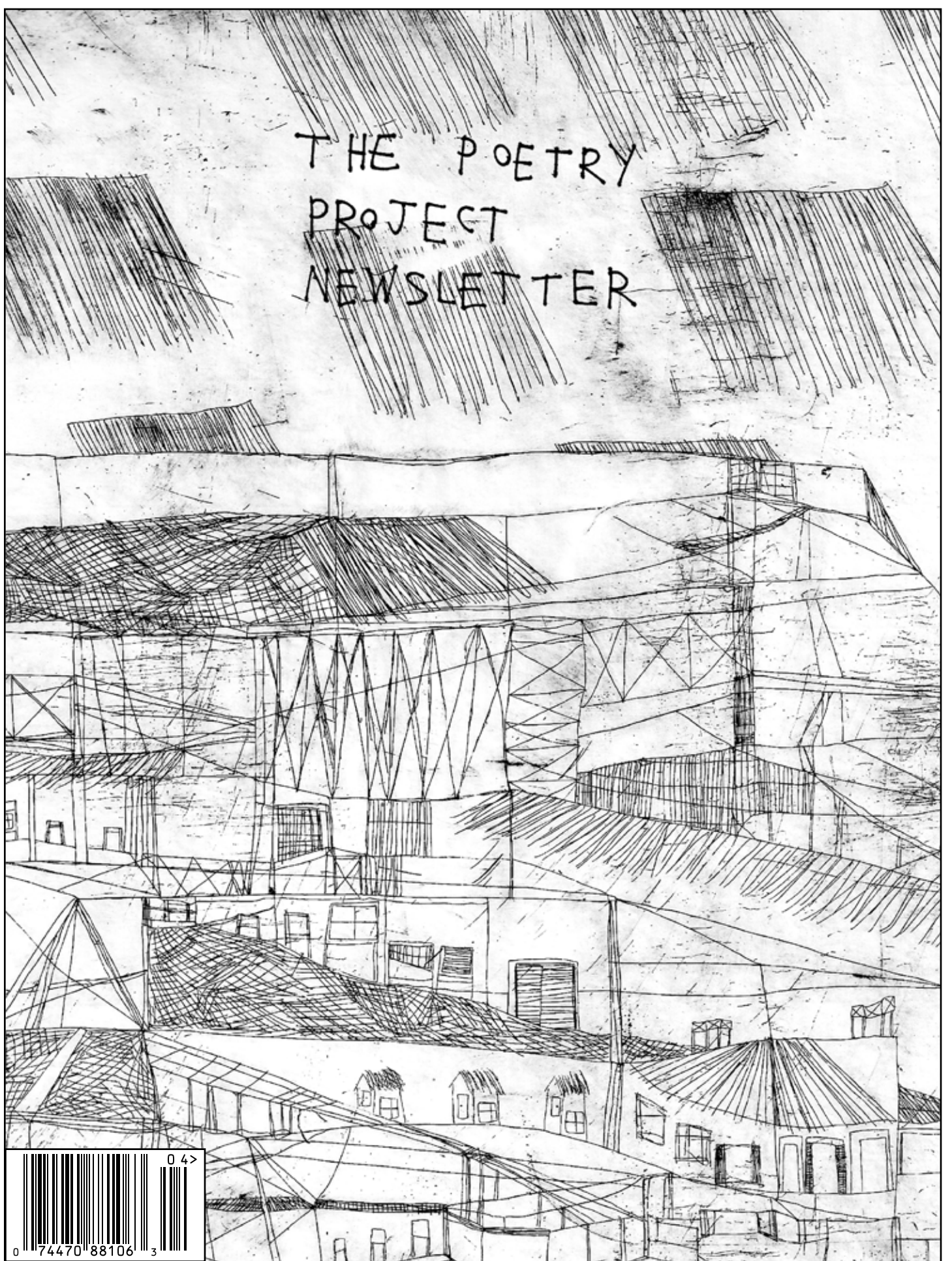


THE POETRY
PROJECT
NEWSLETTER



New Poetry from Coffee House Press

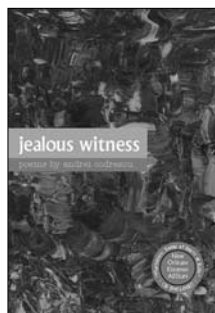


COMING SOON

Beats at Naropa,
an anthology
edited by
Anne Waldman
and Laura Wright

Poetry from
Bill Berkson
Mark Nowak
Akilah Oliver
Ted Mathys

Good books are brewing at
www.coffeehousepress.org

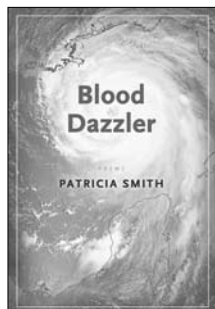


Jealous Witness

POEMS BY ANDREI CODRESCU
Music & CD by the New Orleans
Klezmer AllStars
ISBN: 978-1-56689-217-9

“Don’t miss this fine collection . . .
spooky, mystical klezmer music is per-
fect for these poems, such acerbic and
witty portraits of post-Katrina life.”

—New Orleans *Times-Picayune*



Blood Dazzler

POEMS BY PATRICIA SMITH
ISBN: 978-1-56689-218-6

“After rising water, winds and abandon-
ment, after our failure and neglect,
comes this symphony of utterance from
the ruins: many-voiced, poignant, sor-
rowful, and fierce.”

—CAROLYN FORCHÉ

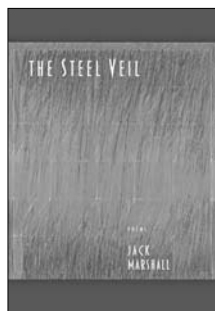


Body Clock

POEMS BY ELENI SIKELIANOS
ISBN: 978-1-56689-219-3

“Eleni Sikelianos’ *Body Clock* explores
the vast interiors of the intimate and
insular estate of pregnancy and the start
of motherhood with time-machine pre-
cision and a newborn’s curiosity.”

— C.D. WRIGHT

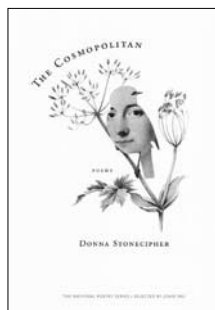


The Steel Veil

POEMS BY JACK MARSHALL
ISBN: 978-1-56689-220-9

“A poet of great lyrical intensity . . . The
steel veil of the title is the “steel veil of
empire,” and the undercurrent of social
anguish, though rarely obtrusive, is
never far from his consciousness.”

—*San Diego Union-Tribune*



The Cosmopolitan

POEMS BY DONNA STONECIPHER
National Poetry Series Winner,
chosen by John Yau
ISBN: 978-1-56689-221-6

“Reading *The Cosmopolitan* is akin to
following a bird in flight; it moves at
different speeds, dives, rises, rolls,
swoops, and floats, and is always some-
thing to behold.”

—JOHN YAU



ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY
131 EAST 10TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10003
www.poetryproject.com

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#217 DECEMBER 2008/JANUARY 2009

NEWSLETTER EDITOR John Coletti

DISTRIBUTION Small Press Distribution,
1341 Seventh St., Berkeley, CA 94710

THE POETRY PROJECT LTD. STAFF

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Stacy Szymaszek

PROGRAM COORDINATOR Corrine Fitzpatrick

PROGRAM ASSISTANT Arlo Quint

MONDAY NIGHT COORDINATOR Kyle Schlesinger

MONDAY NIGHT TALK SERIES COORDINATOR Arlo Quint

WEDNESDAY NIGHT COORDINATOR Stacy Szymaszek

FRIDAY NIGHT COORDINATORS Diana Hamilton & Nicole Wallace

SOUND TECHNICIAN David Vogen

BOOKKEEPER Stephen Rosenthal

DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT Stephanie Gray

BOX OFFICE Courtney Frederick, Eddie Hopely & Nicole Wallace

INTERNS Kelly Ginger, Danielle Johnson, Judah Rubin & Christoffer Stromstedt

VOLUNTEERS Lenny Adler, Jim Behrle, Will Edmiston, Susana Gomez, Erica Kaufman, Evan Kennedy, Derek Kroessler, Esther Mittelman, Christa Quint, Lauren Russell, Erica Wessmann, Dustin Williamson

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER is published four times a year and mailed free of charge to members of and contributors to the Poetry Project. Subscriptions are available for \$25/year domestic, \$45/year international. Checks should be made payable to The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th St., NYC, NY 10003. The views and opinions expressed in the Newsletter are those of the individual authors and, while everyone in their right mind might be like, of course, duh!, they are not necessarily those of the Poetry Project itself. For more information call (212) 674-0910, or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS Rosemary Carroll, Todd Colby, Will Creeley, Jordan Davis, Greg Fuchs, Ted Greenwald, John S. Hall, Steve Hamilton, Kimberly Lyons, Gillian McCain, Jonathan Morrill, Elinor Nauen, Evelyn Reilly, Paul Slovak & Edwin Torres.

FRIENDS COMMITTEE Brooke Alexander, Dianne Benson, Raymond Foye, Michael Friedman, Bob Holman, Vicki Hudspeth, Siri Hustvedt, Yvonne Jacquette, Patricia Spears Jones, Michel de Konkoly Thege, Greg Masters, Ron Padgett, Anne Waldman, Hal Willner & John Yau.

FUNDERS The Aeroflex Foundation; The American-Scandinavian Foundation; The Axe-Houghton Foundation; Belladonna Books; Brooke Alexander Gallery/Brooke Alexander Editions; Erato Press; Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Inc.; Edge Books; Granary Books; The Tomorrow Foundation; The Greenwich Collection Ltd.; The Source, Unltd.; Irwin, Lewin, Cohn & Lewis; The Laura (Riding) Jackson Board of Literary Management; Knoedler & Co.; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; Instance Press; The Jerome Foundation; The Lila Acheson Wallace Theater Fund, established in Community Funds by the co-founder of the Reader's Digest Association; Libellum Books; Menaker & Herrmann; Penguin; Poets & Writers, Inc.; The St. Mark's Historic Landmark Fund; Soho Letterpress; Studio One; The Winslow Family Foundation; Talisman House; Futurepoem Books; The Harold & Alma White Memorial Fund; Anonymous Foundations and Corporations; Russell Banks; Dianne Benson; Katherine Bradford; Mary Rose Brusewitz; Rosemary Carroll; Willem Dafoe; Peggy DeCoursey; Georgia & Bill Delano; Vicki Hudspeth & Wallace Turbeville; Ada & Alex Katz; Dave & Mary Kite; The Estate of Kenneth Koch; Michel de Konkoly Thege; Jonathan Lasker; Katy Lederer; Mark McCain; Jonathan Plutzik; Jerome & Diane Rothenberg; John Sampas; Jeannette Sanger; Bill Berkson & Constance Lewallen; Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge & Richard Tuttle; Stephen Facey; Ron Padgett; Phil Hartman & Doris Kornish; Hank O'Neal & Shelley Shier; Simon Schuchat; Andre Spears; Peter & Susan Straub; Joan Wilentz; Susan Levin; Kiki Smith; Patrick Thompson; Peter Bushyager; Frederick & Isabel Eberstadt; Elinor Nauen & Johnny Stanton; Krishna Yankasammy; E. Tracy Grinnell; Ann Evans; members of the Poetry Project; and other individual contributors and anonymous donors.

