

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS FEATURE BARBARA COLE ON ROBERT WALSER IN MEMORIAM THOM DONOVAN ON DAVE NOLAN MILES CHAMPION IN CONVERSATION WITH TREVOR WINKFIELD POEMS ARIANA REINES CALENDAR JOSEF KAPLAN REVIEWS CHAPBOOKS BY EDDIE HOPELY DOUGLAS PICCINNINI MARIANNE MORRIS & STAN APPS HAILEY HIGDON REVIEWS CHRIS MCCREARY PAUL KILBREW REVIEWS ANSELM BERRIGAN MICHAEL NICOLOFF REVIEWS ERICA KAUFMAN KEN WALKER REVIEWS EDWIN TORRES SARA WINTZ REVIEWS CATHERINE WAGNER JORDAN DAVIS REVIEWS TAN LIN BEN FAMA REVIEWS MATVEI YANKELEVICH MARK MENDOZA REVIEWS TOM RAWORTH



\$5?



THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Corina Copp

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The Poetry Project, Ltd. Staff

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MARK MENDOZA / TOM RAWORTH

COVER BY ERICA WESSMANN.

Erica Wessmann is an artist who loves the poets and the project.

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. from the director

No, I haven't quit, I did what bosses do and delegated some of my responsibilities. Thank you to Joanna Fuhrman for receiving the Wednesday Night Coordinator torch for the season so I can focus on following the dollar signs. We have a great new crew of brainiacs with us. Read on; Arlo will tell you about who's on what.

This is the Poetry Project's 45th season, and we are planning a couple of retrospective-type events for the spring. We are thrilled to announce that the Project received a Strategic Technology Project re-grant from LitTAP so that we may fund the transfer of 10 open-reel videotapes. These tapes are of readings that occurred in 1977–78 as part of a project called Public Access Poetry. While PAP championed the community of poets that were identified with the Poetry Project, these readings were filmed in a television studio on Rivington Street and broadcast on public access television. Given that the videos are on antiquated formats, it is very likely that no one has actually seen any of these programs since they originally aired.

The 60-tape archive was donated to the Poetry Project in 2009 by one of the producers/organizers, Greg Masters. We have selected 10 tapes for conversion with hopes to transfer the entire collection at some point in the near future. We are currently asking for matching grants of \$2,500, the cost to transfer 10 tapes. If you want to help fund this important restoration, please email us at info@poetryproject.org and write "PAP Tapes" in the subject line. Some of the poets featured on the 10 tapes we are converting are: Joanne Kyger, Ted Berrigan, Eileen Myles, Alice Notely, Bernadette Mayer, Lewis Warsh, Joel Oppenheimer, Peter Orlovsky, Tim Dlugos, Ron Padgett, Rene Ricard, Jackson Mac Low and others.

Given that this is such a unique opportunity for community building and collaboration, we have partnered with Anthology Film Archives, who will co-host a series of public screenings in Spring of 2011. Stay tuned for more details.

As tempting as it will be to hang out across the Avenue at the Sly Fox on Wednesday nights, there are many readings I want to attend. I think it's crucial that I don't become a stranger at Project events. To quote the Jackson 5, "Where there is love / I'll be there."

Stacy Szymaszek

2. from the program coordinator

CHANGES

This is the Poetry Project's 45th season and it feels like new times. All of our regular series—that's Monday, Wednesday, and Friday reading series as well as the Monday night talk series—have new curators. Myself, I've spent most of the off-season hiding in the woods and am just now re-emerging in society slightly spooked by East Village noise but feeling basically good about my new position as Program Coordinator. While Artistic Director Stacy Szymaszek is doling out her own special brand of justice on Grand Jury duty in Brooklyn, it's mostly just me and new Program Assistant Nicole Wallace figuring out our new jobs here in the office.

I still cry most days about Corrine Fitzpatrick's absence but am very happy that Nicole is here. Nicole is the author of the recently published *WHITE FLOWERS*, a loose-leaf multi-media chapbook in an envelope. She edits and assembles *IN THE KEY OF C MAGAZINE* in Brooklyn and is working on her Master of Library Science at Queens College, CUNY. Part-time, she is one-half of the musical two-piece GOAT. Her work has appeared in the *Minetta Review*, *Portable Boog Reader 3*, *Ribald Crow Powder Magazine*, and the *Physical Poets Home Library Vol. 4*. Nicole has been co-curating Friday nights at the Project for the past two seasons. She's also been working a classically terrible job for the last three years (at the grocery hole), from which she is now liberated. Since Poetry Project employees are allowed to wear whatever clothing they like (not OK at the grocery hole!), she's looking forward to looking good in her amazing collection of vintage dresses.

Ex-co-curator Eddie Hopely has moved to Philadelphia for graduate school and Nicole is focused on assisting the program. The new curator of the Friday late-night series is Brett Price. Brett is an editor of *Forklift, Ohio: A Journal of Poetry, Cooking, and Light Industrial Safety*, and the author of *Trouble With Mapping*, a chapbook (Flying Guillotine, 2008). Brett is originally from Cincinnati and he's a graduate of the Bard MFA program in poetry.

Macgregor Card inherits the Monday night reading series from Dustin Williamson. Card is a poet, translator and bibliographer who lives in Queens. His first collection, *Duties of an English Foreign Secretary*, recently came out from Fence Books (December 2009). A new chapbook, *The Archers*, is forthcoming from Song Cave. With Andrew Maxwell, he is co-editor of *The Germ: A Journal of Poetic Research*. He teaches poetry at Pratt Institute and is an associate editor of the MLA International Bibliography. He recently married Megan Ewing and their wedding was pure joy.

Michael Scharf is taking over the Talk Series from me. Michael is the author of *Telemachiad* (sugarhigh!), *Vérité* (ubu editions), and *For Kid Rock / Total Freedom* (Spectacular Books). His criticism appears regularly in *sustainable aircraft*, where he is contributing editor. Other critical pieces have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Coldfront*, *Design Observer*, and *EOAGH*.

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

After a great three-year run curating the Project's signature series, Stacy Szymaszek is turning Wednesday nights over to Joanna Fuhrman. Joanna is the author of three collections of poetry published by Hanging Loose Press, *Freud in Brooklyn* (2000), *Ugh Ugh Ocean* (2003), and *Moraine* (2006.) Her fourth book, *Pageant*, won a Kinereth Gensler award and was published by Alice James Books in December 2009. For many years, she has taught poetry in public schools and libraries for Teachers & Writers Collaborative, the C.E.P.P. and Poets House. Currently, she teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and in New York City public schools.

Arlo Quint

2. from the editor

“—To get out of this dignified stationary!” —Jean Day

Dear Poetry Projectors: I am so glad that the poetry season is upon us; to be honest I am glad too for jacket weather because I am a jacket-aholic. It seems much is upon us. Much connectivity, as various “scenes” continue to brighten and collect each other—just see Danny Snelson et al at *Prelude*, or the *opened* zine in the UK touching on the cross-ocean Greenwich Festival and SoundEye. Yet there’s much stormy weather, much oily sassoon, much men in the mines, much “talk of the war ending,” which is talk, isn’t it. “To get out of this dignified stationary!” seems one way to loosen the confines when they become less ready, if a thing can *become less* (you can’t; hang in there!). Oh convention, as we commence anew with two or more readings a week, we will *fie* you with goodness and vibrancy. And brand-new staff! And the IKEA capitalog is a tome! Good thing there is a proliferation—not to sound too romantic about it—of small presses to put out books of pleasurable skim reads that have nothing to do with storage or \$19.99 or anti-slip underlay or, maybe they do. All power to them. All power to Nina Simone and Pirate Jenny. It’s been a summer but it’s ceasing and my rights are still intact, plus this issue of the *Newsletter* makes me feel like a letter from the Antipodes, and I wonder where the antipodes is for this *Newsletter*. See you soon!

Mangles, Corina Copp

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• • •

WITH REGRET

It's been a rough few months for art and poetry. We regretfully note the passing of Louise Bourgeois, Shusaku Arakawa, Leslie Scalapino, Deborah Remington, Peter Orlovsky, Jim Neu, Tuli Kupferberg, Peter Seaton, and Edwin Morgan.

ANNOUNCE

We're happy to help announce that the Ontological-Hysterical Theater is now officially home to the **Incubator Arts Project!** The Incubator has long been a vital supporter and programmer of the new, emerging, experimental theater arts (recently winning an OBIE), and it's a joy to know that this will continue. Visit incubatorarts.org for more info.

Also, see **James Franco** as the young Allen Ginsberg in *Howl*. Opens September 24. <http://howlthemovie.com/>

MARIBOR



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IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Dave Nolan (1962–2010)

THOM DONOVAN

“Things are symbols of themselves.”

— Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Dave Nolan, who died this past February 25, 2010, in the New York City subway coming home from work, and who served as lead sound engineer and archivist at the Poetry Project from the mid-eighties through the mid-nineties, was both a friend and my colleague at the 92nd Street Y on the Upper East Side.



We worked at the Y together for what would have been four years this past April. Dave was a loved person at the Y. Loved for his friendliness and collegiality, and for his unique fashion sense (I will never forget the signature cowboy hat coupled with business attire and hippie accessories).

I would look forward to having a conversation with Dave, usually at my desk about archival issues related to our jobs, but also about downtown poetry and music, and the social histories surrounding St. Mark's Church and the Bowery Poetry Club.

In terms of Dave's involvement with the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and Bowery Poetry Club in particular, BPC founder Bob Holman has told me: “If it was poetry, and it was sound, it was Dave.” During a phone conversation, Holman described Dave as “the last of the nice guys” stressing Dave's “abilities as a listener”—to poetry, to music, to people. During the first two years of the Bowery Poetry Club, Dave was instrumental in designing the Club's sound system and archive. “He created the tech system at the Club,” Holman explained to me. According to Holman, Dave also acted as “broker” between BPC and the Wetlands music club, where Dave was to be found working the boards on a more or less nightly basis.

Everyone I have spoken to about Dave's life and work has mentioned his extraordinary commitment to community, spoken word, and sound recording as an extension of history making. According to Jane Preston, the Managing Director of Poets House, where Dave was a sound engineer from the early nineties until his death: while Dave was not Poets House's first sound engineer, he was the engineer to first “cement” the organization's awareness of archival questions and problems. Regularly recording Poets House's annual Bridge Walk, according to Preston, Dave introduced digital media to Poets House, trained staff, and supervised the recording and logging of events. What attracted Dave to Poets House's programming, also according to Preston, was the “cogent thinking” and “lively dialogue” of particular panels and conversations.

Dave and I worked on a project together at the Y to digitize the Unterberg Poetry Center's collection of audio recordings from the Center's ongoing literary event series. Through Dave's example I learned much about archivism both as a profession and an art. Not only did Dave teach me to think about what the job of the archivist is and how properly to perform it, but also about archivism as an ethical relationship to cultural materials. Without the care and dedication of rare people like Dave, we wouldn't have archives, and therefore would risk losing our relationship to the past, to history, and to possible futures. As a result of Dave's efforts, many hundreds of the Y's programs are preserved for posterity. Likewise, Dave was instrumental in creating an infrastructure for further preservation projects across the Y's many departments and programs.

To take on many of the archival projects that Dave undertook made him that much more rare a person. This past New Year's Day at St. Mark's Church, Dave recorded yet another poetry marathon for the Poetry Project. This is a work of love. To attend local poetry, to attend poetry culture as a marsh for more visible cultural expressions and forms, to attend poetic language as a glue which binds us all. During the reception following the funeral for Dave at St. Mark's Church on March 3rd, Poetry Project Director Stacy Syzmaszek expressed a regret that she didn't get to celebrate Dave's work for the Project more. A similar sentiment was expressed by Bob Rosenthal, co-executor of the Allen Ginsberg Trust, who, when I spoke to him by phone, said that “it was our faulty view that we expected Dave to always be around.” Dave is gone now, but through his boundless enthusiasm, deliberate effort, and love for community, music, and poetry, he has left us with invaluable recorded materials—a vital living history with which to construct future archives. Poetry will miss Dave Nolan, and so will I.

• • •

The Archivist

—for Dave

Because you wanted the world to hear
What you heard
Ears are all we are sometimes
A moment of music on them

The details not the mirage
Of hearing that's what the archivist sees
Like we were sometimes just eyes
No longer I when we see
Stein said that
Because the world is mindful

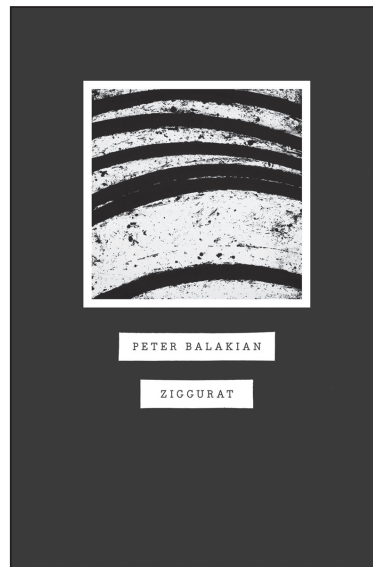
Of identity you were taping it
All the time even the noise even the blanks
Before they organized our memories
What was even searchable
As memory

How any of it could impress us
This is where poetry comes in
Structuring the thing otherwise
All that time with the tape on
Just in case there was music.

Thom Donovan is the co-editor of ON Contemporary Practice and the editor of Wild Horses Of Fire weblog. His book *The Hole* is forthcoming with Displaced Press this fall.

PHOENIX & POETS

FROM CHICAGO



Ziggurat

Peter Balakian

“Peter Balakian’s *Ziggurat* ingests calamity and dissolves it into almost exhilarating rhythm and image, pushing the language until it feels like it’s breaking into something new. The work aims to reveal the human capacity to integrate and, after hard passage, transcend.”—Sven Birkerts
CLOTH \$25.00

Tourist in Hell

Eleanor Wilner

“Wilner is a poet of incomparable erudition and gifts of insight. There is no other contemporary poet who has addressed, as she has throughout her distinguished career, the world legacy of history and myth with such a keen sense of wonder, curiosity, and, in the end, literal re-vision. *Tourist in Hell* furthers Wilner’s reputation as a great poet of the invisible, the forgotten, and the potential.”—Susan Stewart
PAPER \$18.00



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ESSAY

Robert Walser: Modern Method, Not Madness

BARBARA COLE

Though Walter Benjamin's claim that "we can read much by Robert Walser, but nothing about him" no longer seems as applicable today as it might have in 1929, there nevertheless remains something eerily enigmatic about this modernist figure. What we may read by him or about him seems to inspire parallels with other literary "giants" whose complex writings seem inextricably bound to their even more complex lives. But what do such comparative formulations reveal about Walser or his writing?

