray foregrounds mis/hearing and mis/contextualization, pressing a "[s]ecret collusion between what you meant and what you ended up saying" (62) into the service of composition.

Anyone who has spent any time with Steph knows that communication with her can be a challenge, depending on the circumstances. I recall years ago, when she attended the reading series I used to host on the Lower East Side, PEACE on A, that she told me she loved the series because she could hear the readings so clearly, attributing this to the acoustics of the space, which had low ceilings and ample furnishings. I have also been in spaces with Steph where it was not easy to communicate, because sounds tended to get lost and bounce around more. Feeling

somewhat presumptuous about making reference to Steph's impairment in this review—both that she would want me to and that I could describe it with any degree of accuracy—I solicited a description from her in her own words. This is what she wrote me:

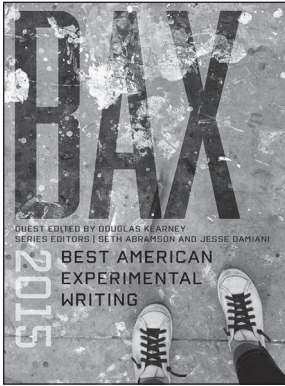
So.. I guess technically it's called a "sensory neural hearing loss" which means I may hear all the sounds but not hear the very highest pitches. Which means I might not understand all the words without reading lips. That's why I joke sometimes but kind of mean it when I say if I could "casey-kasem-ize" everyone's voices, I'd be able to hear everything. If everyone had a low voice and enunciated clearly and there was no background noise I'd probably hear 100%. NY is loud and for some reason most rooms I seem to be in are high ceilinged with a lot of echo. The other joke I make is that I can hear pretty well in all the places you are not supposed to talk, namely two: libraries and church. If I could hold all my meetings and hangouts there I would!

Gray's poems attend the ways that we communicate through the foregrounding and creative use of her impairment. They also amplify the fact that to understand can determine survival, where hearing loss makes one more reliant upon visibility in an urban environment, and being working class, a woman, and gay undoubtedly tend to increase the possibility of the experience of precarity. Revisiting a New York (School) aesthetic very much given to problems of contextualization and the "indexical present" (Adrian Piper), Gray's writing and filmmaking challenge the stakes of her elected aesthetic genealogy. The compulsive indexing, naming, and (cognitive) mapping of an urban space—the signs and sounds of such a surround—proceed from an orientation through precarity and risk where "[s]yllables emerge from disaster" (44) and often "silence alone protects" (37). Here, "[e]very low note gone high would make me die" (62) because sound conditions the "good life" and what lives are "worth living" in an ablest society.

Focusing on Gray's specific embodiment, and speculating on how that embodiment may have shaped her poetics, does not adequately address much that I value in this work. Namely, its indelible senses of humor as well as its ability to transport one "holosensually" (Fred Moten) through a synaesthetic discourse of the senses. With the loss of the 'lower registers' the powers of sight become acute, and this seems a reason why we must read Gray's films and poems in tandem, as the stills from her films which appear in *Shorthand* encourage us to do. Concomitantly, the ears see and touch, prompting the reader to consider how the senses enable certain spatial and social practices while restricting others. In many of the poems, a voice lifts off the page. This voice is light-hearted, yet sarcastic. In its tonalities I often hear the gallows humor and hopeless hope of someone raised in Upstate New York. It pokes fun at other poets and the culture of New York City. It cares not for distinctions between "low" and "high" culture, reserving the poem as a space where head-bangers and literary theorists can collide. I take these collisions to be a crucial part of Gray's promethean project, whereby she steals the fire of poetry and cinema as a form of class warfare, re-appropriating their forum, their tenuous authorities, for her own agency and the agency of her communities—from Buffalo, NY to Flushing, Queens and no doubt elsewhere.

When I come to the end of many of these poems, I find myself starting at the beginning, puzzling at how Gray got from point A to point B. The poems don't move syllogistically, but through the improvisation of a psychological process. Sometimes they are diaristic, recounting events from the day. Sometimes they are more structural, even procedural. Many of them are about knowing (and what one doesn't or can't know, for lack of information). "[W]hat did you know that I didn't know the last time I stepped through here not knowing that you knew it all when you were written. [...] I didn't know that you didn't know that I knew you knew everything" (30; my ellipses and brackets). This is part of their