The Poetry Project's programs and publications are made possible, in part, with public funds from: the National Endowment for the Arts; the New York State Council on the Arts; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; and Materials for the Arts, New York City.

EDITORS EMERITI: Ron Padgett 1972-1973 / Bill Mac Kay 1973-1975 / Ted Greenwald 1975-1977 / Frances LeFevre 1977-1978 / Vicki Hudspeth 1978-1980 / Greg Masters 1980-1983 / Lorna Smedman 1983-1984 / Tim Dlugos 1984-1985 / James Ruggia 1985-1986 / Jessica Hagedorn 1986-1987 / Tony Towle 1987-1990 / Jerome Sala 1990-1991 / Lynn Crawford 1991-1992 / Jordan Davis 1992-1994 / Gillian McCain 1994-1995 / Mitch Highfill 1995-1996 / Lisa Jarnot 1996-1998 / Brenda Coultas & Eleni Sikelianos 1998-1999 / Katherine Lederer 1999-2000 / Ange Mlinko 2000-2002 / Nada Gordon & Gary Sullivan 2002-2003 / Marcella Durand 2003-2005 / Brendan Lorber 2005-2007

COPYRIGHT © 2008 POETRY PROJECT. ALL RIGHTS REVERT TO AUTHORS UPON PUBLICATION.
WWW.POETRYPROJECT.COM



4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

6 READING REPORTS

8 I LOVE MY LOVE WITH A CAPITAL Z: HELEN ADAM

KRISTIN PREVALLET AND LEE ANN BROWN IN CONVERSATION

14 POEMS BY KAREN WEISER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY STEPHANIE YOUNG

16 EVENTS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

18 BOOK REVIEWS

BRETT EVANS & FRANK SHERLOCK / ROB HALPERN /
MARCELLA DURAND / LISA JARNOT / SESHU FOSTER /
DANA WARD / MAXINE GADD / JULES BOYKOFF & KAIA SAND /
GEORGE STANLEY / GEORGE ALBON / LAURA MORIARTY /
DANIEL COMISKEY & C.E. PUTNAM

32 JOIN NOW

VISUALS

COVER ART: BEKA GOEDDE
CALENDAR ART: JIM BEHRLE

ONLINE

WWW.POETRYPROJECT.COM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

When the bells at St. Mark's Church ring, they ring for us. Really. After the 1978 fire, four bells were installed in the tower with a dedicatory plaque:

“FOR THE ARTISTS AT WORK HERE”

“FOR THE WORKERS WHO REBUILT THIS CHURCH”

“FOR THE PEOPLE OF THIS COMMUNITY”

“FOR PEACE ON EARTH THESE BELLS RING”

It's a remarkable bit of knowledge that can snap me out of a slumpy attitude (too focused on little failures) back into a broad view of my/our work here—which is so much about engendering a system of mutual exchange, a sub-economy that continues to hum (with humans) through this massive foundering of our nation's finances. So my head comes out of the sky, or out of the steeple, to join the multitudes of people in the Project's community who are adept at balancing idealism and work-a-day.

I'm thinking about our Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading, the 35th, as a splendid and generative manifestation of this ethos. It's an event that our community has and is deeply invested in, as performers, volunteers, and listeners. It is also a crucial fundraiser for the Project, securing thousands of dollars to go toward programming costs, i.e., paying poets for their work, creating a forum. It shouldn't be radical, but it is. In an effort to ensure that this annual event continues to reach out and out and out, we invite 25-35 first time performers each year. If you participated in 2008 and aren't participating in 2009 it is for this cause. People have been very understanding, which I appreciate.

It's a strange and frightening time—then again, has there been a time in history when people weren't uttering this sentiment? Nevertheless, in two days we'll know the outcome of what is being called the most important election since 1860 (hello Lincoln). Obama cites *Moby Dick* as one of his favorite books, and I actually *don't* think he wants to emulate Captain Ahab.

- Stacy Szymaszek

35TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON... HERE'S HOPING IT'S A CELEBRATION

This issue will go to print before November 4th, and as such I write from the vibrating window of “hope” that is the week leading up to Election Day. The polls look good, but after 2000 one learns not to get too excited. So I'm knocking on wood when I say I hope the mood will be high come New Year's Day 2009. Thursday, January 1, 2009 marks The Poetry Project's 35th Annual New Year's Day Marathon. As always, 100+ poets, musicians, dancers, and performers will take the stage for our biggest fundraiser of the year. The Sanctuary doors will open at 2pm, and the room won't fall still until

I am at the earliest. Many of our luminous favorites will return and, as always, 25 to 35 first-time participants will be joining the ranks. For an early idea of the line-up, please check the calendar insert of this newsletter.

The Parish Hall will be full of books, food, and friends. We're happy to advertise that we are once again capable of piping in sound from the main event, so volunteers and the like can hear what's going on. All the more reason to volunteer! Each year we are completely indebted to the near 100 kind souls who donate a few hours of their time to our cause. We are looking for people to sell books, serve food, stamp hands, stack chairs, make change, make signs, tap kegs, meet, greet, and maintain the law. Please email Arlo Quint at info@poetryproject.com if you are interested in helping out. Feel free to tell him what part of the day or night is convenient for you, as well as which jobs you may or may not prefer.

Arlo is also the point man for food donations. Quite a bit of the day's revenue comes from what Bill Kushner likes to call “the food court.” Every year our generous neighborhood eateries (and talented-in-the-kitchen friends!) donate delicious food to be sold throughout the day. Look forward to pierogies and pizzas, casseroles and crepes. If you would like to donate baked goods or finger foods, or if you have an in with a restaurant nearby, please step forward!

We are also now accepting donations of books, chapbooks, and other printed or recorded matter. Each year small and not small presses (and some individual authors) offer wares in good-condition to be sold in the Parish Hall. Please contact us in order to arrange drop-offs or shipments. We thank you in advance!

As much as we like to grumble about the work, we are all looking forward to this long-standing community event, and to the delirium and fun that comes with utter exhaustion after half-a-day of sensory upload. Hope to catch you there.

- Corrine Fitzpatrick

TO REVIEW...

One night to go. And drained. Let it be said, and let another say it:

My galley charged with forgetfulness

Thorough sharpe sees in winter nyghtes doeth pas

Twene Rock and Rock; and eke myn enemy, Alas,

That is my lorde, sterith with cruelness;

And every owere a thought in redines,

As tho that deth were light in suche a case.

An endless wynd doeth tere the sayll apase

Of forced sightes and trusty ferefulnes.

*A rayn of teris, a clowde of derk disdain,
 Hath done the wered cords great hinderance;
 Wrethed with errour and eke with ignorance.
 The starres be hid that led me to this pain;
 Drowned is reason that should me consort,
 And I remain dispering of the port.*

Here's to going to bed tonight a whole lot brighter.

- John Coletti

ASSISTANCE NEEDED

Bernadette Mayer and Philip Good need to raise money to pay for heating fuel. Already months behind in monthly payments. People can send money to Giorno Poetry Systems (222 Bowery, 3rd Fl., New York, NY, 10012, United States); write "Bernadette Mayer Fund" in the memo.

A CELEBRATION OF FRANK STANFORD

Thirty years after Arkansas poet Frank Stanford's death, poets from across the country came to Fayetteville, Arkansas, to celebrate his legacy through a three-day festival held October 17-19. The experience was communal and intense. Throughout the weekend over 24 hours worth of poetry was read, including the 16-and-a-half hours it took to read his epic poem, *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You*. Begun at approximately 9 p.m. Saturday night, the ten or so folks who remained at 5 a.m. did not think the last lines would actually be uttered. Then dawn broke, and folks returned. Stanford's childhood friend Bill Willett took over and read for three hours straight from a first edition copy of the book. Then Irv Broughton, Stanford's editor, read the last pages. By noon the room had filled to 30 who wanted be there when the final lines were uttered. Broughton ushered everyone to the stage and asked them to read along for the last five lines. Out of sync and ecstatic, the chorus grew until the last word, "death," was triumphantly pronounced. Then the crowd gave a joyous cheer, and everyone there was changed.

- Katy Henriksen

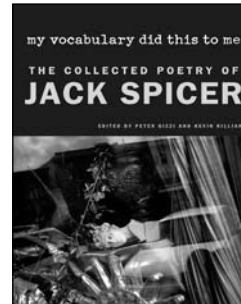
WCW!

Proud parents Erica Svec and Zachary Wollard introduce William Cassius Wollard, born October 13, 2008 at 4:04am, 7lbs 8 oz. Hallelujahs for this elf of elves!!!

ONWARD

Reginald Shepherd, born April 10, 1963 in New York City, passed away on September 10, 2008. Hayden Carruth, born on August 3, 1921, in Waterbury, Connecticut, left us on September 29th, 2008. Friends to poets and poetry both, each will be greatly missed.

WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY PRESS



My Vocabulary Did This to Me The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer

Edited by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian

"Jack Spicer rests among the great poets of our time, astonishing, shining and demanding. Now, we may celebrate the gifts of his poems in this superb edition of his *Collected Poetry*."—Robin Blaser

\$35.00 jacketed cloth



All Odd and Splendid Hilda Raz

"The poems evoke a sense of outreach, a powerful awareness of connection and need to care for one another. By example, Raz shows the importance of trying hard to understand others in all their strangeness."—Floyd Skloot

\$22.95 jacketed cloth



Odes and Elegies Friedrich Hölderlin

Translated and edited by Nick Hoff

"At every point, Hoff finds extraordinary ways of conveying the astonishing force of Hölderlin's work."—Harold Bloom

\$26.95 jacketed cloth

These projects supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Order from your favorite bookseller or call 800-421-1561
www.wesleyan.edu/wespress
 Save 20% when you use discount code WV300 on your web

READING REPORTS

Brendan Lorber & Gillian McCain, The Poetry Project, September 24, 2008

Dapper Brendan Lorber's carefully orchestrated roll-out of his fresh baby daughter took on the appearance of a poetry reading at the Poetry Project. Reflecting concerns about the current economic crises, Lorber's first poem consisted of purple couplets inscribed upon \$1 bills, allowed to drift to the floor one after another. The fluttering bucks landed mostly face up, circled the podium. "Every step brings us closer to nothing but the next step." He offered a previously undiscovered Blake piece which foreshadowed this presidential election. Lorber ever treads "the line between Molotov & Mosel Tov" and has been noted for his feverish wordplay delivered via deadpan. Now influenced by Aurora, new work represents both bold new moves into the edges of sleeplessness and the joys of finding a new inscrutable editor. Old work such as "The Day Dude Looks Like a Lady Died" ever retains its bubbles. After the break, Gillian McCain celebrated the other side of the coin. A long thread celebrating childlessness permeated her poems and the chapter she read from "the novel that will never be finished," *The Car People*: "It was best to stay away from babies..." It is a dread noir populated by a knife-wielding fatale. In a long numbered sequence, characters swirl in at a sinister dinner party, talk centers around California, cars, and Canada. "America along for the ride, we like the sound of baseball, too." Concerns about invaders and real estate map a nightmare of "shaken babies of the (shattered?) elite." "Tomorrow our car will go missing, our furniture rearranged, our cat will go borrowed." Lorber with his Brando-esque *The Wild One* cap and McCain with a multi-paneled scarf left all gasping. 80 attended, many luminaries included. - *Harrison Rodney*

Eleni Sikelianos & James Thomas Stevens, The Poetry Project, October 15, 2008

It was debate night in America, and a conflicted gaggle of poetry stalwarts had chosen James and Eleni over John and Barack. As it turned out, both poets were stumping on behalf of the same curious and little understood entity: the body. James Thomas Stevens started things off with a simple premise: "The body is always involved." Given that he was reading from a chapbook about bubbles and chimeras, this wasn't immediately apparent. But as he hit stride with new work focused on the education of Mohawk chief Joseph Brant, the body emerged in confrontation with the disorganizing force of imperial language. As Stevens enlarged Brant's dilemma to encompass more recent cultural atrocities, he argued that the body is in fact, "the bravest book." Eleni took a more directly biological slant, as she read from her newest book *Body Clock*, which details the magical amalgamation that is childbirth in all its temporal complexity. Her poems exquisitely perform this transubstantiation, calling upon "some restless meat" to cast its Spicerian spell over the shifting minutes and hours of motherhood. Railing against debate's shoddy professionalism, Sikelianos welcomed the messy splendor of the body and even presented her "amateur" drawings, which explore maternal time as an event with pictorial and linguistic residue. Though her readings always astound with their sensual grace, on this occasion Sikelianos also doled out some straight talk: "Now go learn some animal things." Finally, an education platform I can support. - *Chris Martin*

M.F.A. IN CREATIVE WRITING

**in public, in private -
writing the world**

Join a vibrant writing community in the heart of Brooklyn.

Core Faculty: Jessica Hagedorn • John High • Lewis Warsh

Recent Visiting Writers

Charlotte Carter

Brenda Coultas

Thulani Davis

Samuel R. Delany

Tonya Foster

Richard Hell

David Henderson

Barbara Henning

Erica Hunt

Katt Lissard

Bernadette Mayer

Dennis Moritz

Anna Moschovakis

Akilah Oliver

Han Ong

Maureen Owen

Simon Pettet

Karen Russell

Edwin Torres

Chuck Wachtel

Anne Waldman

Wang Ping

Matvei Yankelevich

39 credits

- Full- and part-time study options
- Convenient day, evening and weekend schedules
- Graduate assistantships available

**POETRY
FICTION
PLAYWRITING
SCREENWRITING
TRANSLATION
MEMOIR**

BROOKLYN CAMPUS

**LONG ISLAND
UNIVERSITY**


1 University Plaza, Brooklyn NY • 718-246-6336 • marilyn.boutwell@liu.edu

I Love My Love with a Capital Z:

Kristin Prevallet and Lee Ann Brown Talk about Helen Adam



PHOTO CREDIT: CHARLES RUAS ARCHIVES

LAB: Tell me the story again of finding Helen Adam's rock collection.

KP: Oh, those crazy rocks! Basically, the rocks are symbolic of the whole big story about the Helen Adam archive. Helen had a very intense relationship with her stuff—she was a terrific collector of thrift store treasures: vases, art books, and bric-a-brac. Her apartment in San Francisco was jam-packed with all this stuff, and mixed in were her valuable possessions: collages by Jess, books hand-made by Robert Duncan, photographs, childhood notebooks, etc.

Unfortunately, when she moved to New York in the early 1960s, she left so hastily that she just threw everything, valuable or not, into brown paper bags, puzzle boxes, and envelopes. These ended up in Duncan's basement. When Duncan sold his archive to the Poetry/Rare Books Collection at the University of Buffalo, he gave them Adam's as well (she got a monthly stipend from this, which was a big help to her).

When she died in 1993 her affairs were in a similar state of disarray—the contents of her apartment were carted away by the state to some warehouse in New Jersey where the boxes sat for six years before going into public auction. In the winter of 2000, a real miracle occurred: Bob Hershon's son Jed *happened* to work for a bookstore that also *happened* to purchase a collection of ran-

dom, unclaimed boxes—papers, photos, and letters were mixed in with a wide assortment of cool books and...rocks. Jed started sorting these boxes and recognized Helen Adam, who he had met as a child (Helen and Bob were good friends). There was a box of agates—I bought three—mixed in with more ordinary rocks. She collected rocks because she believed that they contained astral beings...she saw faces and shapes in them, and used them to direct her dreams.

Flash forward to 2008. The book is finished, and I'm thinking that the archive is as complete as it will ever be. I mention Helen Adam to my neighbor Andrea Brady, who runs a little antique shop here in Greenpoint. She had never heard of Helen Adam, but somehow the next afternoon she *happens* to be walking by the bookstore where a box of rocks had just *happened* to have been thrown into the dumpster. At first she didn't think much about it—but then she *happened* to overhear the guys in front of the store talking: "Yeah, those rocks belonged to some writer... Helen Adam." She got a chill up and down her spine and was compelled to take the box. Luckily she had her van parked not too far away.

LAB: And could you please describe some other moments of discovery as you explored her archives in Buffalo? What other material did you find?

KP: Oh there were many moments. She made a ton of scrapbooks, all devoted to different themes, such as *The Evil Eye*, *Noel Coward*, *Black Magic*, *Greta Garbo*, *The Ballets Russe*, and *the Threshold of Sleep*. I would sit on the floor of the Poetry Collection flipping through these scrapbooks and passing the time immersed in Helen's world. It was so exciting to me because I was exploring my own poetic relationship to collage and synchronicity. All the signed photographs of old film stars, weird articles from *Fate* magazine in the 1930s, cut-out fashion models from *Vogue* in the 1940s. It was intoxicating.

LAB: The scrapbook themes you describe sound strangely like Joseph Cornell, especially the *Ballets Russe*.

KP: Oh yes, they both had a penchant for collecting glamorous images and objects and transforming them into deeply personal manifestations.

LAB: I remember drinking in her collages when I was at the Robin Blaser Conference in Vancouver at the Emily Carr Art School on Granville Island. That's one of the first times you

and I hung out, but that wasn't until 1995. Did we first meet in Boulder or in New York City?

KP: Actually, we first met hanging out in front of St. Mark's Church in 1991. I had just moved to New York and was working as an editorial assistant at W.W. Norton. Ken Jordan (Reality Sandwich.org) was working there as well—and he introduced me to Bernadette Mayer and insisted that I take her workshop. Her parties were so amazing—all these poets sitting around her table, lounging around her bookshelves. You had crazy outfits—mini-skirts and bright red boots. I remember following you and Laynie Browne up and down Houston Street one evening looking for a party. The Lower East Side was so different then. You would walk several abandoned blocks without seeing anyone at all, and then pop into a building that was dimly lit and tightly crammed with people.

But you know, I think it was through you that I first heard about Helen Adam. You sang a Helen Adam ballad at one of your readings at The Poetry Project in the early 1990s. And I remember we talked about her at a few of Bernadette's parties. How did you discover her? Were you intentionally exploring the ballad tradition at that time?

LAB: I knew about her ballads and songs before I saw the collages in the show you curated at Emily Carr. When I first moved to NYC around 1987, Larry Fagin made me lots of great mix tapes and sang me some Helen Adam tunes. I mainly remember "In and Out of the Hornbeam Maze" and "Limbo Gate." I remember the Limbo Gate tune differently than the sheet music, but that's the way new tunes arise, from remembering and forgetting. I arrived at my version of "I Love My Love" from listening to Lisa Jarnot play it with her rock group, Vole, but I tend to make it sound upbeat which is a good contrast to the creepy story unwinding. When I sang it the other night, I almost sounded like Shirley Temple at one point, as she marches up and down the Good Ship Lollipop: "The naked! The naked! On Hallelujah Day!"

KP: Maybe you can talk about the deeper significance of Helen and the ballad tradition in your own work? I know you were immersed in the ballad tradition before you encountered Helen Adam.

LAB: When I was trying to figure out what a poetics statement might look like—Robert Duncan talks about the rhymes he learned from his nursemaid and how that influenced his sense of prosody—I asked myself what might those parallels be for me and realized my own childhood poetic forms were mainly hymns I learned from my Mom and Girl Scouts and church camp songs which were strangely vaudevillian. (For more on that, see "Buf-

falo Stance: or Paranoiya Big Destroya" in the anthology, *Writing from the New Coast: Theory*).

Harry Smith was around too, then, living at Allen Ginsberg's apartment across the hall from me at 437 East 12th Street, the "Poets' Building." Harry taped the whole evening of a party in my apartment. He put the mic on the floorboards of the tenement by the bathtub in the kitchen to get the whole soundscape of the room. I remember Larry singing and playing Elizabeth Cotten songs with lines like "One old women Lord in this town / Keeps a-telling her lies on me." The importance of folk culture to the poets was becoming clear to me from several angles. I don't remember Harry talking about Helen Adam per se, but he was instrumental in getting me to appreciate the songs of my upbringing. I was showing a videotape of a childhood friend's wedding I had just recorded on a trip home to illustrate the sexism I had to put up with in "the South," and he got really upset that I cut the tape off during the hymn, after the first verse, to save videotape. He helped me recognize the hymns as one of the most important parts of the tape—not just the outrageous choice of Bible verses that were chosen for the wedding—the one saying a woman should obey her husband. I took hymns for granted before, thought them mainstream, that everyone knew them. In Boulder, he also recorded me and my sister Beth (who plays violin on the *Daydream of Darkness* CD with us) singing all the hymns we could remember and him getting really excited when a squirrel jumped on the roof outside the window at the same moment we sang "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow / Praise him all CREATURES here below" and when we sang "While Shepherds Washed Their Socks By Night" and "We Three Kings of Orient Are / Tried to Smoke a Rubber Cigar." It was a good shot of privileging playful, ASSOCIATIONAL thinking: the mystical, the sublimity of the absurd, of paying attention to what unfolds in the moment and working from that. A good alternate mix of influence after the theory land of Brown University. There is some strange association and permission I hold about the wild elders: Helen Adam, Harry Smith, and Hannah Weiner. The three H's!