The enduring shadow cast by his absent, depressive mother has been compared to that of Kafka's fraught relationship with his father. His years of confinement, first at Waldau in Bern, followed by more than a quarter of a century in Herisau, evoke Pound's years at St. Elizabeths (though Walser himself might have been more inclined to reflect on Hölderlin). The tragic circumstances of his death—found face-down in the snowy fields of the asylum on Christmas Day 1956—not to mention that his body was gruesomely photographed in this manner, though not a suicide, still evokes the macabre fixation around Woolf's decisive plunge or, worse, Pasolini's crushed body splattered across Italian newspapers.

Swiss by birth, his writing style—or styles, so difficult to pin down a singular mode—have been compared broadly to his German-writing contemporaries, Hesse and Mann; his admirers, Kafka, Musil, and Benjamin; his predecessors, Cervantes, Fielding and Rousseau; his fellow modernists, Joyce and Proust; as well as postmodernists like Pynchon, Barth, and Bernhard. Though he is rarely compared to a woman—let alone an American woman—I can't help but draw analogies between Walser and Emily Dickinson: the self-imposed isolation from the world, the ruminations of madness, the much-debated lifelong virginity, and yet, the impressive if not inconceivable body of work discovered after their deaths, writing capable of such despair as much as wit, such desire tempered by quiet reflection.

But, in the end, what is most difficult about Walser is that he is, in fact, so *unlike* any other writer. His privileging of servants and laborers in his novels, his mixture of class critique bordering on affectionate portraiture, may remind readers

of Dickens but the comparison inevitably proves lacking. His snippets and vignettes, his take on the darkest of inner motives and moods even as they are cast in the lightest of language play may seem reminiscent of Beckett at first glance but only so far. His (debated) turning away from writing might seem akin to Oppen's hiatus in the face of political turmoil, but Walser seems to have avoided reflecting on the turmoil of the world wars. What is to be gained from such comparative analyses in which x clearly does not equal y ?

**"I myself am sometimes
well-known, sometimes
a stranger"**

RW,
Microscripts

Perhaps the most accurate statement to be made about Walser's writing, then, is that it is uniquely his.

Just recently, New Directions has published a selection of what may be the most quintessentially Walser of all Walser texts, in *Microscripts*. Originally dismissed by his otherwise loyal friend and executor, Carl Seelig, as the "indecipherable" scribblings of a schizophrenic writing in code, the microscripts emerge as Walser's most enigmatic and haunting literary legacy. Translated by Susan Bernofsky, whose introduction explains: "The 'microscripts' have now been painstakingly analyzed by scholar Werner Morlang and Bernhard Echte, who spent more than a decade laboring over the transcriptions of the 526 diminutive pages, and so we know they were the original drafts Walser would copy over in a fair hand before sending them off for publication" (10).

ESSAY

Following Bernofsky's informative introduction, the image of the first microscript in the collection announces itself as a tear-off calendar page from 1926 reading, "Mai 16 Sonntag," the red "16" indicating a referent devoid of any particular reference. What appears as a minimalist gesture is immediately upended as one turns the page to glimpse Walser's "pencil method," or *Bleistiftgebeit*, crammed between the margins, cramped and illegible. This juxtaposition, in many ways, enacts the entire reading experience of *Microscripts*—those referents which one might reflexively think of as self-explanatory do not yield such simplistic interpretations. There is no simple interpretation, no clear-cut meaning. Even more, the reverse side of this first microscript of the collection (No. 337) underscores the superb quality of the New Directions reproduction, as the bleed-through from the red "16" is just barely perceptible beneath Walser's microscopic script. The collection of microscripts (again reminiscent of Dickinson's fascicles)—written on the backs of envelopes, tear-off calendars, magazine pages, business cards and postcards, postal wrappers, business correspondence, and large sheets of artist paper—bear witness to the tactile nature of Walser's work. Each crease of the paper, each tear in the margins, the postal marks bleeding through from one side to the other, all emerge as part of the textual experience.

Microscript 350, for instance, written on a portion of an honorarium notice from Rudolf Mosse Verlag, demonstrates Walser's playfulness in appropriating the printed matter. As the "About the Microscripts" endnotes explain, Walser "turned the final 'G' of 'Verlag' (publisher) into a 'C' and added an 'H' to make the end of the word spell out 'ach' (a lament)" (116). Entitled "Crisis," it quickly slips into a meditation on critics: "Could this sentence, which perhaps seems not the most jubilantly exultant where its framer's framework is concerned, merit criticism?" (45).

For all of the critic's rehearsing of Walser's falsely-diagnosed schizophrenia, his voluntary or reluctant years of institutionalized exile, the physical or psychological symptoms behind his turn to the pencil, it is genuinely refreshing to confront the playfulness which opens one microscript: "Is it

perhaps my immaturity, my innocence or, to put it in a more ordinary way, my foolishness that has prompted me to ask myself whether I would like to enter into relations with you" (53). Page after page, the playfulness leaps between toying with desire—"All his longing, how he longed for it again!" (39)—and teasing of language: "This reality. This treasure trove of in-fact-having-occurred-nesses. This car drove off, and he and she were sitting in the back. How do you like my 'trove' and 'drove'? Make a note of these words! They're not my invention....Don't you think my 'trove' is *ben trovato*? Please do be so good as to think so" (62). The language play is so intricate, so seemingly effortless, it is almost possible to forget that this is a work of translation.

At other times, they read as veiled (or not-so-veiled) autobiography. Passages such as "[a]n illness took hold of him, and he let it bear him away until he departed" (33) or "I am living here in a sort of hospital room and am using a newspaper to give support to the page on which I write this sketch" (24) seem to be Walser speaking as himself. Even more notable are the prevalence of reflections on the writing process itself: "I could write you a thirteen-hundred page, that is to say, a very fat book about this if I wanted, but at least for the time being I don't want to. Maybe later. Look forward to what might be coming, my friend, and until then, farewell. To conclude, however, let me quickly add one last thing" (61).

As vital to an understanding of *The Waste Land* as Harcourt's edition of Pound's revisions and Vivian Eliot's marginal comments, or as crucial to the study of *Finnegans Wake* as Joyce's notebooks, so the *Microscripts* will prove invaluable to any reading of Robert Walser. Nearly seventy years later, New Directions has answered Benjamin's lament, offering readers this opportunity to read a work that is as much by Walser as it is about his method.

Barbara Cole lives in Buffalo, where she is the Education Director of Just Buffalo Literary Center. She spent the first half of 2010 living in Vienna, Austria.

FALL WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

OUT OF YOUR MIND (AND IN YOUR BODY): A MOVEMENT WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS – SALLY SILVERS. TUESDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 12TH

This is a movement workshop for writers who want to explore creating movement out of words and writing out of movement. No dance, theater, or athletic ability/experience is required. Dancers or choreographers who want to work with language and with untrained movers are also very welcome. We'll start with a physical warm-up designed to fire up your senses, center you in your body, and get your creative juices flowing. We'll explore ways of writing inspired by movement. We'll look at people moving on video (from Jerry Lewis and Robin Williams to sports to break dancing; from Yvonne Rainer, Douglas Dunn, and Bill T. Jones to my own dances) with an eye toward new kinds of writing: texts to accompany performance, to combine poetry with documentation—that which designs movement or is energized by it. We'll look at some texts that have inspired or accompanied dance and performance (from Emily Dickinson to Vito Acconci to John Cage, etc.). And we'll especially look at our own writing to imagine performing it and putting it in motion. Through collaborations, talking about videos, writing and editing together and alone, we'll create performances that spotlight the experiments that start with our bodies. When you stimulate your body, your creative process comes alive in ways that will amaze you. Let's open some new horizons for your writing. Did I already say no movement training or dance experience necessary? Wear or bring comfortable clothes and shoes. **Sally Silvers is a writer/choreographer who has been making dances and texts for 30 years.**

TO NEITHER EXTREME: TEXTS FROM OTHER CENTURIES AND THE WORKS CONTEMPORARY POETS MAKE FROM THEM – KAREN WEISER. FRIDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 8TH

So much of how we think of history comes to us in the form of narratives. What happens to our understanding when that text from the past is poetry or is re-visioned into poetry? How do poets work with historical texts or different kinds of older disciplinary narratives? For a brief period early scientific texts were poems, and yet our culture seems to have mostly forgotten that poetry has the capacity to be wide in what it attempts to do or think through. Lisa Robertson writes in the poem "Palinode/": "Though my object is history, not neutrality / I am prepared to adhere to neither extreme." My hope is that we can explore our own writing as it comes out of a reading practice, considering history without feeling inclined to "adhere" to its formulations. We will look at pairings made up of contemporary poems and the works (or historical subjects) they converse with, seriously engaging both texts on their own terms and together, while writing poems that make use of the past to open new vistas of inquiry. Some texts will include selections from: *A Key Into the Language of America* by Rosmarie Waldrop and *A Key Into the Language of America* by Roger Williams; Fred Moten's *Hughson's Tavern* and Jill Lepore's *New York Burning*; and Aaron Kunin's *The Sore Throat* and William James *The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1*. **Karen Weiser's first book of poems, *To Light Out*, was published by Ugly Duckling Presse in the Spring of 2010.**

POETRY ON THE FLY – JOEL LEWIS. SATURDAYS AT NOON: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 9TH

Although the contemporary trend in poetry tends toward book-length projects and beyond, what is a poet to do when she lives on the fringes of a faraway "up and coming" neighborhood, shares an apartment with five other people (three of which are in a band) and juggles a series of poorly paying and widely scattered teaching jobs? This workshop focuses on the art of writing where you happen to be and taking advantage of a few snatched moments in a coffee bar or on a seat in a slowly moving "G" train. Working paradigms include Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*, written during the noon sup on a stationary store's chained typewriter (instructor will explain this piece of equipment to those under 30), Philip Whalen's poetry of notebooks compressed into viable worlds, Paul Blackburn's subway poems and his open-form *Journals* project and Joan Kyger's in-the-moment poetics. Requirements for class are: a notebook, some form of writing device and a Metro Card with some money on it. **Joel Lewis travels to work via ferry, light-rail subway, bus and goat cart to his social-work gig on Staten Island—always with a rollerball pen and moleskine notebook at his ready. His most recent book is *Learning From New Jersey* (Talisman House).**

THE IRREPARABLE, IRRETRIEVABLE AND FORGIVENESS – AKILAH OLIVER.

SATURDAYS AT NOON: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN NOVEMBER 13TH

For this workshop process, consider the poem as that which poses the idea that the poem doesn't necessarily represent knowledge or "experience," but rather seeks to understand the world in all its terribly beautiful humanness. What is rupture? Rapture? What does it mean, essentially, to forgive? Are both loss and love forms of the irretrievable? In this workshop, we will pay careful attention to the composition of the poem as a process of investigation and discovery into these questions, and the many questions that spin off from these. Can language, poetry, and the collapsing of text create an/other text that transmutes, holds, witnesses, traces, and recreates itself? Where does the body enter this discourse? Where does the sentence/line begin? Can a poem witness? This workshop invites participants to think of the poem as a compositional field to investigate the irreparable, the irretrievable, and forgiveness. We will look at theoretical and philosophical texts next to poetry, and vice versa. For example, Alice Notley read alongside Giorgio Agamben; Avital Ronell read alongside Leslie Scalapino. **A poet, performer, and teacher, Akilah Oliver's most recent book is *A Toast in the House of Friends* (Coffee House Books).**

The workshop fee is a great deal at \$350, and includes a one-year Sustaining Poetry Project Membership and tuition for all spring and fall classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call 212-674-0910, email info@poetryproject.org or register online at www.poetryproject.org under "Get Involved."



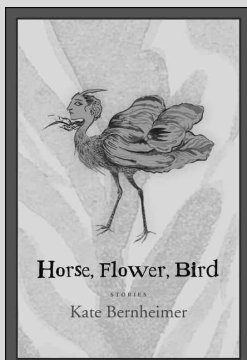
NEW FROM COFFEE HOUSE PRESS



Horse, Flower, Bird

STORIES BY
KATE BERNHEIMER

Art by Rikki Ducornet



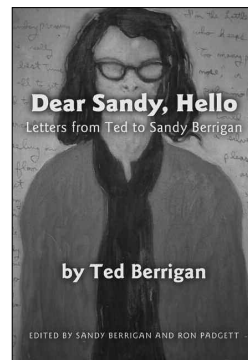
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Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines

POEMS BY
JULIE CARR



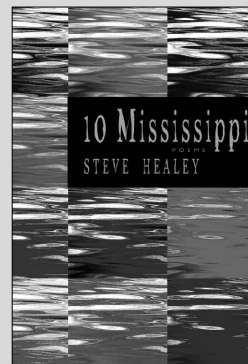
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"To read *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines* is to recall once again that memory might just be the singular attribute of being human and that there can be no poetics of daily life that does not confront loss. Such is the domain of love; such is the vocation of poetry." —PETER GIZZI



10 Mississippi

POEMS BY
STEVE HEALEY



ISBN: 978-1-56689-252-0 | \$16

"Despite the national craze for self-expression that poetry has become, it is harder than ever to hear an original voice; but here one is and it's a doozy. Somehow Steve Healey has figured out a way to get a new sound out of the saxophone of English." —BILLY COLLINS

POEM

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

ARIANA REINES

I am so lazy
 All I want to do is look good and write poems
 And all I get to do is write poems because my time has not yet come to look good.
 Sometimes
 I stand up and sit down thinking about my poems
 Truly they are so excellent that I should be famous
 And someday too I should look good enough to stand alongside them
 Maybe this will happen someday
 But not today
 However even better than this would be
 The destruction of the system that causes
 Me to fantasize in such an idiotic way. Should I destroy myself or try
 To attain the heights within this system first
 And then destroy myself after I have become sanctified
 By what is to be despised here?
 As I write you I am listening to NEU! What I am trying to say is
 In the middle of the night last night I tried to watch a movie
 By Rainer Werner Fassbinder
 Not a movie but rather the first episode of a miniseries,
 I am sure you know it, Berlin Alexanderplatz.
 You see, this week I am taking care of the vegetable garden
 Of two dear friends who are real intellectuals. The Berlin Alexanderplatz DVDs
 Are owned by them. Once I badly wanted
 An older man, loutish but refined, and I remember his red
 Mouth saying the word FASSBINDER
 While he held his young son in his arms. NEU! is very sexy music.
 Have you ever listened to it? I learned about NEU! very late, like two months ago?
 From a boy I was fucking until last week, though perhaps I will see him again. You see,
 Although my looks are melancholic and owlish I remain culturally
 Retarded and all the powerful things that have been done, even thirty years ago, only come
 To me peevishly, occasionally, through the people who condescend
 To share their time and superior knowledge with me.
 I do possess a sensibility that could not be called deaf to culture

But my narcissism has become so exhaustive that it takes up almost
 All my time. There was a time
 Five or six years ago that I would meet people who would say Ariana,
 Have you seen The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant? No, I would say, I haven't,
 I really should though, I wish I was a cinephile! I should stop reading Medieval
 Poetry, because after all I cannot stay safe and uninfected just
 By hiding in things so very old. People who watch movies are such dreamers,
 I would say, and I want to be one, a dreamer, and feed myself with stronger stuff
 Than the things I feel safe in because nobody living is there.
 I should dream in other ways, more ambitious ways, and could if I were
 A person who watches movies. But at that time it took equipment
 And patience, more of both than it takes now.
 Actually some years ago I finally watched like half
 Of The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant. It made me uncomfortable

About being female. But anyway
 Last night I tried to watch Episode One
 Of the revolutionary filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Berlin Alexanderplatz
 Based on the novel by Alfred Döblin to which, incidentally,
 My writing has been compared, and five times I watched
 The establishing shot of the man walking along walls in bright sunlight only to find
 That when the first words in the episode were spoken, I think by a soldier,
 The subtitles were not on, and every time I thought I had turned them on
 It turned out they were not on, and I tried again and again,
 Becoming serener and serener as the night wore on, serener because more
 And more resigned, and I watched
 The sun fall on the cracks in the man's face as he walked down the street
 Until the moment something in German was said, and the dread
 That had woken me up and caused me to want so badly to see a movie slowly
 Ebbled and was replaced with the dread
 That fills the establishing shot of the film, the man with his face
 Moving in clots of light along walls that move past different versions of white.