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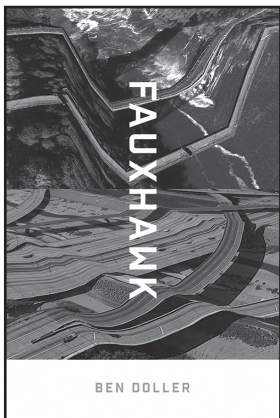
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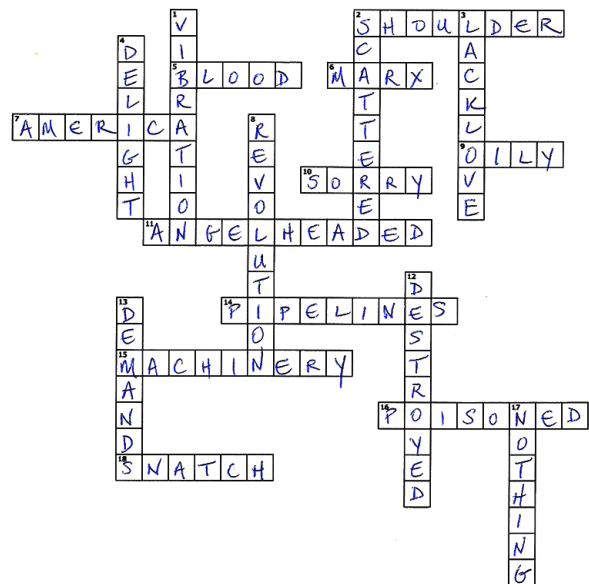
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mystery and charm—that they put us in a position of not knowing, or of only coming to know recursively, through multiple readings of the poem. "[B]asking in ambient bummers" (44), hearing "all the notes extended glamorous and echo-y" (82), they are messily revelatory, and what they reveal most of all is the drama of a psychological and social process that extends from mis/recognition, mis/hearing, mis/articulation. Mis/hearing, in Gray's poetry, provides a permission to world-make with others through contingency, to prefigure through what might otherwise be taken as "mistake."

Last Issue's Answers

best minds



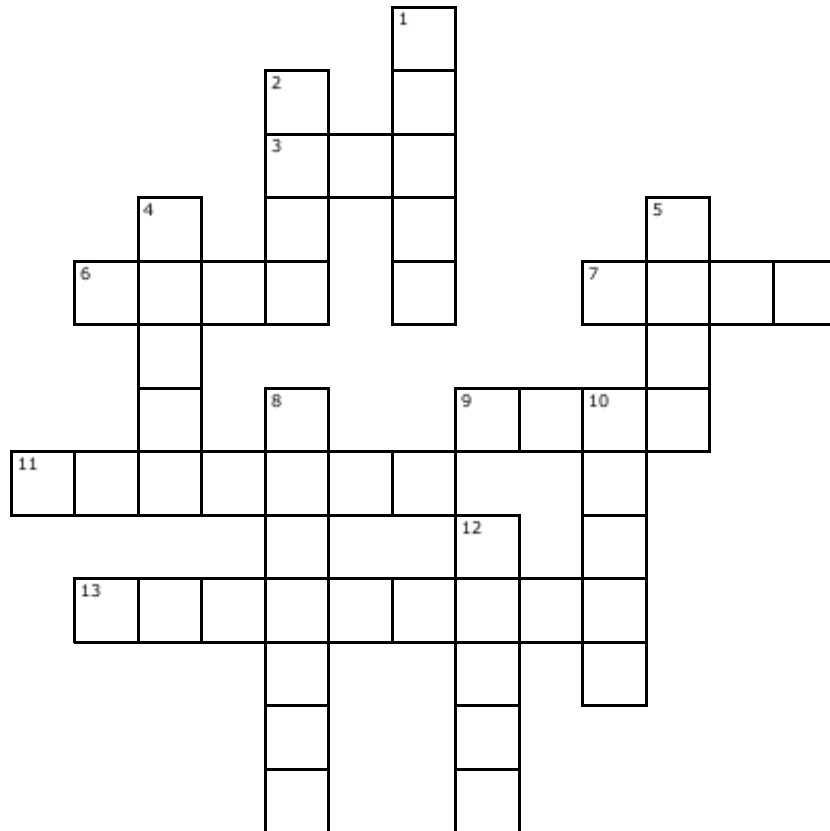
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"Sacred Emily."

Congratulations to last month's winner:
Chuck Stebleton from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Crossword Puzzle

there there



Across

- 3. That is the way we are--- and indivisible
- 6. Come on--- on come on on
- 7. A peaceful life to arise her, noon and--- and moon
- 9. A not torn ----wood color
- 11. I forgive you everything and there is nothing to---
- 13. There is no--- in mercy and in medicine

Down

- 1. Sweeter than peaches and pears and---
- 2. A shallow hole--- on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less
- 4. I love--- and obey I do love honor and obey I do
- 5. Jack--- Jack Rose
- 8. ---belly is so kind to me
- 10. Sweet--- sweet sweet sweet tea
- 12. Pussy pussy--- what what



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