KP: Oh yes, the three H's! I remember that wild time when Lisa, Drew Gardner, and I were hanging out in your apartment on Ludlow Street, using the Ouiji board to conjure up Helen Adam ...and Hannah Weiner appeared instead! Anyway, go on...I love that idea about poetry connecting you to your childhood, your background, your "people" in some sense...

LAB: I also remember listening to a Smithsonian Folkways record with a single Appalachian unaccompanied woman's voice—it was a moment of recognition. I later more fully realized the connection between the hymns and ballads which were my favorite minor key protestant hymns I grew up singing in the balcony of

First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. So I started searching for “minor key” ballads and found out that many of those hymns were originally folk love and drinking songs. For me, Tuli Kupferberg first manifested the model of using other songs’ tunes to make up your own words. He did “I see the White House and I want to paint it black.” Rebbly Sharp did that too. “Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall” became “Hard Acid Rain’s a-Gonna Fall.” Helen Adam turned “Black is the Color of My True Love’s Hair” into “Black is the Color of My True Love’s Skin,” that terrifying ballad that deals with lynching. It was “making it new” in a way I could relate to. Hymns were ingrained in my brain, but not so much ballads—they were further back in some cosmic memory, ancestors of the hymns I knew by heart and which taught me prosody and unison singing. Ballads are usually sung solo without instrumentation, which I liked. The air in the room changes when you sing. People pay a different kind of attention. I am also intrigued by the possibilities of ballads sung by everyone in the room at once.

KP: Did you ever meet Helen Adam? I never did. I remember the day she died though...I was hanging out in the Poetry Collection, and the curator Bob Bertholf took me back to see her archive. I was bewitched by her collages, and the rest is history!

LAB: Oh how I wish I could have met Helen Adam! When I first worked at the Poetry Project, Anne Waldman suggested we do a kind of Meals on Wheels program for aging poets who couldn’t get out much. She suggested visiting Helen, but I wasn’t to the point of taking advantage of that power, that possibility. I love that interview Anne did with Helen Adam in the film *Poetry In Motion*.

KP: Oh yeah, that’s a big hit on YouTube. She sings “Cheerless Junkie’s Song” and tosses her grey hair around as she sings it with great bravado. How did you get the tune for “I Love My Love?”

LAB: After living in NYC from 1987 to 1991 and working at the Poetry Project, I went back for my MFA in poetry at Brown where I met Lisa Jarnot. She played me tapes of Helen Adam from the Buffalo Archive. Maybe this is the same recording you included in the book? Most memorable was “I Love My Love,” which I always call the “Ballad of the Hair.” Lisa also performed a version of it with Vole, with whom I got to record and perform briefly. I loved the idea of how traditional the ballads seemed, plus how new and weird. Some of the first ones I remember reading like that were “My Bed is Thorny,” where she references modern San Francisco streets, and “Apartment at Twin Peaks,” where she eats her husband with friends after taking out an ad in

vision | revision

To reinvent standards and reimagine borders, you have to know a thing or two about breaking down both.

Writing & Poetics at Naropa University **The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics**

Outrider lineages and cutting-edge craft prepare authors to rewrite the world.

BA and MFA degrees available; in residence, online and summer programs offered.

Selected Faculty: Keith Abbott, Lisa Birman, Junior Burke, Reed Bye, Amy Catanzano, Jack Collom, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Anselm Hollo, Bhanu Kapil, Maureen Owen, Elizabeth Robinson, Andrew Schelling, Steven Taylor, Anne Waldman

Recent Visitors: Rae Armantrout, Laura Moriarty, Rebecca Wolff

Recent Summer Faculty: Robin Blaser, Samuel R. Delany, Daisy Zamora, Eileen Myles, Alice Notley

Naropa
UNIVERSITY
Boulder, Colorado • 800-772-6951

www.naropa.edu/kerouacschool

The San Francisco Chronicle. Such weird juxtapositions of old and new, mythic mixed gleefully with mundane detail.

Which ballads do you “know” the tunes to as versions of Helen’s tunes? Tell me about extant sound and video recording? Who else “knows” the tunes? I would love to learn more. I know there is sheet music too, which I don’t really read. I would rather learn it by ear in the ballad singing tradition.

KP: Helen mostly uses classic Scottish tunes to accompany her ballads. On the DVD that comes with *A Helen Adam Reader* there is a fantastic recording of Helen singing her ballads at the poet John Olson’s kitchen table. The tunes definitely repeat—I got a letter from someone in Scotland who recognized the refrain of “Sweet Mary from Pike” in several of them.

LAB: Or is it “Sweet Betsy from Pike?”

KP: Oh yes, “Sweet Betsy.” Carl Grundberg, a folk singer and composer who lives in the Bay Area, transcribed the tunes to several of her ballads and published the sheet music in a book called *Songs With Music*. And I published a few selections from Grundberg’s transcriptions in *The Reader*.

You and I sang “Kiltory” once, remember? I learned the tune for that one from Ida Hodes, who was the secretary of the Poetry Center in San Francisco where Helen, Duncan, Spicer, and the rest of the gang used to hang out. There was a serious cabaret scene in San Francisco during the 60s, and Ida and Helen would perform together. Those were the days!

A Helen Adam Halloween was a magically charged night here at the Church, wasn’t it? No one does “I Love My Love” like you do—that’s definitely your song.

LAB: I love singing that. I love how the horror slowly dawns on the audience—especially if I lead them in singing it themselves from sheet music. The driving rhythm keeps them going deeper into the first attack of the hair, and then when it comes back again, and especially the refrains with the high “HA HA.”

I am amazed at all the material in this *Collected* you edited: the Spicer Circle Initiation Play, the illuminating Duncan correspondence, her sister’s imagination, the intense bond of imagination they maintained, the “historical” and blues ballads. I love the discussion in the interview of how she wrote while riding a bicycle, working from “some sort of tune” in her mind. “You’re gliding along, which goes with the ballad rhythm.” And then

New!

from

THE POST-APOLLO



PRESS

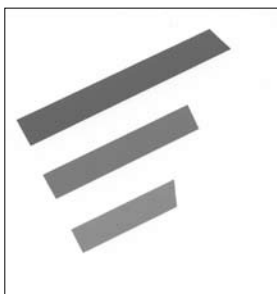
ETEL ADNAN
Seasons



Adnan’s inquiry – into the nature of Being, Time, knowledge itself – crests moment upon moment of quiet revelation . . .

POETRY 77 PP \$18 978-0-942996-66-1

Ryoko Sekiguchi



TWO MARKETS,
ONCE AGAIN

. . . one guesses that love accompanies this most beautifully mysterious of journeys.

POETRY 50 PP \$14 978-0-942996-65-4

JEAN FRÉMON



THE REAL
LIFE OF SHADOWS

Jean Frémon’s
pantheon of painters . . .

POETRY 98 PP \$18 978-0-942996-67-8

she would “stop and scribble.” This is quite another take on the peripatetic mode of Frank O’Hara. Even the poems from her childhood books, like *Charms and Dream from the Elfin Pedlar’s Pack* and *The Elfin Pedlar and Tales Told by Pixy Pool*. I was a little surprised that Helen Adam was so disdainful of the poems she wrote when young, but I guess it made sense that she had to have a psychic break with her childhood fairy expressions to finally access “the heavy stuff.” I want to see the “doll rhymes written when she was two.” You say her mother took dictation from her. The phrase “Doll Dictation” has been haunting my weekend—what would those dolls in the New York Doll Hospital say, if they could talk?

We both have five year old daughters. I was reading all the more mature doll ballads like “Doll Song” and “The Step Mother” and thinking how Miranda would not like them one bit! Haunted dolls way before there was Chuckie! How about Sophie? Does she get mad at you if you read them out loud? Miranda made me put the book in the back of the car after I started reading the first part of the Spicer initiation out loud. Guess that wasn’t exactly age appropriate material.

KP: Sophie has such a love/hate relationship to scary movies...on the one hand she LOVES Darth Vader...on the other hand she is TERRIFIED of E.T. Go figure. I have not tried to read her any of the ballads—you’re so right that the “Doll Song” is bone-chilling terror, too much for her. Not exactly a nursery rhyme.

LAB: Several times in the book, Adam uses the quote, “If a man tells you he has seen the Fairies, look if he be shaken, / If he be not terrified be sure he has not seen.” No matter how scary real fairies could be, it’s even more awful for a child when she suddenly thinks they might not exist. I was just with Laynie Browne in Tucson, and we went to this kind of outsider art sanctuary called the Valley of the Moon where an old man had built a fairyland outside the window of a little girl who was sick. It fell into disarray over the years, and some teenagers remembered it and fixed it up and were doing a Halloween play there where you tour through the garden. It was a wonderful set place to go after reading Helen Adam all day. We should create a tableau of some of the ballads—on carts like a passion play!

KP: Oh my—that would be wild. And I think hearing the ballads in a garden, in the moonlight, with a campfire, would be the ultimate experience...that is, if you’re open to being scared by your imagination taking over your sense of reality, coaxed into delightful fright by the predictable cadence of the ballad rhythm (as we both are). Next summer, let’s go camping.

Kristin Prevallet is the editor of A Helen Adam Reader (National Poetry Foundation, 2007). Her most recent book of poetry is I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time. She teaches writing at St John’s University and lives in Brooklyn.

Lee Ann Brown is the author of The Sleep That Changed Everything (Weslyan University Press) and Polyverse (Sun & Moon Press). She is the editor of Tender Buttons press and teaches poetry at places like St. John’s University and Naropa.

THE STEPMOTHER

My lord’s young daughter in the earth finds rest.
They laid her doll upon her shrouded breast;
So the waxen image, with its crown of glass,
Is the child’s companion under churchyard grass.

I had little liking for that silent child,
With her ways so quiet, and her eyes so wild.
And the first wife’s beauty in her wistful face
To stir his memories and mock my place.

She had no playmates, and was much alone.
To secret cruelties I will not own.
It was only, only that I could not bear
His smile of pleasure when he called her fair.

This house is older than the old thorn trees.
Its rooms all echo with the roar of the seas.
At night, if a child cried, nobody would hear.
But what should be stirring for a child to fear?

A month of sea mists, and at last, she died.
He knelt down weeping at the new grave side.
My words of comfort stammered into air.
The headstone trembled, and the doll stood there.

My heart beat heavy when its eyes met mine.
Black eyes shining bitter and malign.
He lifted up his head when he heard me groan,
And it darted silently behind the stone.

I looked in my mirror in the evening late.
(A young child dying puts an end to hate)
The flames of the candles sprang an azure blaze,
As the mirror tarnished ‘neath the doll’s dark gaze.

My deep rose garden in the noonday light
Was balmy refuge from the dreams of night.
A rose tree shuddering where no wind blew,
The red leaves fluttered as the doll pushed through.

The feet that follow me are light as air.
I turn to look and there is no one there.
The hands stretched out to me are weak and small,
Yet hold me helpless in their evil thrall.