Finally I had to accept that the subtitles were not going to go on
 And feeling tormented that I am neither a famous poet nor a woman whose looks resemble
 The vapidty of her aspirations, my thoughts turned to a man
 I loved once, a German whose name was Rainer, and who, when I asked him one night
 What his middle name was, said "Maria" in the most insulting tone
 Of voice you can imagine, for Rainer knew that I was fanciful
 And though to know Fassbinder begged a sophistication different
 From the one I had then developed as insulation against
 The cruel and elegant persons of my age, Rilke
 Was something that I knew and that my breathlessness and overt
 And beating heart also knew well. Oh
 Well. Maybe someday I will learn what it meant in the Seventies
 To be a revolutionary. These ideas are important
 To the culturally successful people who maintain
 That this system must be overthrown and what I accept
 As the clearly suicidal mass, which to participate in it
 Means to agree to it
 Ought not to be accepted. I should
 Simply try to succeed while not accepting, though I hate to try
 At all. I should
 Become the ally of cultural critics who at certain periods
 Of the night too become romantic, and I think I even will,
 As soon as I can overcome the fantasy
 That my dreams might become sweet
 Again, and fragrant, neither oppressively
 Narrow scenes in which I dominate the culture
 As both hero and heroine, a sacrificer melted down
 To become the very ore of beauty that makes worlds, nor
 The inheritrix of products
 Delivered in the form of somebody else's
 Secrets, bequeathed in films, in books, in cuts of clothing
 That to attain the truth they point to
 I have no choice but to pass through
 And agree to them, their canniness
 And history, its limits, and the obsessions
 (Which are not mine) legitimated by them
 For having passed.

Ariana Reines is the author of *The Cow* (Alberta Prize, Fence Books 2006), *Coeur de Lion* (Mal-O-Mar 2007), and *Mercury* (forthcoming, Fence Books 2011); and the translator of *My Heart Laid Bare* by Charles Baudelaire, for Mal-O-Mar, and *The Little Black Book of Grisélidis Réal: Days and Nights of an Anarchist Whore* by Jean-Luc Hennig, for Semiotext(e). TELEPHONE, her first play, was produced by The Foundry Theatre and presented at The Cherry Lane Theatre in New York, February 2009, winning two Obies. TELEPHONE is out in PLAY: A Journal of Plays. Last year, Ariana was Virginia C. Holloway Lecturer in Poetry at UC Berkeley.

INTERVIEW

Why I Am Not a Fauvist: A Conversation with Trevor Winkfield

Note: This is an excerpt from a longer interview. Other sections, including the first part, "Before I Became Modern Art," appeared or are forthcoming in PN Review and Mimeo Mimeo.

MILES CHAMPION



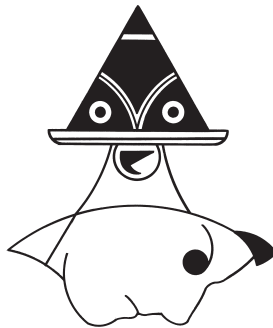
PORTRAIT OF TREVOR BY MILES.

MILES CHAMPION: You did your first book cover for [John] Ashbery around this time [1977], for the Ecco Press reprint of *Rivers and Mountains*...

TREVOR WINKFIELD: John asked me to do it; I did it—simple as that. I presume it was because he'd liked my Fischbach show so much, which is another reason to exhibit and not keep one's work locked up in an ivory tower. I tried to keep the cover as simple as possible—a river, a boat, some mountains—all the while trying to avoid making the restricted palette I used (red, white and blue) from looking too flag-like. The only other problem I had was technical: I didn't have my favorite brand of English acrylic to hand, so I experimented with an American brand, which glopped out of the tube like... well, use your imagination. A completely horrible mixture, so I had to arrange for tubes to be shipped from England, thus revealing myself to myself as a pampered brat who couldn't improvise.

MC: [Raymond] Roussel would have been proud, I'm sure. And your next cover was for another second edition: the SUN reprint of James Schuyler's *Freely Espousing*.

TW: Jimmy's cover turned out to be a bit of a fiasco, thanks to two nincompoops: myself and the designer. The design was too simple to begin with, and, like the one for Ashbery, it relied on three colors: red, green and cream. The designer, without consulting me, decided



PORTRAIT OF MILES BY TREVOR.

to drop the cream, leaving that area plain white. The result was a tepid Christmas card, which makes me cringe to recollect.

I didn't feel totally satisfied with any of the few covers I designed until I did Ashbery's *Three Poems and Flow Chart*, where I was given carte blanche to use whatever imagery I liked and as many colors as I saw fit. And I got paid for them, which I'm sure spurred my brush to greater heights (as Fairfield Porter once warned me, "One free cover leads to another free cover," and how rightly he spoke).

MC: We've somehow managed not to mention Simon Cutts, even though you met him in the early seventies. I know he gave you your second show in 1978, but I'm not sure where in London his Coracle Press Gallery was.

TW: Coracle was located as far from the cutting edge as possible, Camberwell New Road, the back of beyond and the antithesis of Bond Street art; a completely nondescript area, which is no doubt why Glen Baxter lives there—nothing to disturb the work process, not a Georgian townhouse in sight. Coracle, as far as I recall, was part of a row of shops, such as you'd find in any working neighborhood: grocery stores, hairdressers, newsagents, that sort of thing—the kind of shops where opening the front door triggers a tinkling bell. Coracle fitted in perfectly: very unobtrusive, very modest...and quintessentially English. Cutts' whole ethos might be summed up by the title of Niklaus Pevsner's

book, *The Englishness of English Art* (bear in mind that, in the mid-seventies, English art was being roundly pooh-poohed as provincial, not a patch on American art). English art and its modesty was something to be kept quiet about, and it was this aspect of being consciously overlooked that Simon reveled in. He made a point of not showing anything that might be classed as "relevant." He worshipped snowmen and crazy paving. His gallery was the kind of small, quiet hermitage that encouraged slow viewing, very much against the "hurry of spirits" that our hero Gilbert White warned against. I've just been reading a 1949 article called "The Opening of Milk Bottles by Birds," which made me think, oh, this is just the sort of natural-history study Simon would love.

MC: You suggested earlier that [Ian Hamilton] Finlay's gentle subversion of whimsy kept it a necessary step away from twee, but that such an endeavor wasn't without its dangers. Do you think you ran a similar risk by calling your Coracle show "Analytical Dot-tiness" (not to mention following it up with "Radical Daftness" in 1980)?

TW: I thought we all became artists in order not to conform—isn't that so?

MC: Quaiite. Your first collaborative book with a poet was *How to Be a Woodpecker* with Ron Padgett in 1983: five of Ron's poems paired with five black-and-white drawings of yours. I assume that all your collaborations are asynchronous given your dislike of working spontaneously; was there any back and forth between you and Ron, or did you simply bring poems and drawings to the table and see which went best with which?

TW: It's true that improvisation isn't my cup of tea, as anyone can tell from looking at my paintings—everything has to be plotted out in advance, like a scientific diagram. But this doesn't necessarily make me a difficult collaborator (at least I hope not). Artists who collaborated with New York School poets early on—Joe Brainard, Larry Rivers, George Schneeman—really did improvise with poets on the page, more or less off-the-cuff, passing the paper back and forth over one or two

sessions. It was more or less the same with me, except my “sessions” extended over several weeks—sometimes several months. With Ron, Kenward [Elmslie] and, to a certain extent, Harry Mathews, I’d do a drawing or two and then pass them on. For me, it was a little bit like waiting until next week for this week’s crossword puzzle solutions to be announced: I didn’t know what to expect, but I was invariably pleased with their “explanations.” Or illuminations. Then I’d send off another batch of drawings, responding to what they’d written, and they’d respond in turn. And so on.

Really, I’m more in tune with the more studied French *livre de peintre*. I’d bought a copy of the original edition of Roussel’s *Nouvelles Impressions d’Afrique* (uncut, for \$4) when I first visited Paris in 1967, and immediately fell under the spell of the rather banal illustrator Roussel had chosen to elucidate his cantos, H.-A. Zo. It’s still my favorite illustrated book, because the drawings gloss the text, while the highly complex text elevates the drawings. Roussel employed a very devious method of extracting drawings from Zo: he sent him, anonymously via a detective agency, a set of 59 instructions for the drawings he needed for his 59 pages of text. The instructions were very straightforward—“A snowman, such as children build, broadly grinning, as though about to burst out laughing”—and the drawings Zo supplied were very straightforward, too. He might, for all he knew, have been illustrating a detective story or a women’s magazine. But when Roussel slotted these extremely simple visuals between each page of his labyrinthine poem—when he took them out of context and put them into a new context—they became metaphysical. Extraordinary.

Most of my collaborations were an amicable conspiracy between two people, aided and abetted by an agreeable publisher, who made a third collaborator. Every writer I’ve collaborated with is someone whose work I’ve both known and admired for a long time. They were invariably friends, so there wasn’t much need for “warming up”—I understood their work already. And they all wrote abstractly, to varying degrees, so I was able to accompany the poems, as opposed to illustrate them. I never had to be too literate, a fate that would have awaited me if I’d attempted to depict something like “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” It was really a case of my adding an extra layer of strangeness.

MC: What other books influenced the way you approach the illustrated book and/or book design?

TW: That’s quite a can of worms I’d have to prise open. Influences galore, as it was for painting. I remember as a schoolboy spying a gigantic book of Henry Moore’s drawings, but only from a distance—it must have been almost two feet high, at least from my Alice perspective, seeing it loom above my head. It was presumably so expensive that nobody was allowed to touch it, so it had been put on a stand in an alcove above the staircase leading to the lower sales floor of Woolworth’s in Leeds. Woolworth’s! This was the first time it dawned on me that not all books were created equal. Jump ahead to 1964 when I sent off for the Jasper Johns retrospective catalogue from the Jewish Museum in New York. Apart from a funny, deeply insightful text by John Cage (that was also to influence my own art writing thirty years later), it had a very delectable cover: Johns’ life-size painted bronze sculpture of his paintbrushes crammed into an empty can of Savarin coffee, everything covered seductively with simulated paint splotches, dribbles and fingerprints—“fool the eye” come to life, eminently lickable (at least for those of us who equate painting with cooking). The point for me resided in its isolation, almost island-like, richly colored on a brilliant white background, with no type. I’d never seen anything like it.

Jump ahead another decade, to the mid-1970s. Paul Auster, after receiving his first substantial writing grant, passed on to me his job as an art book cataloguer at Ex Libris bookstore on the Upper East Side. I think “swanky” might not be wide of the mark in describing the atmosphere there. My job was to help catalogue various bibliographic treasures: Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise*, Futurist metal books, Dada posters, all the original Max Ernst tomes, Malevich’s *Suprematism: 34 Drawings*, illustrated books by Tatlin, Léger, Miró, Matisse and Apollinaire, manuscripts by Mondrian, Eilshemius and Jarry, proofs of Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés*, theoretical texts by the Russian Constructivists...it went on and on. And it was all mine, at least while I catalogued it all. Surrounded by and physically handling all this paper bullion was, to say the least, a great education for someone planning to make books. Not only that, but one of the two proprietors was none other than Elaine Lustig Cohen, the designer responsible for the Johns cover I’d fawned over years before. Small world, indeed! Elaine showed me how to lay out a catalogue, what type to select, what size illustrations make the best impact on what weight of paper, that sort of thing. So by the time I embarked on my first collaborative book with Ron Padgett

in 1982, I had a pretty good idea as to what I wanted it to look and feel like.

MC: I didn’t know you equated painting with cooking—I don’t think I’ve ever seen you use a can opener, let alone boil an egg. Am I being too literal?

TW: Just because I equate cooking with painting doesn’t necessarily mean I can cook, though at a pinch I can boil an egg. I was referring to the French tradition, where painters became so adept at tweaking oil paint into such delectable textures—at the expense of everything else—that they were often compared, disparagingly, to haughty chefs. The juicy surface became the focal point of the painting. There was a famous cartoon strip from, I think, the 1950s—those dear, departed days when it was still fashionable for an artist to struggle—that showed a typical starving artist in front of one of his own still life canvases, depicting fruit. Over about five frames, frame by frame, the fruit dish became depleted as its hungry creator ate the fruit piece by piece, ending up with an empty dish. His art was good enough to eat, in other words.

I can’t say I’ve ever been tempted to eat—or lick—a Chardin, though de Chirico is another matter. He did some metaphysical still lifes around 1916 where the provisions—cookies, candies and croissants—are so ravishingly depicted, almost three-dimensionally, that they almost pop into your head, if not into your mouth. There’s one I particularly cherish called “The Faithful Servitor” that is—or was, when I last drooled over it—in MoMA’s collection; it depicts a tilted blue box of candies still wrapped in glistening cellophane and silver paper. You can’t see the candies inside, but de Chirico has depicted the wrappers so microscopically, so obsessively, so sensually that you know for a fact he desperately wanted to gorge himself on the contents, though due to wartime rationing the objects of his lust were unobtainable, which no doubt heightened his vision. I’m sure Renoir harbored the same feelings about his nude models, but let’s not get into transubstantiation.

MC: I looked up the article on the National Gallery’s Uccello acquisition that had such an effect on you as a teenager: it appeared in the September/October 1959 issue of *The Burlington Magazine* and was written by Martin Davies—later Sir Martin Davies—who went on to be appointed Director of the Gallery in 1968. There can’t be many writers on art who would cite both Sir Martin and John Cage as influences. But it wasn’t until

ten years after encountering Cage's text on Johns that you first published a piece of your own art criticism—on Glen Baxter in *Art in America*. Was there a particular motivating factor—such as Glen asking or the magazine's checkbook lying around—or did you simply need to get some of the things you had been thinking about down on paper?

TW: Well, it's a well-known fact that dotting mothers should not knowingly consign their offspring to the penurious realm of art criticism. Art writing, on the other hand, is a different kettle of fish altogether: equally badly paid, but at least one can spend weeks, months—even years—polishing one's thoughts prior to publication. Imagine if you're stuck in the journalistic field, having to see a show and then sum up your opinions in relatively few words by tomorrow or the day after—not to mention having to be careful so as not to offend advertisers (i.e., galleries). It's a swift hop, skip and a jump to hackery in no time flat. And we've not exactly been living through a Golden Age for art these past forty years: to be an art critic on a regular basis must be absolute hell. I could never do it; for one thing I'm such a slowcoach as a writer.

I started writing about art because I've never been a teacher, so I had all these ideas bottled up inside of me with no outlet. I think most artists approach paintings a little differently from the usual set of eyes—don't ask me to explain it, I can't. But you automatically know when something's not quite right, a bit unbalanced, and you notice tiny details and rhythms that others might miss. A whole painting can hang or fall on the placement of a red button. Adrian Stokes, himself a painter, wrote a great essay on Cézanne's "The Bathers"—the one in the National Gallery in London—in which he compares the frieze of aqueous dumpy nudes to a quorum of naked tramps camped atop a railway carriage as the landscape whizzes by. It's a very subjective view, I'll grant you, but once you get that image in your head you can't look at those bathers again without thinking of that Depression-era interpretation. And it's wonderfully down to earth, free of any art-world jargon such as "privileging the signifier" or any kind of top-heavy theorizing. I hate the kind of writing that uses art as a convenient hook on which to hang the writer's pet ideas—their ideas, not the artist's they're discussing. Writings by Patrick Heron or Richard Hamilton produce insights on a par with Stokes, for the simple reason that they're artists writing about artists they admire, and seeking to transmit their enthusiasm. Using writing to insinuate ideas, not propagate them—a subtle but essential distinction.

My own rather simplistic aim was simply to write about artists I liked, too—Vermeer, Florine Stettheimer, Joseph Cornell, Lubin Baugin—and leave the rest for professional critics to evaluate or demolish. For myself, I know there's enough cruelty in the art world without my adding to it. Ultimately writers and critics alike want to prod people into getting off their backsides and heading for galleries and museums. If you don't achieve that result, why bother writing about the visible in the first place?

MC: What did you say about Stettheimer recently—that you admire her for not having been afraid to paint like a woman?

TW: It's so rare for a woman to paint like a woman that you want to draw attention to the achievement. Let's face it: certain women have a painterly touch that's quite distinct from most applications (there's usually no difference between men and women as to how they lay down the medium). Jane Freilicher displays it most of the time; Florine Stettheimer went further and painted all the time like a spinsterish amateur—a very great spinsterish amateur. But I wasn't allowed to use the designation "spinsterish" in the article I wrote about her—apparently it was regarded as being politically incorrect (oh dear). My point was that Stettheimer's delicate spinsterish hand was part and parcel of her narrative genius. Her femininity, as expressed through her brushwork, was an essential characteristic of her style, yet that aspect—that glaring fact—is currently censored from view. As my late mother would have sighed, "What is the world coming to?" Minefields wherever one looks.

MC: Well, "spinsterish" is usually thought of as a pejorative term—as a slightly kinder version of "withered" or "unhappy"—and "delicate spinsterish hand" does make her appendage sound rather desiccated...

Since you mention Adrian Stokes, I wonder what that arch-Kleinian would have made of your refusal to use paint straight from the tube...

TW: I'm not a Fauvist. The only thing I've ever used straight from a tube is toothpaste.

MC: Yes, you do have a lovely set of clickers. A running theme throughout our conversations has been a preoccupation with art that is both abstract and figurative; you describe your own work in such terms and, in a lovely essay on Paul Signac, you refer to the conjunction of abstraction and figuration as an "ongoing mission" that is of central rel-

evance to painterly language. What is it that so particularly excites about work that clearly partakes of the world while, at the same time, containing plastic elements that simply can't—or not straightforwardly, at least—be referred back to it?

TW: Ah yes, the old abstract-versus-figurative dilemma. Thanks to Modernism, we can now enjoy both at the same time, in the same painting! Aren't we lucky? Abstraction was there from the start, of course, only it was known as composition. The arc of the Madonna's arm had to cradle the infant Jesus just so, otherwise the painting's entire geometric structure would fly hither and yon—or at least produce awkward shapes, leading the erstwhile viewer to ponder, "Why doesn't this painting work?" Even if you present yourself as a figurative painter, somewhere inside there's an abstract artist dying to get out. But unlike de Kooning and Guston, we no longer have to apologize for moving back and forth from figuration to abstraction and back again. That kind of visual schizophrenia won't raise any eyebrows these days and, as I said, most of us now feel free to use figurative and abstract elements on the same picture plane without thinking—or rather, *with* thinking.

Talking about thinking and looking reminds me of an optical experience I once had, thanks to Bill Berkson. We were in the Metropolitan Museum a few years ago, standing in front of two Analytical Cubist paintings, one by Picasso on the left, the other by Braque on the right. You know the kind of paintings I mean—they look as though they've been painted using a mixture of gravy and engine oil. The Braque painting I'd known and loved for a long while, mainly from reproductions prior to its entering the Museum: "Still Life with Banderillas"—banderillas being those harpoon-like daggers toreadors stab bulls with. I think my initial confusion revolved around my not really knowing what banderillas were, at least for the twenty or so years before I saw the actual canvas. Because of my ignorance, I mentally classed it as an abstract painting—idiotic, I know—and that's how I casually looked at it: as an abstract, or at least semi-abstract composition, albeit one distilled from real life. Anyway, I was standing before the painting, a little to Bill's left and slightly behind him, looking over his shoulder at the Braque while he was looking to his left and expounding brilliantly on the Picasso. I was engrossed by Bill's discourse, so much so that my mind was totally devoted to what he was saying, while my eyes were glued "unthinkingly" to the Braque. For the only time in my adult life, my eyes and mind were in two separate places,

and because of this disjunction I had what I can only describe as an “out of mind” experience. Braque’s hazy objects temporarily detached themselves from the background, coalesced and presented themselves to my eyeballs three-dimensionally. I could see them as Braque envisioned them, as actual volumetric glasses, vases and banderillas on his studio table in 1911. A stereoscopic relief. I’ve always considered that experience as my one perfect abstract/figurative sighting—as though I’d had blurred vision, then put on spectacles and seen things crisply, then taken the spectacles off again.

MC: I didn’t mean to invoke the “abstract versus figurative dilemma”—what I was trying to get at is that you have reserved particular praise in your art writing—and in our conversations—for certain artists who melded abstraction and figuration sometimes centuries before Modernism, and in ways that go far beyond the dictates of composition.

I was hoping you might say more about why you find that approach—various as it is—so interesting.

TW: I’m not an art historian, but I’m sure antecedents can be found everywhere—in the flatness of Egyptian painting, for instance, or even further back. For myself the turning point—how I began to find unconscious abstraction everywhere—came after reading Paul Sérusier’s *ABC de la Peinture* at a tender age. Sérusier wasn’t a particularly good painter—he was a minor Nabi—but he was a brilliant theorist, and he made at least one extraordinary painting, “Le Talisman” in 1888, which really is one of those works that changed everything, the painterly equivalent of a decisive battle. Paul Gauguin, the bully and driving force behind the Pont-Aven group, took poor young malleable Sérusier out to the Bois d’Amour on a painting expedition and basically told him that if he saw

shadows as blue, he should paint them blue, and if he saw a tree as yellow, he should paint it yellow, and so on. In other words: no imbrication; simplicity and pure colors only. Very strong-arm stuff on Gauguin’s part, no messing about. The resulting picture—a tiny wooden panel—is a little gem of pure color, and when you compare it to the drab, naturalistic colors Sérusier had used immediately prior to that expedition to the woods, you can see what a religious conversion it must have represented for him. Wham! And it still packs a punch, one of those paintings that never ages, even if we now have to peer at it through a dimly lit glass case in the Musée d’Orsay.

Sérusier went on to formulate a very simple working method, to the effect that, before a painting is a battle scene or whatever, it’s essentially a flat surface planted with colored shapes. A light went on in my head after

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reading that—you might say the blinkers came off. Color was the key to abstraction, or, if you can get color to dominate, then you're well on the way to abstraction. A simplification, but true, for myself at least. Anyway, I began to see abstracts everywhere, not in nature as Cézanne predicted, but in lots of paintings. Uccello, naturally, but more particularly the Sieneese painters who preceded him. They were the original abstractionists as far as I'm concerned, the great bi-focalists who could see compositions abstractly and figuratively at the same time. In lots of paintings by Sassetta and Giovanni di Paolo, for instance, the figures are subservient to the brightly colored architecture, or become components of architectural space. They're often used as blobs to break up the surface. Sassetta, though he was a humanist, often used people as commas and quotation marks across his chromatic planes, and if they got in the way of an architectural element—a column, say—he'd allow it to ruthlessly cut through a body. The band of pink—the abstraction—took precedence.

One thing we forget—or deny—is that at different periods artists not only view things differently, they also see things differently. Medieval eyes—the actual optic nerves, the eyeballs themselves—were capable of seeing things that 21st-century eyes can no longer see. Van Eyck obviously had very acute eyesight to see the extremely minute details in his paintings, and you can't explain it away by claiming he used a magnifying glass, as science isn't the answer to that kind of miraculous vision. Sieneese painters had the rare gift of being able to see things unalloyed, or, more simply, like children—like Sérusier—while still spinning enthralling stories.

MC: Did Sassetta really introduce the smile into Western art?

TW: You mean the simpering angel in "Madonna of the Snow"? A peculiar rictus grin, as though someone had barked "Smile" and she'd held it a bit too long. It *is* the first smile—at least, I can't think of any smiling precursors, can you? Most medieval figures—painted figures—have quite bland expressions, almost zombieified, as though they're trying to look ethereal; either that or expressing pain, which must have come quite easily to them, considering living conditions at the time. I think some budding young scholar should be given a grant to research when white teeth first made a widespread appearance in painting. Given the history of dental hygiene, no doubt that would be sometime in the late nineteenth century, and not in England.

And now I'd like to ask *you* a question: Why do you like my paintings?

MC: Well, I liked your book covers and drawings first—there weren't any paintings of yours to be found on what you like to call "that drear isle." You can imagine how exciting the covers of *Flow Chart* and Ron's *Great Balls of Fire* looked to someone who thought the Calder editions of Artaud and Roussel were examples of interesting book design. The first drawing of yours that I saw was your contribution to the anthology for Schuyler, *That Various Field*, and I remember being struck by the fact that, while it clearly was a drawing, it didn't look like one—its creator had clearly found an elegant way around Duchamp's "tyranny of the hand." I think flatness has a great deal to do with it: my first introductions to art were, like yours, all via reproductions in books and on post-cards, and the first poems to really excite me were also decidedly flat, and cut with bland, non-poetic elements (lumps of *The Tennis Court Oath* will probably be stuck to my brain forever—I should ask a barman to squirt some juice over them). Your Schuyler drawing seemed to share a quality with much of the poetry I was reading soon after—and as a result of—reading John's work: Ted Berrigan's *Sonnets*, early Clark Coolidge, Larry Eigner—poetry that seemed more built than written, the words as building blocks, each flatly displayed in natural light, with no shadows or recesses in which the author as ego could grow monstrous. These word-bricks seemed to have little halos of space around them, negatives of the black outlines around the acorns, pipes and pea pods in your cover designs. I was particularly taken with the little gingham square in your drawing for Schuyler:

a collage element that wasn't, and which I connected with a poem of Kit Robinson's called "Speaking Peoples"—a kind of fake cut-up or poem written to resemble a cut-up, without the use of scissors or Elmer's glue.

When I finally got to see your paintings in New York a few years later, your use of color as a unifying agent—in conjunction with the paintings' near-absolute evenness of surface—seemed a generous and unpretentious way of bringing disparate elements into relation, elements which, as we've discussed, are neither wholly abstract nor heavy with biography. And I liked the playful darkness of the compositions—that you could be serious without being solemn. When I visited your studio I realized that we both work in similar ways: starting with one element and then casting around for a second that might be interestingly added to it, not really knowing where things are going but trusting in—and enjoying—the process. And then, of course, once the painting is done, you have the sense to simply leave it midway between yourself and the viewer; there's no conceptual armature or peripheral baggage to get in the way of or limit my enjoyment of it.

TW: So that's what I'm all about! You quite inspire me to go on painting unassailable—or is that unsalable?—masterpieces!

Miles Champion's *How to Laugh is forthcoming from Adventures in Poetry.*

Trevor Winkfield exhibits his paintings at *Tibor de Nagy Gallery*. His collaboration with *John Ashbery*, *Faster Than Birds Can Fly*, was recently published by *Granary Books*.



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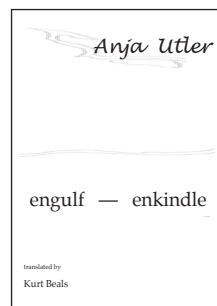
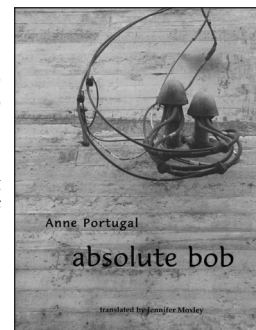
Anne Portugal: *absolute bob*

[Série d'écriture, No. 23; translated from the French by Jennifer Moxley]

bob, a brave little guy (joker, operator, sheer energy?) bops in the manner of a video-game through the ways a poem inhabits sense or nonsense, speeds or slows, slides into forms or undoes them. bob occupies his virtual field of action in perpetual motion, beats down doors, explores corridors, removes walls, strikes sparks from repetition, sets fire to "the same old," pulls the levers of creation. 24 chapters, images per second, hours in the day of a man who must exhaust himself in command performances that gradually asphyxiate even the fabrication of verse.