My husband’s kisses give me no more joy,
Our bed so menaced by the sleepless toy.
It parts the curtains when the moon shines clear.
Its pygmy shadow is the night I fear.

It parts the curtains of the nuptial bed.
I never loved her, but she’s dead, she’s dead!
She lies in darkness, and her woes are done.
The doll from the deep grave walks in the sun.

A month of sea mists and the end of tears.
Alas! for me how many months, or years?
They laid her doll upon her shrouded breast.
The child lies asleep, but the doll won’t rest.

Absolutely Eden by Bobbie Louise Hawkins

Worldly and wise, sharp, alert to all human foibles, Bobbie Louise Hawkins gives us these observations in her familiar, wry and intimate tone. Like no one else, she brings us all home. -Joanne Kyger

\$ 14.00

ISBN: 0-935992-35-9



the influence of paintings hung in bedrooms by Phyllis Wat

Precise and prescient, Phyllis Wat etches the exigencies of everyday in luminous and deep-seeing language. She enfoldes the mysterious within simplicity, and the structures of her poems are such that once you finish, so you begin again. -Marcella Durand

\$ 14.00

ISBN: 0-935992-36-7

My Autobiography by Barbara Henning

Barbara Henning has prepared us a great meal where the sonnets are even better than the index. -Bernadette Mayer

\$ 14.00

ISBN: 0-935992-43-X



CREATIVE WRITING DEGREES WITH A DIFFERENCE



Located in the heart of the San Francisco Bay Area, Mills College is at the center of a vital artistic and literary community with one of the longest-running and most respected MFA in creative writing programs in the country. In fall 2009, we will expand our programs by introducing the first MFA degree in book art and creative writing in the nation.

MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING IN POETRY OR PROSE

Mills College offers a diverse, inclusive writing community in which to explore poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and the novel. Working with award-winning faculty members who are widely published, you will be encouraged to experiment across genres to expand your creative expression.

MFA IN BOOK ART AND CREATIVE WRITING

This one-of-a-kind interdisciplinary degree brings together the study of creative writing with the visual expression of book art taught by distinguished faculty who are leaders in the field. The program will prepare you for unique careers in publishing, teaching, writing, rare books, and art.

CURRENT FACULTY

Elmaz Abinader
Andrew Altschul
Dodie Bellamy
Julie Chen
Cristina Garcia
Susan Gevirtz
Cornelia Nixon
Sarah Pollock

RECENT VISITING

Micheline Aharonian
Marc Com
Stephen Ratcliffe
Kathryn Reiss
Leslie Scalapino
Juliana Spahr
Truong Tran
Gail Tsukiyama
Kathleen Walkup

RECENT VISITING WRITERS

Daniel Alarcón
Will Alexander
Justin Chin
Walter Lew
Laura Moriarty
Patricia Powell

MILLS

5000 MacArthur Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94613
510.430.3309
grad-admission@mills.edu
www.mills.edu/english

An Introduction to Two Poems by Karen Weiser

by Stephanie Young



PHOTO CREDIT: ANSELM BERRIGAN

“We come into the world. We come into the world and there it is.” That’s Juliana Spahr at the beginning of *Gentle Now Don’t Add to Heartache*, a poem about life cycles and developmental stages. Those lines won’t stop ringing in my head as I read and re-read these new poems by Karen Weiser. There’s about a million ways to read this connection my head keeps making be-

tween the world of Karen’s writing, as embodied in the grail of these few poems I’ve been reading, and the world of *Gentle Now Don’t Add to Heartache*. Right now I’m thinking how I am at the beginning of a very particular life cycle: my development as Karen’s reader. And so I am in that stage with these poems where one is struck, hopefully not too dumb, by having been born into these works, and having begun, there’s no going back. There’s no being *unborn* inside the world of these poems, in being their reader. Which isn’t to say I haven’t been casting into the past of Karen’s writing, as far back as my bookshelves go, namely to the tune of *Pitching Woo*, published by Dana Ward’s Cy Press.

When I say Dana Ward, I mean the way that poems and readers are never born into vacuums; they’re born into families. And when I said “grail” a few sentences ago, I wanted to place my hand, the hand of this introduction, on Karen’s evocation of Jack Spicer in the introduction for her book *To Light Out*—particularly the infinite disturbance that is Spicer’s insistence on poetry as transmission from the outside, from another world or being. When I say “the introduction for her book,” I mean that I heard her read from it at 21 Grand in Oakland just last month. And when I say “When I say,” I am also dressing this paragraph up in a gesture that shows up in one of Karen’s titles, which I’m totally struck by: “When I say virtue, I’ve fallen from my chair.”

That title runs backwards somehow through the rest of the poems, most loudly in the line “by furniture I mean DNA” from “But I Daren’t See,” which re-articulates the work of her introduction on a cellular, torqued level. She writes it once in a sentence, in her introduction, in a frame which places Spicer’s martian *inside*—what could be more alienating than one body housed inside another, than being pregnant? And then the poem says so, and when it does, there is less of it—less furniture, which is Spicer’s idea of vocabulary. Like that, the line is infinitely small, so small it’s part of a longer line I’m not even quoting the rest of, the language more direct and complicated than an introduction could ever be. Everything gets smashed in there, in its declarative mystery: “by furniture I mean DNA.” Even the score for music that is a body assembling itself is language: it’s everywhere; it’s gooey; it makes us and makes us and makes us.

If I’m drawing your attention here to what, for me, rings most loudly through these poems—signal bell of their arrival, *how* of the

poem’s arrival—it’s only because I can’t yet speak into the gulf of stillness that echoes back in places, like light glinting through latticework, “a golden network of selves,” but also and especially “this damaged surface / bric-a-brac hanging from every word.” Such is “virtue” and everything that word calls up, especially a strand of some history of how certain bodies have come to be told in gender. The light that glints through this damaged surface is also damaged. What comes piercing through is infinite, vast—a squared off series of spaces that squeezes words like “virtue” through our very pores: “a mighty history patching up its root system / to emerge in the pause of identification as work.”

I have so much further to fall, and I haven’t even gotten to the particular struggle with which these poems engage: sight, of all kinds, mistaking one thing for another, supremely, by accident, to see further than one intended, into the blind spot that is culture, or biology, having had ways of looking and casting about, casting them off and on again in sound.

Stephanie Young lives and works in Oakland. Her books are Picture Palace (in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni, 2008) and Telling the Future Off (Tougher Disguises, 2005). She edited the anthology Bay Poetics (Faux Press, 2006). Find her online sometimes: www.stephanieyoung.org/blog.

WHEN I SAY VIRTUE, I’VE FALLEN FROM MY CHAIR

At the end of the table is an ocean to cross
and an ocean is never in shambles
like a book with thirty-four decks burns
St. Elmo’s fire against the white leaf
a door you stand to apprehend

Close your dream and push it away
a sterile miracle of your inner fine ghost
is a morgue with an imprint of sea and continents
a mighty history patching up its root system
to emerge in the pause of identification as work

Visit the planets, take your mind off your eyes
you see assembled around you
what you know. What more do you want
to push through this damaged surface
bric-a-brac hanging from every word
where the red tape should be

BUT I DAREN'T SEE

But I daren't see in the clumsiness of my thoughts
upholstered with ideas continually there
heart beat vistas with a bundle of damp
personal papers, hands, errors, light
wet with inheritance dress, mutation's habit

While you wait to return your lace, your furniture
is copied, and by furniture I mean DNA,
spiraling into its own pulse
drinking the ancient transparent dream
emanating from the mattresses that are
our bodies. Put a finger on that run of notes
this is life and its laws are merely habits
bedding gravity with panorama in mind

Can you see—
those things you taught yourself to ignore
the colossus of them, with a historian's pity
and the corresponding failures of office
inside our herd of selves, a golden network
of selves, under the thatched roof-shade
of our present shepherd—
sink into the gravity of indistinct sound?

Karen Weiser's first full-length collection To Light Out will be published by Ugly Duckling Presse in the not too distant future. You can read her correspondence with the indomitable Anne Waldman in Letters to Poets: Conversations about Poetics, Politics, and Community (Saturnalia Books, 2008).



EVENTS AT T

DECEMBER

MONDAY 12/1
OPEN READING
 Sign-in 7:45 PM

WEDNESDAY 12/3
ED ROBERSON & GAIL SCOTT

Ed Roberson is author of seven books of poetry, most recently *City Eclogue*. He has climbed mountains in the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Andes, motorcycled across the U.S. and traveled in West Africa. Retired from Rutgers University, he lives in Chicago where he is Writer in Residence at Northwestern University. His next book, *The New Wing of the Labyrinth*, is due out this year. **Gail Scott** is current recipient of the Quebec Arts Council New York Studio grant. She co-edited *Biting The Error* and her books include *My Paris*, *Spare Parts Plus Two*, *Main Brides*, *Heroine*, and *Spaces Like Stairs la théorie*. She teaches Creative Writing at Université de Montréal.

FRIDAY 12/5 [10 PM]
HEY, WHAT'S ALL THE HOOPLAH?

Forget the impending breadlines, grab your polka-dotted canvas bindle, bundle up and bustle your way over to hear the tales of times said and gone and the prophetic parables of a new generation of poets, storytellers and musicians. This night will feature musicians and performers who frequent Feral Foster's Wednesday night **Roots n' Ruckus** stage at the Jalopy Theater in Red Hook (myspace.com/rootsnruckus & folkmusicinnewyork.com). Music and performances by **Elizabeth Devlin**, **Frank Hoier**, **John Houx**, and others T.B.A.

rary poetics, and anthologizing a poets-in-dialogue series he edited and curated (PhillyTalks, 1997-2001). He wrote *The Mood Embosser*, a book of poems. **Kevin Varrone** is the author of *g-point Almanac* and *g-point Almanac: id est*. He lives and works in Philadelphia.

WEDNESDAY 12/10
BOBBY BYRD & LEE MERRILL BYRD

Bobby Byrd's latest volume of poetry is *White Panties, Dead Friends and Other Bits and Pieces of Love*. He is co-editor of *The Late Great Mexican Border: Dispatches from a Disappearing Line* and *Puro Border: Dispatches, Snapshots, & Graffiti from La Frontera*. Byrd is the recipient of a NEA Fellowship, among other awards. **Lee Merrill Byrd** has published a collection of short stories, two children's books and a novel, *Riley's Fire*. The Byrds run Cinco Puntos Press, a publishing company recognized for bringing the literatures of the American Southwest, the U.S./Mexico border region, and Mexico to a national audience. **Eileen Myles** and **Elinor Nauen** will also "realize" poems from *The Resurrection of Bert Ringold* (a Cinco Puntos title) by the late **Harvey Goldner**.