Anne Portugal lives and teaches in Paris.

Poetry, 120 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN 978-1-936194-02-5 original pbk. \$14



Anja Utler: *engulf — enkindle*

[Dichten=, No.11; translated from the German by Kurt Beals]

Utler's poems touch the ground where feeling and thinking begin to take form and burst from the body, burst into language. Their interweaving pulls us into an almost undifferentiated, pre-conscious world where the human body and the surrounding landscape are fused. Stretching syntax and semantics, Utler's poems trace speech to its roots in the lungs, throat, tongue, until it emerges as sound and song.

Anja Utler lives in Vienna and Regensburg. *münden — entzündeln* (2004) received the coveted Leonce-und-Lena Prize.

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POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

9/22 WEDNESDAY

Peter Orlovsky Memorial Reading

Poet, singer, farmer, yodeler, banjo-picker, Buddhist-practitioner, Allen Ginsberg's lifelong companion, Kerouac's Simon Darlovsky in *Desolation Angels* and George in *The Dharma Bums*, the generous and wonderfully whimsical Peter Orlovsky (July 8, 1933–May 30, 2010), was an unforgettable and hugely colorful presence in the East Village, and in/around the Poetry Project. Please join us in a night of music, video, song and poetry, as some of his closest friends pay tribute to him including: **Chuck Lief, Philip Glass, Ed Sanders, Steven Taylor, Hal Willner, Janine Pommy Vega, Andy Clausen, Patti Smith, Anne Waldman, Gordon Ball, Rosebud Pettet, Simon Pettet, Bill Morgan, Anselm Berrigan, John Godfrey** and others TBA. ADMISSION IS FREE.

9/27 MONDAY

A Reading for VLAK

This reading launches the inaugural issue of VLAK, an international magazine with a broad focus on contemporary poetics, art, film, philosophy, music, science, design, politics, performance, ecology, and new media. Vlak is edited by Louis Armand, Edmund Berrigan, Carol Watts, Stephan Delbos, David Vichnar and Clare Wallace. The reading will feature contributors **Pierre Joris, Eileen Myles, Elizabeth Gross, Marjorie Wellish, Vincent Katz, Arlo Quint, Stacey Szymaszek, John Wilkinson, Jess Fiorini, Joshua Cohen, Stephanie Strickland** and **Louis Armand**.

9/29 WEDNESDAY

Laura Moriarty & Joseph Donahue

Joseph Donahue's most recent collections of poetry include *Incidental Eclipse* and *Terra Lucida*. This fall, Talisman House will publish *Dissolves*, *Terra Lucida IV-VII*, the second volume of an ongoing sequence. He lives in Durham, North Carolina. **Laura Moriarty's** books include *A Tonalist*, an essay-poem from Nightboat Books, and the novels, *Cunning* and *Ultravioleta*. *A Semblance: Selected and New Poems, 1975–2007* came out from Omnidawn in 2007.

10/4 MONDAY OPEN READING

Sign-in at 7:45 p.m.

10/6 WEDNESDAY

Anne Carson & David Shapiro

Anne Carson was born in Canada and teaches ancient Greek for a living. She is the author of *Autobiography of Red* (Knopf, 1998), *Men in the Off Hours* (Knopf 2001),

Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera (Knopf, 2005), *NOX* (New Directions, 2010), and many other works. **David Shapiro** has written many books since his first, *January*, emerged in 1965 from Holt, Rinehart and Winston with poems written when the poet was 13–16. He was a violinist in his youth and was educated at Columbia and Cambridge University; and has taught at Columbia, Cooper Union, Brooklyn, Bard, and Princeton, both as art historian and as poet.

10/8 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Douglas Piccinnini & David Lau

Douglas Piccinnini's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Antioch Review*, *The Cultural Society*, *EOAGH*, and *Jacket*, among others. A chapbook, *SOFT*, is forthcoming from The Cultural Society, and *Crystal Hard-On* (minutesBOOKS) was recently released. He lives in Brooklyn, and curates the CROWD Reading Series. **David Lau's** first book of poetry, *Virgil and the Mountain Cat*, came out last year from UC Press. He is co-editor of *Lana Turner: a Journal of Poetry and Opinion*. His other ongoing projects include *Laborland*, a video documentary on labor and art in California; and political organizing with the student movement in the golden state.

10/11 MONDAY

Christie Ann Reynolds & Simone White

Christie Ann Reynolds' chapbook *idiot heart* was chosen in 2008 by Brenda Shaughnessy for The New School Chapbook Competition. She is the co-author of a chapbook, *Girl Boy Girl Boy*, forthcoming with Correspondences; and author of *Revenge Poems*, Supermachine's first chapbook. **Simone White's** first book, *House Envy of All the World*, was published this year by Factory School. Her work has appeared in *The Recluse*, *Callaloo*, and *Ploughshares*, and in the exhibition catalog for The Studio Museum's *Flow*, among other places.

10/13 WEDNESDAY

Cedar Sigo & Robert Hershon

Cedar Sigo is 32 years old. His books include *Selected Writings*, *Expensive Magic*, *Portraits* and *Music For Torching*. His new collection of poetry, *Stranger In Town*, is number four in the City Lights Spotlight Series. He lives in San Francisco. **Robert Hershon's** most recent book is *Calls from the Outside World*, his twelfth collection. Among his awards are two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and three from the New York State Foundation on the Arts. Hershon has edited *Hanging Loose Press* since 1966 and served as director of The Print Center for 35 years.

10/18 MONDAY

Ben Estes & Paul Killebrew

Ben Estes is the author of the chapbooks *Lamp like I'map* (Factory Hollow Press) and *Cymbals* (The Song Cave). With Alan Felsenthal, he is the editor and publisher of The Song Cave (a series of singular things) and the journal *Sea Ranch*. He currently lives in Northampton, MA. **Paul Killebrew** was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. He currently resides in Louisiana and works as a lawyer at Innocence Project New Orleans. His first full-length collection, *Flowers*, was published this year by Canarium, and his long poem *Inspector vs. Evader* is soon to be republished online by Ugly Duckling Presse.

10/20 WEDNESDAY

CAConrad & Wanda Coleman

CAConrad is the recipient of the 2009 Gil Ott Book Award for *The Book of Frank*. He is also the author of *Advanced Elvis Course*, *(Soma)tic Midge*, *Deviant Propulsion*, and a collaboration with poet Frank Sherlock, *The City Real & Imagined*. He is a co-founder of PACE (Poet Activist Community Extension). **Wanda Coleman** is a contributor to *Harriet* (poetryfoundation.org) and drgodine.blogspot. Her most recent books include *Ostinato Vamps*, *The Riot Inside Me: Trials & Tremors*, *WANDA COLEMAN: Poems Seismic in Scene (de la chienne)*, and *Jazz & Twelve O'clock Tales*.

10/22 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Claire Donato & Evan Commander

Claire Donato's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Octopus*, and *Action Yes*. She holds an MFA from Brown University, where she was involved with Writing: Digital Media and received the John Hawkes Prize in Fiction. **Evan Commander** is a visual artist, poet, and curator. He currently lives and works in New York where he edits and curates the independent press and reading series, Moor. He is the author of two chapbooks, *Planet Carpet* and *A Thing and Its Ghost*.

10/25 MONDAY

Ben Fama & Natalie Lyalin

Ben Fama is the author of the chapbook *Aquarius Rising* (Ugly Duckling Presse) and co-author of the chapbook *Girl Boy Girl Boy* (The Corresponding Society). He is the founder of the Brooklyn-based Supermachine Reading Series and poetry journal. His work has appeared in *GlitterPony*, *notnostrums*, *EOAGH* and *No, Dear Magazine*, among others. **Natalie Lyalin** is the author of *Pink*

and *Hot Pink Habitat* (Coconut Books 2009) and the chapbook *Try A Little Time Travel* (Ugly Duckling Presse 2010). She lives in Philadelphia and teaches at Temple University and The University of the Arts.

10/27 WEDNESDAY

Rachel Loden & Jerome Sala

Rachel Loden is the author of *Dick of the Dead* (Ahsahta), a finalist for both the 2010 PEN USA Literary Award for Poetry and the California Book Award. It was also one of the three most-cited books in *Attention Span 2009*. Loden's first book, *Hotel Imperium*, won the Contemporary Poetry Series competition and was selected as one of the ten best poetry books of the year by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize, a Fellowship in Poetry from the California Arts Council, an &NOW Award, and a grant from the Fund for Poetry. This is her first reading in New York City. **Jerome Sala** is a poet and critic. He is the author of cult favorites such as *Spaz Attack*, *I Am Not a Juvenile Delinquent* and *Look Slimmer Instantly*. Forthcoming is a chapbook of goth-horror poems titled *Prom Night*, done in collaboration with artist Tamara Gonzales. His blog on poetry and pop culture is espresso bongo.

11/1 MONDAY OPEN READING

Sign-in at 7:45 p.m.

11/3 WEDNESDAY

John Olson & Jeni Olin/Truck Darling

John Olson is the author of seven collections of poetry and prose poetry, including *Oxbow Kazoo*, *Free Stream Velocity*, *Eggs & Mirrors*, and, most recently, *Backscatter: New And Selected Poems*, from Black Widow Press. He is currently at work on a novel about French painter Georges Braque. A native of Houston, TX and a resident of New York City, **Truck Darling** (formerly Jeni Olin) received her BA and MFA degrees from Naropa University in Writing & Poetics. She has published three full-length books: *Blue Collar Holiday* (a collaboration with the artist Larry Rivers), *Ich Habe Angst um Meinen Hedgefonds*, a German translation of her poems, and *Hold Tight: The Truck Darling Poems*.

11/5 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Cynthia Arrieu-King and Jane Carver

Cynthia Arrieu-King is an assistant professor of creative writing at Stockton College. Her poems and other work will or do appear in *Boston Review*, *Witness*, *Jacket*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *Harp and Altar*, among

others. Her book, *People are Tiny in Paintings of China*, will be out from Octopus Books this fall. She was born in the Empire State and is thrilled to be reading in New York alongside Miss Jane Carver. **Jane Carver** is an artist and musician currently based in Brooklyn. Her works include *Leda and the Swan*, *Mutter* and *Muse-Sick: The Corso Suite*. www.myspace.com/janeortruncarver.

11/8 MONDAY

Jennifer Karmin & Brandon Shimoda

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

Jennifer Karmin, in a polyvocal improvisation with seven NYC writers, will perform a selection of cantos from *Aaaaaaaaaalice*, published by Flim Forum Press in 2010. A proud member of the Dusie Kollektiv, she is the author of the Dusie chapbook *Evacuated: Disembodying Katrina*. **Brandon Shimoda** was born on the west coast of the United States, and has since lived in nine states and five countries. Recent books include *The Alps* (Flim Forum Press, 2008), *The Inland Sea* (Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2008), *Lake M* (Corollary Press, 2010) and *The Bowling* (Greying Ghost Press, 2010), a collaboration with Sommer Browning. He is currently on the road, and lives nowhere.

11/10 WEDNESDAY

Donna de la Perrière & Dana Ward

Donna de la Perrière is the author of *True Crime* and *Saint Erasure* (forthcoming from Talisman House, Fall 2010). Her work has appeared in *Agni*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Five Fingers Review*, *The New England Review*, *Bread Loaf Quarterly*, *New American Writing*, and other journals, as well as *No Gender: Reflections on the Life and Work of kari edwards* and *Bay Poetics*. **Dana Ward** is the author of, most recently, *Typing 'Wild Speech'*. New poems are out or forthcoming in *Burdock*, *Lana Turner*, *Peaches & Bats*, and other spots. He lives in Cincinnati, edits books and hosts readings under the Cy Press banner, and works as an advocate for adult literacy at the Over-the-Rhine Learning Center.

11/15 MONDAY TALK SERIES

Tan Lin and **Kareem Estefan** on affect and attention in beautiful operating systems (like disco or a relaxing poem). Tan Lin's *Seven Controlled Vocabularies* is a book as generic data object: at times it's like a painting and at others it's vaguely cinematic. It has a narrative structure, but it's loose like a tourist itinerary or inventory. The most beautiful page makes

you look away from what you are reading. Tan Lin said that. Estefan and Lin will talk about what attention spans are made, and what affective states they produce, in the generic objects and operating systems of the present. **Tan Lin** is a writer, artist, and critic. He has published the books *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe*, *BlipSoak01*, *Heath: plagiarism/outsource*, and *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004 The Joy of Cooking*. He is a professor of English and creative writing at New Jersey City University. **Kareem Estefan** currently co-curates the Segue Series at the Bowery Poetry Club and studies art criticism and writing at the School of Visual Arts. Previously, he hosted Ceptuetics, a WNYU radio show featuring readings and interviews with conceptually innovative poets, which is now archived at PennSound.

11/17 WEDNESDAY

Dean Young & Paul Violi

Dean Young has published nine books of poems, most recently *Primitive Mentor* and *elegy on toy piano*. A book of prose, *The Art of Recklessness*, was published by Greywolf in July 2010 and a new book of poems, *Fall Higher*, will be out next year. **Paul Violi** is the author of twelve books of poetry, including *Overnight*, *Breakers*, and *The Curious Builder*. He currently teaches at New York University, in the Graduate Writing Program at New School University, and in the English Department at Columbia University.

11/19 FRIDAY (10 PM) Poets' Potluck

The Thanksgiving Poets' Potluck is an opportunity for New York City's poetry communities to come together for an evening of readings, performances, and delicious food. An array of writers from the Poetry Project's series as well as other local reading series will read/perform their work. Anyone interested in bringing a dish for the potluck will contribute to an amazing Thanksgiving feast. If you're interested in bringing food, please email Brett Price at fridaynightseriesp@gmail.com.

11/29 MONDAY

Launch for Lunar Chandelier

Celebrate the launch of a new Brooklyn-based small press, Lunar Chandelier, with publisher **Kim Lyons** and authors of the first three titles, due out in Fall 2010: *Deliberate Proof* by **Vyt Bakaitis**, *petals, emblems* by **Lynn Behrendt**, and *Homework* by **Joe Elliot**. Lunar Chandelier's credo: "Delirious avenues/ lit/ with the chandelier souls/ of infusoria"

—Mina Loy

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BOOK REVIEWS

CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY JOSEF KAPLAN

01. *Cannot Contract*

Eddie Hopely

(Self-Published, 2010)

Cannot Contract ends with a bulleted list of ailments brought on in paper mill workers—“cardiovascular mortality” and “gastro-intestinal cancers”, to name a couple. It’s a sobering admission, especially for a book so intensely consumed with the material conditions of its poetics. Early on, for example, a poem partitions out like that Damien Hirst horse to reveal its compositional history. Earlier still, poems begin concurrent with the table of contents. Pages will “end” halfway down (as denoted by the page number); a new section will start up sometimes within the current one. The book’s primary tactic is to grind up against itself so that the result is often an abrupt tack in concern, where the context of a poem suddenly opens to incorporate relevancies previously concealed by the work’s aesthetics. These reveals are a kind of complicity, echoed in the book’s title: that the work will not contract, but must expand its purview at all moments. You see a similar compulsion in the OCR-mangled tweets scattered throughout, blurring an overwhelming density of confession: “really want to motorbike”; “but I get no kick at all”; “mom killed spider baby mole lady”; “dad killed —phone numbers / messages.” Hopely is tying an increased fluidity in personal data to a need to recognize how that data informs structures affecting the lives of actual people. This is how I read the second, punned “contract” of the title. As much a call-to-arms as it is a gasp.

02. *Crystal Hard-On*

Douglas Piccinnini

(minutesBOOKS, 2010)

These meticulous poems flirt along an edge of abstraction tweaked enough to just barely maintain the appearance of narrative metaphor. The result is a series of Young tableaux

in which structures of cohesion ironically grope an increasingly détourned content. In “New Window”: “The dry gland along the crepuscular bulge / Coughs a last gong before eloping / Blonde into a dirty epiphany. / His sister’s follicular infection healed. / We clap together. / The crypt echoes.” Also, in “Donkey Osseus”: “as though cokey split China- / town to kick the gong around / a dream about a thing / at home a diamond plug.” I take this to be largely satirical, a sort of transparent dickishness (à la the chapbook title). Like Indiana Jones’ Crystal Skull brain-killing Irina Spalko for wanting to know how the universe works, it’s a lively portrait of how craft and tradition can become linked to the violent upkeep of power relations. It’s also a poignant backdrop for Piccinnini’s relentless invocations of cock. Piles and piles of cock. “Plastic secretions / From the electro-organ wand”; “beef pill”; “angel chub a special tube”; “corks are better fed / bursting over admiring chests.” In fact towards the end I began to read every line as if it were a dick, which I also take to be satirical—the measuring up of attention.

03. *So Few Richards, So Many Dicks*

Marianne Morris

(Punch Press, 2010)

Marianne Morris presents a taut, brutalizing response to the *Times Literary Supplement*’s dismissal of this year’s *Infinite Difference: Other Poetries by UK Women Poets*. Read alongside her tumblr-posted critique, *So Few Richards, So Many Dicks* enacts a “shared experience” by spinning the *Times*’ blithe inattention into parallel, delinquent sleights of financial capital. “Pleasure you with a rolled / -up TLS,” she writes, “everyone will be happy // not in denial of shit but in accordance with it.” This dramatization recalls an earlier description of the “egregious battering / of capital organs” about the head of a secretary—in the “financial time of the lyric,” everywhere we look we’re getting screwed, either by some idiot reviewer or by Repo 105. Morris’ poem answers this by sharply layering the banalities of domestic and corporate routine within a shifting field of linguistic registers, at times harshly broken apart (“Today I love you. You are much better than Twitter

can / eat itself, just ask”), at other times lucid. (“There was a crash but nothing ever ended. / The abused become abusers / sometimes in the amorous method.”) The momentum pushing them through is mainly a fierce capacity for reference and (an earned) disgust. It’s essentially a diss track. And when Morris notes that there is a “proximity of shit to our live / breathing,” it is as succinct and convincing a diss track as one could hope for.

04. *Market Freakout*

Stan Apps

(Slack Buddha Press, 2010)

“It was a time of personal and collective economic crisis, and the two contrived to become mixed in the author’s mind.” In *Market Freakout*, this blurred account manifests Rashomon-style—or maybe Sybil-style—as a rotating set of stylistic reactions: somber (“I could kiss you, / we could make love / in a casual, distracted way / as if we found a little time”), caustic (“I like how the recession lowers the bar // for what I consider ‘victory.’”), angry (“IT’S SORT OF LIKE BLACKMAIL / EXCEPT THEY’RE NOT RESPONSIBLE / THEY’RE TOO IRRATIONAL”), and expository (“books lose most of their value when you bring them home”). It’s an appropriately bleak, jarring read, with a sense of unease compounded by the almost paradoxical tone of utter confidence consistent throughout. While each stylistic component is in some way dwarfed, or defeated by what it describes, its conviction in describing that object is impeccable. Apps excels at this, using an authoritative mode to perform the devastating effects of witnessing one’s absolute attention unable to influence the target of its focus (like, say, in love, life or class war). In his Author’s Declaration, he concludes: “I would prefer to live differently, but if everyone is so set upon preserving these systems, and glorifying the anxiety-promoting self-harm they induce, then what can I do? I suppose the only way I will be able to transcend them is by making more money.” This is sad because it is funny because it is true.

Josef Kaplan edits Sustainable Aircraft, an online journal of mostly critical writing on contemporary poetry.

BOOK REVIEWS

*Seven Controlled Vocabularies and
Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking*

Tan Lin

(Wesleyan, 2010)

REVIEW BY JORDAN DAVIS

Tan Lin has been holding out on us. To be specific, he's been withholding the series of prose meditations he's read in public on occasion over the last decade plus or minus five years. These pieces, which he read under the Eno-esque working title *Ambient Stylistics*, are written in clear prose about mystifying subjects, as if a features section had been commandeered by some late 20th-century French philosopher, and still managed to get the early edition out:

What is the relation between a fruit and a vegetable? A book transpires one letter and then one word at a time and nothing about reading can prevent this from happening. For this reason, books are best diluted or read over a good many years. Only things that are consumed endure beyond their shelf life. Nothing is really different [if you say it] is. I had dinner yesterday at WD-50, which is a restaurant located where the new Fukienese area of Chinatown and the old pickle shops of the defunct Lower East Side

almost come into alignment. The restaurant is at 50 Clinton Street and it has a post-Craftsman style décor with bulbous glass lamps that look like fluorescent flower bulbs. The chef's name is Wylie Dufresne. He is young and looks like a cowboy reincarnated as a skateboarder. His father Dewey is also a chef.

Lin lets the subject morph without losing the plot. Though these pieces are preoccupied with transitory sublimity, the slough of despond of many an honest poet, they are relatively short. They are funny and serious. Though there's a good deal of internal repetition and recombination of set phrases, I want to believe they are more than mere idiosyncratic associations and brute computational method. They occupy a habitable zone between "I don't get it" and "your point being?"

It would have been a stretch to see any of this (besides the funny and transitory parts) in the work Lin has chosen until lately to collect in book form. To date, his books have been crammed full of concentrated nonsense, parodies of unknown sources, and fleeting lyrical memories of growing up in a college town on the edge of Appalachia. None of the parts are labeled and there are no instructions for assembly. Brian Kim Stefans has heard Hopkins in them, and Michael Palmer, and I agree it's hard to avoid hearing

Palmer in couplets such as "A deck of cards is opened. Hands heard / Like rain shuffling 'inside' the hansom cab" or even "The vitamins are speckled / They moan like creases on their towels." Somewhat harder to hear Palmer in this, though: "Jai-Alai. College president leaves house and kids. I'm / on welfare. Errata. Jeez don't touch that, etc."

The Barnes & Noble hardcover edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, published in 2005, retails for \$7.95. Lin's introduction to that volume doubles as excellent self-analysis, indebted to but not impoverished by the essays of Adam Phillips:

Alice's conversations, when they don't end unsatisfactorily in silence, tend to go in a circle. For the child, the ability to have and share feelings might even be inversely related to language acquisition, so that paradoxically the more skilled the child is in language, the *less* able she is to express the intensity of her first feelings, which are by definition primal and non-verbal.

Lin has a weakness for gnomic pronouncements, but the remarks in the introduction to *Alice* are more than just remarks. In the passage above, he zeroes in on a possible vector in the weird neutral feeling his own work prompts. *Seven Controlled Vocabularies etc* combines this mastery of the codes of art

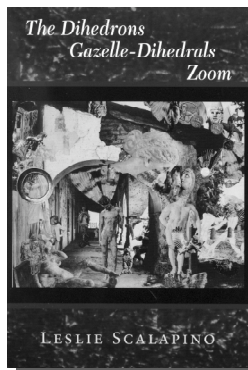
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and literary criticism with his knack for mixing and matching. As Lewis Carroll enjoyed parodying Mother Goose, Isaac Watts and Robert Southey, Lin bends Walter Pater's "All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music" into several unlikely combinations. Here's one: "As we all know, poetry and the novel should aspire not to the condition of music but to the condition of relaxation and yoga." To borrow from a wilder critic, all of Tan Lin's uses of the word "should" have to be interpreted as Lin convincing bystanders of his narrator's ecstatic insanity in all art-matters. The same goes for "would," "could," "for this reason," "that is why," "it is important," and even "all" and "nothing." These little markers of coercive competence – they're wonderful. Just what his work has needed all along.

Giving himself the permission to be a mystery genius allows him to tell several truths poets need to hear: "The most exasperating thing at a poetry reading is always the sound of a poet reading." "People are basically animals that know to read." "[B]ooks are the most careless and also the most relaxing of things you can do to your brain. That is why they are so beautiful and why reading and college go together so well i.e. because [sic] they in fact go together so poorly." "Someone said: 'Anticipation is an interesting and difficult thing to produce.'" (Someone being the artist Jorge Prado.) "Someone else said, 'Excitement is the only thing in the world that cannot be predicted.'" (Actually, according to Google, it wasn't excitement but alienation that someone was talking about, and they weren't talking but writing a psychology text on juvenile delinquency.)

As mystery genius Lin declares, "No book shall have a posthumous fame." Perhaps we can act together as a community of reading writers and see about giving this book some fame in its lifetime. Perhaps not – this being a Tan Lin production, there is a great deal of gibberish strewn among the beauties. But there are beauties, at least as many as I thought I heard when this book was just a rumor. Probably more. More, please.

Jordan Davis edited the Newsletter from 1992 to 1994.

Undone: A Fakebook Chris McCreary (Furniture Press Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY HAILEY HIGDON

Chris McCreary's *Undone: A Fakebook* deftly deals in piecemeal. I do not mean that it battles incompleteness or fragmentation. I mean strictly, with a delicate aversion to any system, McCreary tackles and unhinges separate concerns in distinct tones. In eight shifting sections, he threads these tones into a composite. With each word functioning like a series of euphonic notes, *Undone* is a malleable thing. McCreary's attention to sound is strong. The language is slick. At times it feels stuck inside an angular shape—sharp-cornered and anxious—but then McCreary tactfully works to round out the tight angular moments with concise, persistent, disciplined candor.

Undone is upfront about its conglomerates of assonance and alliteration. In the section, "Songs To Learn and Sing," McCreary trills,

First the bulb
had dropped from its socket & now
his coffee was getting mocked

and

His t-shirt said, *Not Dead Yet* & so
Switzerland became a metaphor for sabotage
or subterfuge & other stuff that gets swept

under rug.

Gradually tethering its whiplashed resonant tentacles, McCreary allows for temptingly associative moments too. For example, in the poem "Solitary Man" he writes:

I am tripping on my assonance,
I say, even itching in my iambs.

Though the musical moments of the book speak first, the collage work here allows many other allusions to emerge. Myth, music, role-playing, fantasy, and popular culture references pepper the book. Still, the poems in *Undone* can function on their own, especially because McCreary balances the playful

moments with riskier, darker ones. In the latter half of the book, he flips between dream and nightmare, reality and fantasy.

Despite my tendency to connect "fakebook" to "facebook," the text bears a closer resemblance to the fake book of early jazz—a minimal, loose collection of melodies and chords on single sheets—the starting tools for improvisation. In a recent interview with Marthe Reed, McCreary expounds on this connection. He reveals: "The idea of the 'fakebook' for me had more to do with the fact that I could dive in and out of more traditional structures and use of rhyme, then divert course again as necessary."

McCreary succeeds in allowing the suggestion of a traditional structure, and then he hits the panic button. *Undone* explores various jumping-off points. The book is divided into eight sections, with each poem taking up only one sheet. For the most part, there is a subtle variance in the sections. Though the poems display a sense of control, they also flaunt unabashed about-faces.

The first two one-poem sections, "Black Star" and "More Songs about Buildings & Food," evoke a slick sonic resonance that later reappears in third section, "The Diamond Sutra," in lines like:

I say, *hum* in my sternum
& *numb* in my arm & portable

stairways, I say,
& *low tides* & so-

called life rafts, *bones filed*
to fit the glass slipper

or more pronounced moments like:

left an Etch-
A-Sketch in my teddy bear's

intestines.

"The Diamond Sutra" offers a posturing sleekness. It functions almost as a boastful list—the numbers in the black book, with a nod to Neil Diamond. Then, the book takes a quirky turn and allows for section four, "The Great American Songbook," which is a hilarious four-part undoing of the pop music essay. In these four one-page prose essays,

the narrative is farcically non-conclusive and floating, with an ironic, pondering tone. The tongue-in-check meandering and the clusterfuck of pop culture invading poetry hint at the underbelly of the book, the dark obfuscated personal moments of delicately articulated anxiety.

These darker moments begin to appear in the sixth section, "The Black Book." In his interview with Marthe Reed,¹ McCreary calls the "The Black Book" the "dark heart" of *Undone*. To me, "The Black Book" reads as a tense and careful cut-and-paste of the anxieties of domesticity. McCreary juggles paranoia, fears of climax/anti-climax, abandonment and inadequacy all adroitly, balancing them with a breezy musical quality that obliges these personal fractions to function collectively, but also in an opaque camouflage.

My favorite pieces are found in this section and the next, "Fiend Folio." Here is a sample:

The Black Book feels your pain. He misses your body,
just wants to
be held, fears you'll shelve him under "Self Help" &
move on.

He wants you to flip his pages & clip passages at
random, maybe cut
& paste these recycled ciphers until he's finally free
from narrative,
nothing left but bits of flesh pressed into fresh positions

McCreary's "Black Book" is not a little book of phone numbers; it is the journal he keeps. I imagine the initial narrative exists here, then patchwork and pasting moves the passages into a position, making the poem out of the parts.