MONDAY 12/15
DAVID LARSEN & C.J. MARTIN

Newly relocated from the Bay Area, **David Larsen** is pursuing postgraduate work. His first book of poetry is called *The Thorn*, and he has translated *Names of the Lion* by Abu Abd Allah ibn Khalawayh. From 2005-2007 he was co-curator of the New Yipes reading/video series at Oakland's 21 Grand. **C.J. Martin** edits the Dos Press chapbook series, as well as the online journal *Little Red Leaves* with Julia Drescher. He's the author of *Lo, Bittern*, and *CITY*.

MONDAY 12/8
LOUIS CABRI & KEVIN VARRONE

Louis Cabri's current projects include a study of Zukofsky and the Language Poets, a collection of essays on contempo-

WEDNESDAY 12/17
MIDWINTER DAY:
A 30TH ANNIVERSARY READING

Bernadette Mayer wrote *Midwinter Day* on December 22, 1978; please join her and special guests as they read selections from this epic work. Readers include: **Philip Good**, **Marie Warsh**, **Lewis Warsh**, **Barbara Epler**, **Jamey Jones**, **Peggy DeCoursey**, **Lee Ann Brown**, and **Brenda Coultas**.

JANUARY

THURSDAY 1/1 [2 PM -]
THE 35TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY
MARATHON READING

Poets and performers include Arthur's Landing (Ernie Brooks, Steven Hall, Yvette Perez & Peter Zummo), Jim Behrle, Martine Bellen, Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Barbara Blatner, Justin Bond, Donna Brook, Peter Bushyeager, Reuben Butchart, Steve Cannon, Todd Colby, John Coletti, Corina Copp, Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle, Steve Dalachinsky, Mónica de la Torre, Katie Degenetesh, Maggie Dubris, Marcella Durand, Will Edmiston, Avram Fefer, Bonny Finberg, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Merry Fortune, David Freeman, Ed Friedman, Joanna Fuhrman, John Giorno, Abraham Gomez-Delgado, Stephanie Gray, John S. Hall, Janet Hamill, Diana Hamilton, Bob Hershon, Mitch Highfill, Bob Holman, Brenda Iijima, Lisa Jarnot, Pierre Joris, Erica Kaufman, Lenny Kaye, Evan Kennedy, Aaron Kiely, Paul Killebrew, David Kirschenbaum, Bill Kushner, Susan Landers, Denize Lauture, Joseph Legaspi, Joel Lewis, Rachel Levitsky, Susan Maurer, Gillian McCain, Jonas Mekas, Jennifer Monson, Rebecca Moore, Eileen Myles, Jim Neu, Richard O'Russa, Akilah Oliver, Geoffrey Olsen, Dael Orlandersmith, Yuko Otomo, Ron Padgett, Julie Patton, Nicole Peyrafitte, Wanda Phipps, Kristin Prevallet, Arlo Quint, Chris Rael, Lee Rinaldo, Citizen Reno, Frances Richard, Bob Rosenthal, Douglas Rothschild, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Tom Savage, Michael Scharf, Harris Schiff, Elliott Sharpe, Frank Sherlock, Nathaniel Siegel, Samita Sinha, Hal Sirowitz, Christopher Stackhouse, Stacy Szymaszek, Anne Tardos, Susie Timmons, Rodrigo Toscano, Anne Waldman, Nicole Wallace, Phyllis Wat, Max Winter, Don Yorty, Emily XYZ, and more.

THE POETRY PROJECT

MONDAY 1/5

**ON CONTEMPORARY POETRY,
LAUNCH READING**

ON features twenty-one essays by poets *ON* poets of their approximate generation. Come find out what's going *ON* and celebrate this new publication featuring exchanges *ON* contemporary poetry and poetics. Contributors include Taylor Brady, CAConrad, Michael Cross, Thom Donovan, Jen Hofer, Sawako Nakayasu, Brenda Iijima, Alan Gilbert, Andrew Levy, Tim Peterson, Alli Warren, Suzanne Stein, and more. Readers include **CAConrad, Thom Donovan, Brenda Iijima, Tim Peterson, Andrew Levy, Kyle Schlesinger**, and more t.b.a.

WEDNESDAY 1/7

MITCH HIGHFILL & KATY LEDERER

Mitch Highfill is the author of 7 books of poetry, including *Moth Light* and *REBIS*. His work has appeared in *OCHO & Critiphoria*. **Katy Lederer** is the author of *Winter Sex* and *The Heaven-Sent Leaf* as well as the memoir *Poker Face: A Girlhood Among Gamblers*. Katy was an Iowa Arts Fellow, and serves as a Poetry Editor of *Fence Magazine*. For many years, she edited her own journal, *Explosive*.

MONDAY 1/12

CYRUS CONSOLE & JESSICA DESSNER

Cyrus Console is from Topeka, Kansas. His first book, *Brief Under Water*, is available from Burning Deck Press. He lives in Lawrence, Kansas. **Jessica Dessner** is slowly making the transition from dancer/choreographer to poet/visual artist. Her chapbook, *Wit's End with Bric-a-Brac*, was published in 2006. Her drawings will be featured in the artwork for two record releases, the Welcome Wagon's *Welcome to the Welcome Wagon*, and Osso's *Run Rabbit, Run*.

WEDNESDAY 1/14

SAMUEL R. DELANY & RENEE GLADMAN

Critic and novelist **Samuel R. Delany** published his first novel, *The Jewels of Aptom*, in 1962 at the age of 20. Since then he has gone on to become one of the most widely influen-

tial science fiction writers in America. His latest novel is *Dark Reflections*, and *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* is forthcoming. He is a professor of English and creative writing at Temple University. **Renee Gladman** is the author of four books, most recently *Newcomer Can't Swim*. *Toaf* is forthcoming this fall. Gladman is editor and publisher of Leon Works, an independent press for experimental prose, and she teaches fiction at Brown University.

FRIDAY 1/16 [10 PM]

MICHAEL BASINSKI & JUSTIN KATKO

Michael Basinski is the curator of The Poetry Collection at SUNY Buffalo. He performs his work as a solo poet and in ensemble with BuffFluxus. Among his books are *Of Venus 93*, *All My Eggs Are Broken*, *Heka*, *Strange Things Begin to Happen When a Meteor Crashes in the Arizona Desert*, and *AuXin*. **Justin Katko** is a poet and publisher. He edits the small press Critical Documents, which specializes in contemporary poetry from the UK and the US. He is completing an MFA in Electronic Writing at Brown University.

WEDNESDAY 1/21

BOB PERELMAN & CRAIG WATSON

Bob Perelman is the author of numerous books of poetry, including *Ilife*, *Ten to One*, and, in collaboration with painter Francie Shaw, *Playing Bodies*; and two critical books, *The Trouble with Genius* and *The Marginalization of Poetry*. He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. **Craig Watson** currently serves as an associate artistic director for a professional theater in Rhode Island. His eleven books of poetry began with *Drawing A Blank* and most recently include *True News* and *Secret Histories*.

MONDAY 1/26

**TALK SERIES: JIM DUNN
& MICHAEL CARR—**

ON EDITING THE WORK OF JOHN WIENERS

Michael Carr and **Jim Dunn** will discuss elements that have shaped **John Wieners'** published works since the early 70s. What constitutes his poetic work at that time comes as readily in prose, notes, jottings, ad-libbed read-

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ADMISSION \$8
STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

ings, and interviews. From that time onward, Wieners' books have been seen through from manuscript to print with someone acting in the role of editor. This dynamic continues to shape the work of the poet John Wieners as interest in his work continues to grow and more of his writing comes into print. Michael Carr is the editor of Wieners' *A Book of Prophecies* (Bootstrap, 2007) and Jim Dunn is editing Wieners' *A New Book from Rome* (forthcoming from Bootstrap).

WEDNESDAY 1/28

ED SANDERS & KAZUKO SHIRAISHI

Edward Sanders, poet, historian, and musician, is the author of *America, a History in Verse*, a nine-volume history of the United States, 1450-2000. Other books include *Tales of Beatnik Glory*; *1968, a History in Verse*; *The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg*; *The Family*, and *Chekhov*. Sanders was the founder of The Fugs, which has released numerous albums and CDs during its 44 year history. **Kazuko Shiraishi** is one of Japan's foremost poets. Her books include *Seasons of Sacred Lust*, *A Canoe Returns to the Future*, *Sand Families*, *Let Those Who Appear* and *The Running of the Full Moon*. At the age of 17 Shiraishi became a member of the VOU surrealist group. Her poems have been translated into more than 20 languages. New Directions will publish her collection *My Floating Mother, City* in 2009.

THE POETRY PROJECT
IS LOCATED IN

ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER
OF 2ND AVE & 10TH ST IN MANHATTAN
212.674.0910 FOR MORE INFORMATION

THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE
WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

BOOK REVIEWS

BRETT EVANS &
FRANK SHERLOCK
READY-TO-EAT INDIVIDUAL
LAVENDER INK / 2008

ROB HALPERN
DISASTER SUITES
PALM PRESS / 2008
REVIEW BY THOM DONOVAN

Three years after Katrina, Brett Evans' and Frank Sherlock's collaboration, *Ready-To-Eat Individual*, and Rob Halpern's *Disaster Suites* offer two engagements with one of the most controversial and harrowing events of our time. What I find crucial about both books are the ways they not only take stock of Katrina as a particular event, but make us rethink lyrical poetry "post-disaster" anew.

In the very abbreviation "A.K.," popularized by New Orleans natives, is a sense that Katrina has altered time itself, as time is both felt and narrativized as history. This is how I understand the term *event*—as an occasion which marks time, or from which time diverges, changes course, and thus provides one with a sense of continuity, or rupture. A.K. implies a new aeon or era. Like "B.C." or "B.C.E." it is an eschatological signature—a mark of where time ends, so it can begin again. In this way it is messianic: both outside time, and determining of time's very structure, its narrative contours and skips in the record. However, one may also understand *event* in Alain Badiou's sense of the term—that which presences the suppressed content of symbolic economy, subaltern realities, multiplicities, desires. Truths not-yet-created or permitted by present social formations that only become virtual with the arrival of the event itself.

What Katrina marks principally, is a time in which one can no longer distinguish between "natural" and "man made" catastrophes. On the one hand, Katrina (and other Gulf storms since) are obviously the work of global climate changes that have resulted from the over-production of greenhouse gases; on the other, Katrina reveals an entirely cultural disaster, the result of racism and economic inequality in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

The images of this disaster are difficult to forget (though I suspect they are already being forgotten by our society of political theater and mass media spectacle). They are of poor whites and Black folk stranded on rooftops, and at shelters waiting for basic necessities; they are of the complete failure of our federal government to care for and protect its citizenry through the support of infrastructure, social welfare and emergency services. Yet, the social disaster of Katrina is not only documented by images, but sedimented in language. In the very discrimination of Black "looters" and white "scavengers" prioritized by the media after Katrina, one discerned the popular media's complicity with those disparities underlying the real disaster of Katrina.

As after all disasters, after Katrina one needs new language forms to recover event from the abuses of media and historical representation alike. In their own ways, both Brett and Frank's *Ready-To-Eat Individual* and Rob's *Disaster Suites* have recourse to lyrical poetry, though not without qualification, and significant renovations. As Rob's post-face to *Disaster Suites*, "Post-Disaster," recognizes, the language of lyrical poetry cannot disavow its complicity with the social formations (and the language effects of those formations) which contribute to, and produce, disparity and injustice. Not least of these effects is one that has been most privileged by "avant garde" and mainstream poets in the past forty years: irony. As Rob elaborates:

I'm afraid there's an all too familiar irony that occasionally enters the poems, and this unsettles me. A voice seems to take shape around a comfortable air of fatefulness—"I am cronyism's phony double"—the irony of direct statement, the swagger of rhetorical effect *as if what will have happened were what is already happening now*. Some of the poems thus dispense fatally with the promising gap between tenses, and instead presume the suppression of time's discontinuities, filling in the fault *non-contemporaneity, time's disjointedness* that the mind, like ideology, passes over and seals. The performance of smoothness, the insurance of the present by way of a contracted voice, sometimes sounds like a bad imitation of empire's temporality, as the tone of time hardens into structure, and amplifies what can't be heard *this being the sound of everything deafening* rather than toning, readying. I'd prefer a song more delicate and exposed, where the risk of address *risk of hearing something other than myself* remains vulnerable, as opposed to, say, the false note of a voice turning away from distraction, hollow gesture of absorbed autonomy *poetry's last line of defense, commodity's front line of attack* a dire stand against disaster, perhaps, but insincere. (p. 69, *Disaster Suites*)

I am interested in Rob's description of his poems' voice(s), as they correlate his own book with Brett's and Frank's. That one should attempt lyrical poetry after disaster—though it risks a "hardening" of the voice and thus the reproduction of "empire"—is to rethink address—who is speaking, who is being spoken to—as central to the poem's meaning.

While *Ready-to-Eat Individual* is constantly critical of conditions in New Orleans, and with the United States at large in relation to geopolitics, what makes this critical position most successful is the pleasure it yields through humor, wit, and prosodic valuables. Puns move the work from line to line, and page to page; so does a certain cartoonish gallows humor, with reproduced (head)lines (in bold letters, and with a page all to themselves—as though film intertitles) like "My other car is a martyr." As with

the work of Judith Goldman, Louis Cabri, Gregg Biglieri, Kyle Schlesinger, and others (in terms of contemporary poetry), or much Rap music, I find this use of punning as a critical vehicle particularly effective, inasmuch as it invites participation in the poem's discourse, its various levels of meaning.

In terms of the sonic and rhythmic qualities of the book, *Ready-to-Eat Individual* takes up the idiom(s) of New Orleans natives (Creole, Black, and white Southern English). The insistence of native voices and speech rhythms grounds the poetry as both part of a local conversation and as an artifact of voices now threatening to disappear as New Orleans threatens to disappear as a cultural center. What also grounds the poetry, as a poetry of "local color" and discourse, are the many references to proper names specific to the city, and to news coverage after Katrina.

My mama your mama what
color was the brood?
Shape of Dome mothership ex
haust and okra for the horse

to keep at bay Bill Jeff
erson action fig. in Nosfera-
tutu bangs out a Gus
Ferrete—Hey Voters

why not
have this
thick dick
on a stick

(*Ready-To-Eat Individual*, xvi)

In the spirit of Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*

volumes, Langston Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Ed Sanders' *America: a History in Verse*, and other "documentary" poetics, one may consider *Ready-to-Eat Individual* an extensive, documentary poem. Throughout the book are peppered numerous headlines from newspaper, television, and internet sources; lists of objects found at construction sites; post-storm graffiti, public signage and overheard speech; lyrics from Rap songs; doggerel and limerick. While much of this material is recognizable from national media about New Orleans after Katrina, much of it is also bringing news of Katrina only someone on the ground (like Brett, a native of New Orleans, and Frank, who helped to rebuild after Katrina) could bring.

Something the book shares in common with certain poems from Rob's *Disaster Suites* (as well as Tonya Foster's post-Katrina writings and visual art, which I would have also liked to address here) is their intimacy of address. Nearing the end of the book, especially, the poem's tone becomes increasingly close-by and warm, as the "I" of the poem locates itself in relation to a "you"—the reader, a lover, the citizens of New Orleans forsaken after Katrina, left to feel "at-home in / the post-apocalypse"—and a "we" emerges to address another form of "you":

I appreciate the instructor
deeply but I've already mastered
the lessons of misunderstanding

the city is too dirty
for you You're right
you might be too clean

for me though my doubts
are arousing I want you dirty
enough to be comfortable

& relax How did I get
so at-home in
the post-apocalypse?

(*Ready-To-Eat Individual*, liii)

I see a lot of raw material but
tonight is not someday & we
want that shine to guide us home
We can smell our way
through this world but why
should we have to Give us
what you got mother fucker
Give us what you got

(*Ready-To-Eat Individual*, lxxx)

While in *Ready-to-Eat Individual* there is a sense that one is being invited into a local conversation, full of anger and frustration and concern, but also emboldened by a sense of solidarity—that people are bound together by the same fucked-up situation—it may be interesting how Rob provides a similar feeling in *Disaster Suites*, however in a non-localizing way. While Brett and Frank overcome the hardened, ironic voices of empire through a site-specific dialogue—the fact that their book prioritizes local particulars that necessarily touch other localities and global situations—Halpern allegorizes lyrical poetry's complicity with an entire global network of social disasters which include Katrina, and even become determined by Katrina (Rob's book was begun immediately after the storm, and completed as the first draft of a manuscript following the death of his close friend and colleague, kari edwards; *Disaster Suites'* cover also features drawings, drawn from memory by the artist, after photographs of homes devastated by Katrina), but also encompass movements between sites, and beyond site itself towards all that is being made invisible, occulted by the fatal abstractions of capital.

To trace all that *Disaster Suites* relates would be too difficult a task for a short review like this one (please see my pieces at Wild Horses of Fire blog, at the Nonsite Collective's website, and forthcoming at *Jacket* for more on Rob's work). There is the



Poets In Need is a non-profit organization providing emergency assistance to poets who have an established presence in the literary community as innovators in the field and a substantive body of published work. Assistance is given only in cases of current financial need that is in excess of and unrelated to the recipient's normal economic situation and that is the result of recent emergency (due, for example, to fire, flood, eviction, or a medical crisis).

Checks should be made payable
to Poets In Need and sent to

Poets In Need
Post Office 5411
Berkeley, CA 94705

Poets In Need is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization.
Donations are tax-deductible.

BOOK REVIEWS

Iraq war, the military-industrial complex, organ harvesting, genetic engineering, genetic modification of crops, land use, commodity exchange, labor exploitation—all of the bad effects of a beefed-up neoliberalism. But if I could emphasize a connection between these two books, it is the sense that both are searching for a new relationship between the writer/poem and reader, one mediated by affect, and the affective modalities, specifically, of one's being related by inextricable disasters across an entire social nexus.

Through affection (which is not the antithesis of irony, and, in fact, probably its complement, or inversion) the form of the poem wants us to feel anew, as well as think anew through some felt aspect or tonality of the poem. Similar to some works by Robert Creeley, or the breeziness of much New Narrative, in the poems of *Disaster Suites* the reader finds themselves in the throes of a projectivist (that is, breath-based) negative dialectics. But whereas Creeley's poetry is distinctly straight (despite recent attempts to queer it, such as in many of CACConrad's wonderful poems from *Deviant Propulsion*, or Michael Davidson's and Charles Altieri's takes on Creeley and embodiment), *Disaster Suites* opens up to new erotic possibilities—erotic possibilities activated by Rob's unique person of course, but also by an unprecedented historical situation that lyrical poetry and the arts at large are trying to respond to and find their way out of (as though from the singularity of a black hole). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and forthcoming in any number of geopolitical “hot spots”; the intensifying regulation of social space; the Siren's call of the mass media; the anesthetization of large parts of the population through...

Domestic oil turns disaster into peace-making
Opportunities, renewed production, settlements
—and money, which is what I thought I had

Dreamt you thinking. Out loud, we were leaden
As the sun. We were out harvesting wind
—selling smog and low-population land

But now I only want you to hold me
The way you might hold a mirror to my fat
Fertile slopes, these bodies at rest

—*not knowing what our flesh can do.*
(p. 61, *Disaster Suites*)

What inspires me about Rob's work in relation to Brett's and Frank's is the opening upon new ways to be intimate, and create new affective situations through a lyric that does not disavow disaster but makes of disaster coevalness, intimacy, and thus possibility. Such situations of poetic address may lead the way towards reimagining a commons, and ways of talking to each other when it is too easy to get bogged-down in all that is depressing and morose about our particular historical moment (post-Bush, pre-something else perhaps even scarier).

Watching Sarah Palin speak on television and internet recently (and realizing once again the post-Reagan power of gesture-driven political performance) these new modes of affect are everything for my generation (and future generations, I suspect), and perhaps something setting us apart from our parent generation. That the affective must lead to new forms of thought and civic responsibility is something Spinoza thought through centuries ago, before the Enlightenment swept in and colonized all that was radical about his philosophy. Post-disaster, we are realizing anew how to render affect effective for discourse, and create new locations for engagement, intimacy, social interaction and, even, love.

Thom Donovan is an active participant in the Nonsite Collective (www.nonsitecollective.org), a coeditor of ON: Contemporary Practice (oncontemporaries.wordpress.org), edits Wild Horses of Fire blog (whof.blogspot.com) and curates Peace Events (formerly Peace On A). He lives in New York City, where he is an archivist, teacher and writer.

MARCELLA DURAND AREA

BELLADONNA BOOKS / 2008

REVIEW BY PAUL FOSTER JOHNSON

AREA, the first of two new poetry collections by Marcella Durand released this year, is admirable for its interdisciplinarity. Durand applies a range of knowledge from urban studies to the physical and natural sciences in a series of spatial and ecological engagements. The poems also make frequent reference to visual media, especially painting, as means of demonstrating perceptual relationships in these environments.

A book that places such emphasis on seeing could be expected to calibrate its observations to the viewing subject. While there is an “I” in many of the poems, perspective is mobile and the eye functions as a relay point for the flow of information.

As a face emerges in an automated identification program, the last to appear are eyes: *as the most visible*. It takes opacity to capture light. *The tapetum lucidum* at the end of the eyes is the most reflective object. In translucency it appears dark. At the end of the eye, the retina amplifies light. At the end of vision, another you, me, more phosphorescence, shimmering in a trail we made moving through space. (“Remote Sensing,” p. 26)

Here perception belongs to no one, and eyes are seen rather than seeing; interiority is rejected in favor of pure movement. Throughout the book, images shift rapidly between human and telescopic scale. As the poems create an ambience of surveillance, they call on us to track each viewpoint relative to the others, as a sort of provisional map.