Overall, *Undone* is musical, dexterous and nuanced. It becomes more of itself with each read. In the final sections, "Fiend Folio" and "Pretty Monsters," McCreary provides a balance of irony coupled with its constant shadow, vulnerability. This allows the text to seem at once lippy and pert, yet terrifically veiled and dark in its off-rhymed cadence. The darker, mythical and fantastical allusions appear

¹ McCreary, Chris. "inter[re]view Chris McCreary & Marthe Reed." [Weblog entry.] *Dialogue's End*. 15 July 2010. <http://thediologuesend.blogspot.com/2010/07/interviewchris-mccreary-marthe-reed.html>.

here, suggesting a more circular reading of the book. In the final poem, he croons:

& so we let these myths
blend, wending paths of bread

crumbs never eaten,
enchantments

never cast &
this way, then, our odyssey

never ends...

Hailey Higdon lives, writes and works in Philadelphia. She runs *What To Us* (press) and makes small books with female poets in a series called *THE DIMES*. Her chapbook, *How To Grow Almost Everything is forthcoming from Agnes Fox Press*.

Free Cell

Anselm Berrigan
(City Lights, 2009)

REVIEW BY PAUL KILLEBREW

"The compatibility of cynicism and conviction would unnerve my foundations were I not conjoined with friendship itself at its staggering wake." Minus some line breaks, this sentence from the first page of Anselm Berrigan's new book, *Free Cell*, spells out the ethos of "Have a Good One," a long cycle of short poems that all appear under the same title—"Have a Good One"—and take up the front three-quarters of the book. These are poems about getting by in the human universe through "the icing of all personal / bureaucracies," offices of existence where small and large injustices trigger passions within us that cannibalize us down to appetizers until we can regenerate in the company of fellow travelers.

There's an interesting theory of politeness that Steven Pinker talks about in *The Stuff of Thought*, something I'd call, borrowing from the legal academic Owen Fiss, the "antisubjugation" principle of manners: when I ask you, "Could you pass the ketchup?", it's

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not like I'm unsure whether you're capable of passing ketchup or doubt whether you're actually willing to pass me the ketchup; I'm asking because I want to make it clear to you that I understand that you don't exist purely for my own ends, that you're autonomous, that I, at some point, will pass something to you.

Isn't something like that at work when I say to a total stranger, "Have a good one"? It's not an antisubjugation thing exactly, but there is some kind of shared understanding, maybe along the lines of: "We have found ourselves together for a moment during this very short life that holds futures neither of us has any control over, and though I know nothing about you and will probably never see you again, I can only hope that wherever your path takes you next is a good place." The restraint is gorgeous—the hope for someone else's good fortune, the wish for a good "one" and nothing more—which must be why there's nothing you can say back except "Thanks" or "You too."

The point is, it's not easy being you, everyone knows it, and sometimes we even let on:

I hereby
invent anonymous gods
to look out for the terminally
inhibited. Go forth, and bend
not these ugly fates toward
their piss-ant excuses for darkness.
Don't kill anyone I know.

Or even more to the point:

There's
a they for you
out there "There
is?"
There
is.

There's a grace to all of this that may be grounded in an understanding of how little separates us ("how long will I own / this porous be?") or how obfuscating the self can be ("Explanation befits a mirrored / version of me, so I / move on."). It may be as simple as a loner's sympathy ("I'm all I'm / comfortable / with lately."), though, even if it is, it's sympathy

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grounded in a sort of ethical imperative. ("It's become harder and harder / not to take responsibility. For / all of it. Every bastion of / disrepair, every qualified public / apology for ill-tongued remarks.")

. . . .

After the "Have a Good One" poems, *Free Cell* has two other parts: a poem of forty-three medium-length, left-justified lines titled "Let Us Sample Protection Together" and a twenty-eight-page cycle of medium to longish poems under the heading "To Hell with Sleep". It's an interesting setup for a book—two cycles joined by a hinge—and because both of the cycles were previously published as smaller-run titles on their own (*Have A Good One* was published by Cy Press in 2008, and *To Hell with Sleep* was published the next year by Letter Machine Editions), *Free Cell* also has the feel of two books conjoined.

I like to think of *Free Cell* as two books with lagniappe because it's nice to remember that the book form is, among other things, a technical maneuver you can make with poems. And a set of poems can be a book without appearing by itself in perfect-bound form. That's the idea with *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* or John Ashbery's *The Mooring of Starting Out*, and of course with Ted Berrigan's *Collected Poems* (which Anselm Berrigan co-edited), all of which are organized not only as collections of poems, but also as collections of books. Reading a lot of poems by someone through the lenses of individual books can cast the poet's concerns through varying levels of focus across the poet's life.

I'd say the same is true of *Free Cell*. With changes in emphasis, each of Anselm Berrigan's full-length collections has involved humor, the sensations of an ethical person living through tumultuous political situations, chunky phoneme clusters, and first-person reports about family, work, and life. Of the two books in *Free Cell*, "Have a Good One" tilts in the direction of humor, politics, and the personal, whereas the tight clumps of language in "To Hell with Sleep" read more like bits of consciousness seeking respite by forming themselves into poems.

My understanding is that the poems that make up "To Hell with Sleep" were all written after Berrigan's daughter Sylvie was born, and they do have the feeling of a psychic freak-out tempered only by how little of the psyche is awake. There was a similar unity of form and state of consciousness in "Zeros and Ones," the second section of Berrigan's second full-length collection, *Zero Star Hotel*, which Berrigan said was written after writing out long lines "of the numbers 0 and 1, into duplicate lines with the numbers spelled out," which put him into a "trance-like empty state." The poems in "To Hell with Sleep" resist conscious volition, but not consciously: "Sylvie hates to / go to sleep, no she hates / the 'go' part & so do I". It's the kind of writing that your brain can only do when it doesn't know it's "doing" anything at all.

Paul Killebrew works as a lawyer at Innocence Project New Orleans. His book Flowers was published by Canarium this year, and his long poem Inspector vs. Evader is being republished online by Ugly Duckling Presse.

Censory Impulse Erica Kaufman (Factory School, 2009)

REVIEW BY MICHAEL NICOLOFF

I tend to think that calling someone a "poet of the body" is both a sly and puzzling move: you get to sound theory-sexy but also to say pretty much nothing, and you somehow manage to distance yourself from the actual messiness of physical life. But in rereading *Censory Impulse*—a sequence I've loved from its mini-incarnations in chapbooks up through its present full-length version—the sense that I'm wading through a language of sinewy physicality makes thinking POTB hard to avoid. Having used that phrase, though, I'm immediately going to throw it out again, because the rarified analytical air the term conjures up—a sort of bad college English paper, all mind / no ass thing that, incidentally, infects introductions at readings at a staggering scale—really has so little to do with EK's work, which is full of the linguistic concentration that I'm always a sucker for, but is also so possessed by a meaty personal investment that the term "poet of the

body" feels far too theory-laden to contain what she's really doing.

I'm going to get into my own hopefully none-too-rarified analysis in a moment, because I think this book can help to answer an often-repeated question—namely, the question of how best for poets to negotiate the intellectual architecture we're in dialogue with in a still-post-Language moment but how to also inject into the picture the emotional overflow and plain fun so many of us still need to avoid linguistic eunuchdom. That was a pretty long sentence, I know, which is why before I do too many of those and potentially go up my own rabbit hole, I want to give EK's own words their proper due.

Because I love the language from the very beginning: "first i think i need / to come to terms / with amputation." Point A: a gorgeous start. Point B: we're at the first stanza in the first poem and yet when we finish the book we can see those first lines contain a microcosm of much of the book's multilayered focus. On the one hand, amputation is bodily, medical, a physical loss, but maybe we're talking about more than the physical, as a few lines down she writes that "i no longer choose / to write questions. / to notice weather. / to hold her hand."—three more amputations, one could say, from inquiring intellect, from the physical world, from a close relationship with another human. There's a lot of hurt here, a lot of loss and malfunction, and while I'm not sure what it's about, really, I get the sense that the "i" here, if it isn't the author, is not a faceless pronoun. Fictional or not, this is a person, and I like it when I find persons in poems, because even if things are weird as fuck in there, at least you have the sense someone's in residence, taking care of and responsibility for the place.

What's cool, though, is that we don't have *only* persons, or *only* the feeling of hurt from what's amputated. In Part II of the book, my favorite section, things get denser but also a bit more smarty-pants, and we hear about "the greater scheme / of lasso coupon radio / hysterectomy" but where that same "i" shows up to tell us "i have no plans / to massage your decency model." We're still bodily, to be sure, but it's not just any old amputation—it's a lasso coupon radio hysterectomy.

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The wry accusation of *your* decency model: shades of Bruce Andrews having a lot of fun, but again, with more of the personal than we're used to hearing from Bruce—a nice combo, and a nice contrast to what's come before in Part I. This variation in registers continues throughout the book's seven parts, and the successful push-pull between the independence of each piece and overall unity is something I find as impressive as its micro-level construction of lines.

But I want to jump back another remove, to the long question I posed earlier. EK quotes Hannah Weiner in her epigraph, who writes: "be very careful in your intercourse with strangers." I can't help but read this as a comment not only on the book's subject matter but also on poetic practice. It's hard to get your mind out of the gutter with "intercourse," but that's kind of the point: it encompasses a range of interactions, of sensory impulses to take in and process—social, sexual, vague, particular. But the other side of that intercourse is in your own response, those sensory impulses you put out for others to pick up, and here's where the "censory" part comes in. What do you, as a poet, communicate, and what do you hold back? How can you be true to your own way of relating to the world and yet not feel like an emotionally closed-off weirdo? *Censory Impulse* provides one such successful answer to these questions. I love New Narrative, and admire the confessional poets' bold TMI, but I know if I begin from personal disclosure it's a quick road to formal brittleness and a severely bored reader. Seeing EK put out a book that's by no means full of private facts but somehow feels like it is, that has a dense linguistic surface but still feels like it's talking to me one-on-one as an emotional human, creates a model worth studying and emulating. Fuck "poet of the body"—this is what all good poets should shoot for.

Michael Nicoloff is a poet, audio artist, and very informal urban planner residing in the East Bay Area of California. TAXT Press put out his CD, "Punkses", earlier this year.

In the Function of External Circumstances

Edwin Torres
(Nightboat Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY KEN L. WALKER

Hopefully, someone out there can agree that the quarry the lyric gets its water from comes out of the human need to shuck loneliness, or at least, to better understand that kind of warmth and open possibility that alone can be. Edwin Torres demonstrates that well, among many other things, throughout his newest book, *In the Function of External Circumstances*. Over a hundred pages of poetry is sequenced through five sections of multiple forms, including diary excerpts and travelogues.

One example of lyrical faultlessness emerges in "In Each Look Our Years," where an encounter morphs into dimensional stand-out:

that's it
that I walked into the café
and in the noise and the crowd
we met

and that I saw
what it was I'd been
in what it was
I saw

that in our skin
in the decade of our skin
is what began
before we knew

and that time before
with this time now
is nothing
waiting to start again

It would be convenient to label this Williamsesque, but these types of lyrical moments that occur throughout the book substantiate an idea that *process* does not only pose as form but can be turned into it. Subtlety of this sort transpires in one of the book's first poems, "Sarcophagi," where an agency of past-tense verbs turns into lowly resonating sounds, mediated by personal sense experiences. An ancient Kemetian sarcophagus acts as an emblem for what Torres seemingly

does with this work—training the reader to alter his or her conditionings. When looking through a sarcophagus, it's easy to get caught up with the tiny circle of light at the other end, but its sole purpose is to excel at being a funeral receptacle, a transport to another side of death. Like a tunnel reconstructs the entire view of a passage, so does the process and method restructure the view of the poem.

The book's third section—"Underneath the Southern Cross"—feels like pieces of a shredded diary slowly floating to the water's surface. Debris of what feels like whole poem excerpts meanders through 36 pages. One couplet goes: "Fanny-Be Buzzrock / Jeepa Meanie Chola-Roll" as another shouts, "HORIZON IS INTERRUPTED BY REEF: / excuse me! excuse me! excuse me!" Then there are correspondences in their entirety, satiated with witty passing-through observances. The text itself changes form numerous times, from italicized passages to bolded lyrics to simultaneously bolded and italicized sound poems.

By the time a reader allows these variant forms—some gorgeously nonsensical, others posturing as subconscious messages—he or she finds that the normal conditioning of reading and standard understanding of understanding has been altered and that the reader can be an active participant in the procedure. Granted, this is one of poetry's great tasks—to take a reader and wring him or her out like an employed dishcloth. Rightly so.

Torres Clark-Kents as a graphic designer by day, making him the complete artist—stage performer, poet, painter, collage-maker, word inventor, and computer expert. He designed the book, which makes approaching its pinnacle section, "Liminal Skin: A Text in Four Movements" (co-designed by Nancy Cohen), fresh and full of leeway. The piece traverses 16 pages of sound experiments and peppered lyrical moments—not to mention a few archaeological eras—and ends in a compound-spaced lovely set of phrasings:

still was I that still each time each I one at a time

The section begins with a poem titled "Parallel Seed," where the wind carries seeds into

BOOK REVIEWS

the unknown. Graphically, there are sketches of tree lines, kernels that also look like eyes, and scalable things that could be ladders, buildings or lateral walkways. The pages are a mild gray shade instead of the rest of the book's normal white. The whole piece sails the book into a section of water that few poets decide to circumnavigate, which lends it nominally to sharp criticism (it's too much to take in) or unbolted acceptance (it's experimentally unassailable). It's not heady stuff, but it does require some cerebral tinkering, in the way that concrete poetry always has (though this isn't concrete poetry). One can take the light-switch for granted or turn it off and on for hours, staring at the splendor of what evolved out of lightning and a kite. Fun's fun and should stay that way. In the case of this book, it's going to take some carelessly accountable readers to play and work and work and play and admit marvel right when it's time to.

In a recent interview, Torres told me that *In the Function of External Circumstances* is the first book he's ever actually composed. One of the last poems, "A Most Imperfect Start," sums it all up delightfully: "We are in the guise of body when least aware of body. / I am continually at wander with the reach of everyone around me."

Ken L. Walker still has a Kentucky driver's license, received his MFA at Brooklyn College, and is the features editor at Coldfront. Recent reviews and poems can be found in *The Boxcar*, *The New Yorker online*, *Lumberyard*, *The Wolf*, and *Crab Orchard Review*.

My New Job

Catherine Wagner

(Fence Books, 2009)

REVIEW BY SARA WINTZ

After turning down the PR gig that I've held for the last year in order to find work in education (In this job market?! What was I thinking?!), I found comfort in *My New Job*. So what's Wagner's new job?

In her poetry, what's new is her hyperreal presence—so vividly described that it extends out from the surface of the page. This imagery was palpable in her first two books—*Macular Hole* and *Miss America*—

also published by Fence—but Wagner pushes imagery to a whole new and completely exciting dimension in her most recent book.

My New Job is divided into five sections: *Exercises*, *Hole in the Ground*, *Everyone in the Room Is a Representative of the World at Large*, *Roaring Spring*, and *My New Job*. In the first section, *Exercises*, Wagner uses a combination of didactic and poetic language to walk the reader toward an alternate reality: "Put your hand in the womb and let it sprout / Not ready at all just trees between the shutters." (8) What? I can't do that!

Later, she goes on to write:

"If a poem is active
Its action aborts in you
As colored light flies into black

Keeps flying
The light from long ago
Until the night blockade.

So shut the book." (36)

Wagner establishes binaries: the physical object of the book and the space of imagination that grows from the dialogue of reader and writer. Wagner complicates these binaries of physical and cerebral with fantastical physical instructions—asking the reader to "do" something physical that he or she can only imagine doing, and not really do: "Put your hand in the womb..." In other moments, Wagner nods toward a physical engagement between reader and writer, within the space of the page:

"all along I was alone to that
though everyone saw me
checking myself out by talking to them
when they checked themselves out in me
I tried to say Oh here have it all" (17)

Her establishment of author and reader presences, and her enactment of a physical interaction between those forms, in a space of ideas—excites! The hyperreal presence of author and reader blurs otherwise established boundaries: Where does the surface of the book end and the space of our reality

begin? Where does the shape of the author end and our imagined image of the writer begin? Where does the poem end and where do we begin?

Every layer of the human everyday seems to be present—the visceral, cerebral, conversational—all at once.

Catherine Wagner is present as author to this body of work, just as much as she is a character and narrative inside it. The work embodies Catherine Wagner and Catherine Wagner embodies the work. In a way, she has written herself.

She nods toward the possibility of an active poem—one that is part of our body, extending out into our perspective of the world. If we "shut the book" and begin to move—where do we go? And wherever we "go," we still carry an imaginary, "poetic" dimension with us, in real time.

Wagner identifies the complicated relationship between real and imagined states by referring to the real object of the book and to the physicality of herself and reader—in relation to their cerebral discourse.

Even Wagner's author photo nods to this complicated relationship between real and imagined. In the photograph, she appears to be standing in a forest, while waving her hand in the foreground like a gang sign. (Maybe it's a W, for Wagner?) But either way, her hand is moving and so it blurs in the photograph. Her facial expression is confident, even a bit confrontational, and her left shoulder is raised slightly, like a shrug. The blurring of her hand is what interests me most. Her author photo is unlike others that I have seen. Even when an author appears to be moving—I'm thinking of the one in which Tao Lin appears to be flossing his teeth, for example—the motion of an author in a photograph is rarely blurred. And I would normally hesitate to spend this long describing, of all things, an author photo, except that I feel like the way that she has chosen to pictorially represent herself is unusual and relevant to the way that she represents herself in this book's content. It further articulates the slippage between physical and imagined; the hyperreality of her presence as it extends off the page.

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A good job! I don't know if it's a permanent or temporary position for Wagner, but it's certainly pleasurable. Cathy Wagner, "You're going to make me scream inside my head."

Sara Wintz's writing has appeared in Physical Poets vol.4 [Extended Techniques], HTML Giant, Jacket, and on Ceptuetics, and is forthcoming in 6x6. She co-curates the Segue Reading Series.

Boris by the Sea
Matvei Yankelevich
(Octopus Books, 2009)

REVIEW BY BEN FAMA

If you aren't much of a child, this book might spin you into full-blown despair. Luckily, many are, and this book will seem for you for that reason. Not that this is the writing of an immature mind. *Boris by the Sea* is written by someone who could be battered this devastatingly only by a world he is so lovingly trying to make his way through.

Boris by the Sea traces the thoughts and actions of a simple set of characters (Boris, Woman, Ivan, Author) drifting episodically through (mostly) untitled poems. In modest language, we witness Boris' discovering through his direct experiences:

Boris got the crazy idea to build something and began with himself. He said to his right foot, build yourself. And it did. The left foot followed suit. It got boring.

We quickly see Boris reach the logical extension of self-conscious thought: the edge of imagination as the limit of reality, the limit of being-in-time as death. The style with which Matvei Yankelevich handles this sort of moment opens up some connections: Hegel's direct objects, Descartes' thought experiments, Beckett's animal loneliness:

Boris wondered if he had been made wrong. He checked to see if any parts were missing. Seems to be all here. Everything seems to be in its place.

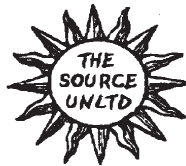
But he certainly felt wrong. There was no way to tell. Boris wondered for a little while longer. He was distracted by the air moving around him. It smelled of salt and fish.

There's also theater here. In the 62 breezy, wide-open pages of poetry and play, several pages of poetic theater appear, and for good reason. When Yankelevich first landed in NYC in the nineties, he was working at Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater at St. Mark's Church. *Boris by the Sea* itself began as a theatre experiment, and even more, Yankelevich, in what must have been a different arts climate during the excessive nineties, borrowed "go cards" from cafés, pasted his own xeroxed *Boris* writings on them, and put them back into the public circulation—a level of punkdom that informs his other major involvement aside from writing: being a founding member and *de facto* figurehead of Brooklyn's art-book and publishing collective Ugly Ducking Presse.

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The glow inside the various forms Yankelevich uses ignites most through this beautifully rendered solitude as it passes through time. The form as we see it on the page feels good against all the irreconcilable experiences we suffer through *Boris*. We get a magical world that yields to imagination, a sad world where things you dream will never come true, an astounding world where watering the sea qualifies your own thirst:

The water frothed between his hands and a white foam rose to the surface.

The white foam was white. But it was not clean.

Boris gave up washing the water. One should never give up. So he tried again.

The other characters enables Boris's private thoughts. Ivan exists as a philosophical springboard, someone to talk at and to talk through, while Woman exists as alien-cum-other. The appearances of these characters are only tangential to Boris' actual concerns.

The Author's character functions more profoundly. First appearing as the writer who "once met his own invention in the park", he bickers with Boris about Time, Perfection, and the possibilities of art. Here Boris sasses Author and Author takes it. Later we see Author dandyishly talk of his ego and narcissism. Another appearance gives instructions on rendering *Boris by the Sea* into a children's book:

"...one should avoid picturing a human in the illustrated version of the book. The illustrations should be abstract color washes or designs and portray the objects that occupy the world without ever showing the human himself."

Early in the summer, Yankelevich read at the Project, tellingly paired with conceptual heavyweight Robert Fitterman (co-author, with Vanessa Place, of *Notes on Conceptualisms*, UDP 2010). I got a flavor of the newer things Yankelevich had been up to since *Boris*: a self-published book of conceptual list-poems entitled *The Nature Poetry of Matvei Yankelevich*, and lyrical excerpts from a longer

manuscript in progress that he had been calling *Composition Book*. While the work of Boris is like a large cat pressing the earth, hungry to see what already exists—snakes, worms, grubs—it does little prophesizing about what is still to come.

Boris by the Sea took Yankelevich ten years to complete (calling to mind Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, a similar drift through cold emotional distance). In *Boris's* 62 pages, the passages often turn to death, negation, distance, doubt, or at their most humane, tears. Yankelevich has established himself as a man-to-watch in the collective vanguard of contemporary poetry, and we have every reason to believe what's next from him will be just as astonishing, new, and smart.

Ben Fama is the author of *Aquarius Rising* and co-author of *Girl Boy Girl Boy*. He is the founder of the Brooklyn-based SUPERMACHINE poetry journal and reading series.

Windmills in Flames: Old and New Poems Tom Raworth (Carcenet, 2010)

REVIEW BY MARK S. MENDOZA

i have tasted fire

goodbye, pleasant butter

— "How to Patronize a Poem"

they give it away

with pleasant butter

— "Continued"

... And a silver sixpence in her shoe

As a companion to Raworth's *Collected Poems*, *Windmills* could be seen as a welcome, somewhat PR-friendly edition of previously scarcely procurable poems. This slim, shiny

volume packs a mighty punch and fits in the hand or under the arm or into a large jacket pocket without being noticeable by closed-circuit cameras. It shows off an extraordinary range of forms: some fine squibs, rhyming doggerel (the necessarily bad pro-war piece "Listen Up"), one-liners, language musings ("Cap"), villanelle ("Never Odd or Even"), zaum ("Issue them Gasmasks"), and excursions into concrete stylings ("Language Construction" and "Capture of Karadzic"). Though if one knows these poems in their "original" settings, it can be a little strange to see them take form here—like the agoraphobic kids one used to have a blast drinking with who now appear behind desks in an Arts Council conference room.

This selection wins out with what it offers wayfaring guests under one modest roof. As if this weren't enough, we have a superb cover illustration courtesy of Raworth himself that the publishers might have done well to consider reproducing as an insert postcard since the poet's visual art is all too hard to come by. Here is a chance to think about Raworth's general economy and his achievements in concentrated form. The poems characteristically veer and swerve idiosyncratically across the page, delighting in tonal shifts, inscribing urgent uncertainties and registering the uncanny nature of reading literature along the way, careful to evade the merely evasive or opt for finishing the recumbent reader off with a freeze/frieze marked up with frustration.

Indeed, the brevity of most of the poems, their use of the sentence-image and their relentless parataxis mean we are not permitted to settle into the culture of the book, but must try out different arrangements, choose amongst different organizations, conditions and causes, vectors and connecting (t)issues – and not entirely as we see fit. We cannot mould the poem in our image because the total process impels radical solidarity beyond self-seeking avant-gardism ("lose / your self // your self / becomes / your art // then what is left / lives [. . .]" "How to Patronize a Poem"). According to his own blurb—what Creeley has in quantity, Raworth has in quality of blurbs—"The poems have no intention, though their author

is happy should others find them interesting to read. They will help the reader lose weight, have an attractive smile, be at ease with members of the opposite (or their own) sex, have relief from constipation, speak in tongues, fillet herrings and ultimately boost the Nation's economy."

"Caller," with its superb speedy title-poem, takes a sardonic look at the contradictions of living in a so-called or actual social democracy, e.g., "menace without epiphanies / malice placid reach // have tenth reservoirs / cutback / tax cuts / not shared sharply". The first of *Windmills'* two epigraphs, from the United States Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual*, mentions "force combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state," inviting comparison with the strategies of response among the International Poetry Corps ("against leif ericsson / courage and knowledge // are not enough / pleasant butter again", "Thor Heyerdahl Solved the Mystery of the Statues? *That Wasn't the Mystery*"). The second epigraph reads: "Flowers in their wounds,' muttered the airman, 'that's what she couldn't get over, flowers in their wounds, flowers.'" The cost of certain comforts (including those brought about by the cultish status of "poetry," marketable relativism, nouns) are exposed throughout the collection: "the placebo / send for the placebo" ("Baggage Claim"); "that one, that it believes to god and doomsday / can not be rested to comfort, / until that it recognizes well / and to its defenders and to" ("Translation 2"); "please note this page / contains the name of god / if printed out please / treat it with appropriate respect" ("Anti-Terrorism Started"). The poet, sick with the squits produced by too many red herrings, patronizes the patronized poetasters of the day, accusing them with stunning Byronic wit of

stunting their *own* growth... making *themselves*
ornamental japanese trees,
safe, instead of being the trees *struck by lightning*

*

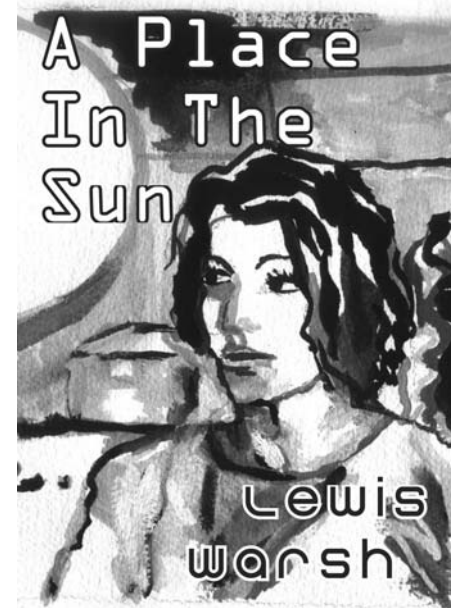
'extra yields
extra profits'
as if what they handle
were not alive

Elsewhere, a keen recognition of the limits of capital disproves the idea that anything can be anywhere at any time—in artist's terms, "form, the shape revealed by the detection, in all dimensions, of the boundaries of content" ("How to Patronise a Poem"). In the terms of crude economics, "they hoped to find a job but failed / due to inexistent workforce demand" ("Reynard"). Raworth has never been afraid to incorporate certain tools of revolutionary capitalism into the shape and gravity of a mental celerity able to express the moral complexity of actual life without falling into the self-conceited sloganeering of the moral Left or the morbid thematics of advertising. As one stanza from "Caller" has it: "fire of thought / why work for afraid / rather than angry". At the same time, thankfully, the poet must know he is a little—and perhaps just a little—wiser for the media the times demand ("T H I N K" reads the second section of "Continued"), which leads him out of the mire of too-easy cynical self-canceling gestures.

Raworth's delicate interplay of intuitive cognition ("understanding / what intuition / writes in language") and tottering states of bewilderment pull us towards that which we might have felt lurking in shadow (where "in shadow shadows / media cycle manicures") and promises to jolt us out of the workday into an adventure amongst tangible things we felt were lost. The poet has tracked our crises, in a world smothered in pleasant butter and imperialist bullshit, where no link can be presumed stable, and where nothing is to be done unless links are traversed and remade. The final poem ends with "nothing wasted," followed by the invaluable errata page that also serves as a delightful found poem, a bonus track that finishes on a thank-you note for some of his traveling companions' "sharp eyes."

mark s. mendoza is a writer and activist from Brighton & Hove, England, currently living in Cincinnati.

BOOK REVIEWS



A deeply engrossing book, I couldn't put it down. And now that I've finished reading it, I can't put it away, for how it furthers my thinking of the genre itself. *A Place In The Sun* beautifully combines the high action and salaciousness of page-turners, with the self-reflection and risk-taking of post-modern fiction. It's a must-read and a must-study.

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