These maps sometimes ground movement in a social context and a knowable totality. In just two lines of “False Color View,” invis-

BOOK REVIEWS

ible and odorless carbon monoxide is traced from industrial fans into a river, then into the mouths of migrating fish, and finally to the dinner table. Such passages are recognizable as concrete examples of environmental injustice.

Yet there is also an equally familiar paranoia about that which lies beyond the limits of sense. For each closed loop, there is an instance where sensory capabilities are unsuitable or unavailable to capture all of the data, to force objects to disclose themselves fully. Later in the same poem, we are told that “to be wary means discovering the drippy spring” as it emerges from a hidden source under a rock and runs on to an unknown destination. For this reader, wariness is next to the queasiness produced by gazing at the mysterious, colorful film on the water in the Gowanus Canal.

“The Orange Line” playfully explores these boundaries of perception. The line operates in the poem as a physical limit, as aesthetic appearance, and as a materializing or dematerializing force. Trying to make sense of the phenomena, the viewer contemplates whether the line is spiritual or corporeal and, accordingly, whether she is “too practical” or “too abstract.” The line thwarts all deliberations, and the exasperated viewer ultimately determines that the line can only be “defined in negatives.”

Many of the poems in *AREA* are in longer and/or serial forms, which provide an excellent vehicle for sustained treatments of specific sites. “The Anatomy of Oil” recounts extensive exploration in the vicinity of oil deposits. While being driven through a desert, the viewer is fascinated by a massive rock and fixates on her inability to stop the car and take a closer look. It is not clear whether this curiosity is scientific or aesthetic. It could be a geological interest or a visceral response to the inaccessibility of the rock’s sublime magnitude. This excerpt from the poem would suggest both:

what are we but
separate one I you
another over there
no stone fits each
layer different
each other color
red and brown and
orange dark, we are
not we us no we
but then what
is oil? but millions
of creatures crushed
one into another
shoulder
to shoulder (pp. 71-72)

Despite the incomprehensible number of creatures required to create this commodity, it can nonetheless be recognized, at least partially, as “us.” Fissures and seams delineate “I” and “you,” but

they do not achieve identity, instead registering negatively in the “layer” they occupy. In its objective properties, the place from which oil is extracted manages to tell us something about ourselves. (This powerful interrogation simultaneously casts the global exchange of oil in a new and ghoulish light.)

Throughout the book, Durand brilliantly shows how space is constituted by history and by everyday life. There is a remarkable rigor to these investigations as they move through technological and geographic force fields, yet *AREA* is at its most challenging when at a loss to provide a complete account and troubled by the remainder.

Paul Foster Johnson is the author of Refrains/Unworkings (Apostrophe Books, 2008).

LISA JARNOT NIGHT SCENES

FLOOD EDITIONS / 2008

REVIEW BY EDMUND BERRIGAN

Lisa Jarnot’s fourth full-length book of poetry, *Night Scenes*, is a bastion of glorious gibberish and rhyme, digging into poetry’s roots, namely song, to create a fresh-feeling and thoroughly enjoyable read. Okay, it isn’t all gibberish, but it’s about as fun to read, and the spirit of “Jabberwocky” is present, especially in the beginning. Jarnot also summons or mentions Tennyson, Malery, Keats, Phillip Sydney, and Hardy. Their various metric influences give her a stable structure to exploit for her playful language treks, which add a nice twist to Jarnot’s various repertoire of effects.

The first time I saw Lisa Jarnot read was in Buffalo in the summer of 1993. She was wearing glasses, a suit, hair pulled back, smoking a cigarette, and had a chapbook called *The Fall of Orpheus*. A rather poety-poet is what I probably thought (I was 19, and had a surplus of shallow observation). A few years later in San Francisco I read *Some Other Kind Of Mission* and was excited by it...in a Velvet Underground & Nico way but without the leather, etc. It was a book/collage project full of exciting work, the kind of poetry I wanted to be reading & writing...seemingly ‘experimental’ but messy, and not a hammer-to-the-head textual disquisition. In subsequent years, *Ring of Fire* and *Black Dog Songs* appeared. Good books: delineating catalogues of finely cut logos and wildlife with varying shades of Whitman, Ginsberg—even a little biblical—but short-lined and embracing of obscurity. The poems are playful, with repetition as a borderline mannerism.

Jarnot’s writing in *Night Scenes* bears some similarities but begins with a deeper dive into sound play than usual for her work. The first poem in the book is titled “Sinning Skel Misclape.” Here’s the first stanza:

BOOK REVIEWS

O sinning skel misclape thy lock
from frenzied felbred feefs
and longitudes of long tongued fuels
unpebble-dashed deceased.

Not sure what a “Misclape” is, nor a “Gemingsfeld” as appears later in the book, maybe some extras from the *Dark Crystal*. I used to have a pair of earmuffs I liked to think were a fizzgig. Anyway, rolling syllables off the tongue, letting sound do the driving, but keeping the feel loose seems to be a mode in a number of these poems, as is letting alliteration and classical rhyme structures order the points of song. “Husband Sonnet One” and the adjoining “Husband Sonnet Two” are good examples of the latter trait. Here’s a bit of each:

like Dante in his mid-life’s wood,
a sheep’s mid-life is stout and good
like beer that ambers from a tap
or maple running wine tree sap
you sheep of silence play along
in dreams my husband sleeps among

(from “Husband Sonnet One”)

like Malory without his bail
who labored over Arthur’s death
while he himself in prison depths
molester of the nuns and cows,
my gentle husband, he’s not thou.

(from “Husband Sonnet Two”)

Over the course of her books, Jarnot has shown a great adeptness at handling forms. *Night Scenes* balances its sonnets and playfulness with a few other kinds of work that hint at some other directions Jarnot could take. “Self Portrait” reads more like a transient still life, portraying the details around her rather than engaging in any kind of self-analysis, though she does let some joy slip in:

was thrown out of the Charleston,
have a wheely-cart for my luggage,
two tranquilizers, four Prozac,
minor elk viewing, movie stardom
an the greatest waves of
happiness this sixth day of July.

Jarnot seems as at home in this kind of writing as in more audio-phillic works such as the opening poem, and in the more repetition-heavy style she sometimes employs. Balancing the book in the middle is a collection of fifty numbered couplets including “Whole Hog,” an amusing work written after Barrett Watten that initially reads somewhat like a minimalist political manifesto by Snowball

from *Animal Farm*, or perhaps just a condensed short story:

1

The pig is complete.
Barns demand limits.

2

Pigs fall down to create drama.
The materials are hoof.

3

Daylight accumulates in work yards.
Farm hands substitute for suns.

Night Scenes is interesting (ha-ha), in that it seems very personal without being revealing, and is expansive through its technique and use of certain kinds of details (historical figures, wildlife representations) rather than, say, political commentary or over-reaching thematics. It seems a bit on the short side with only 60-ish pages of poems, but that length also suits the kinds of quiet joys that make it such a pleasure to read.

Edmund Berrigan is currently editing The Selected Poems of Steve Carey, due out from Subpress in 2009.

SESSHU FOSTER
WORLD BALL NOTEBOOK
CITY LIGHTS PUBLISHERS / 2009
REVIEW BY DIANA HAMILTON

with this unique experience you should be able to
[defibrillate the dead
with this fishbone you ought to be able to fix your car
with this terrific amigo you should be able to buy some
[shoes

with this chilly reception you should be able to get wild

(from “game 53”)

The poem excerpted above from Sesshu Foster’s *World Ball Notebook* implicates the book in hand as the “with this” in question: with this book of poems, it asks, each one titled “game 1” through “game 118” (inclusive), what should you be able to do? The list given sets a pretty high standard for what to accomplish with small tools, but the utilitarian mantra stands in contrast to the book’s more looming repeated item: this is all a game. In a game, you should be able to win, or lose, but not much else. And if the book itself fails, we’re to get wild with the chilly reception instead.

The use of the word “game” as every poem’s title has many implications, but after its first allusion (soccer), it highlights Foster’s decision to use many different forms—including the letter, the list, fill-in-the-blank, prose, linebreaks, instructions, and multiple choice—without attaching much meaning to form’s

BOOK REVIEWS

choice, allowing “game” to remain playful, even when it begins to reference writing rather than sport. If he’s just playing, it’s enough to try things out.

Which gets to the bulk of *World Ball Notebook*, a book very much about trying. First, you have one main speaker trying, through various forms, voices, and poems, to pin down a set of contexts that make up the larger game implicated in the claim to worldliness the book’s title makes—trying too to navigate literal roads, less literal identities, and shifts between time that get in the way of narrowing scope—trying finally to make room for other characters within all this—all the while not trying much for resolution. There is also the constant trying that is parenting, that is wanting to say, and most of all, wanting to record. At its most serious moments, *World Ball Notebook* is trying to witness. In “game 4,” which reads much like a spell or a prophecy, we learn,

The person without ideas or imagination is to pour one teaspoon of ashes on the back of a running pronghorn antelope, or try to; pour one teaspoon on the back of a buffalo, or try to; pour another teaspoon on the first new snow anywhere;

The poem details how various people ought to get rid of their ashes, getting at some need to bury the dead, but it also reassures the instructions’ target that it’s enough to try these things out. Throughout, the types specified are referred to as “the one” or “the person”; Foster uses vagueness as a way to get towards a less confining specificity. He exploits the ambiguity of pronouns to conflate the people and experiences of those he occasionally names, making use of some sort of memory (or ashes) without reducing the poems to history. Sometimes, this seems to happen to “protect the innocent,” so to speak, but often, it does just the opposite, implicating others (especially the narrator himself) in circumstances in which they would not play a direct role without the accusation of grammar, of sentences’ proximity. In a poem midway through the book (game 49), a list of sentences involving a hesitance to speak produces a pair of lines that gets closest at how nearness can imply guilt:

I never told her I was standing on the balcony and saw
[them through the window.
She had not said she’d been raped nor did she ever
[mention it.

(from “game 49”)

Comparing this to the other lines from the same poem, the accusation is just a result of the latter sentence taking on so much weight; these two events are only simultaneous in the experience of reading. But somehow, throughout *World Ball Notebook*, the nearness gets to be too much to claim innocence, and part of the game is becoming aware of the games happening nearby. That is how a scene describing helping his daughter’s soccer team set up the nets in the morning is changed, later in the book, by Foster’s description of a different game entirely, “game 66,” in which,

The black boys attach a chain to the big chainlink gate of fence running along a field, the playing field at night; the chain attached at the other end to the bumper of a car whose driver cannot hear them scream when the chain, becoming taut as the car drives off down the street into the dark, loops around several boys yoking them together...

while back in “game 43,” when “the girls would roll out languid, cold and sleepy,” a premonition of danger comes: the poem/game ends abruptly with the sentence, “Something might break.”

In an interview with Eileen Tabios from *Black Lightning: Poetry-in-Progress*, Foster said, “I have a background that I often have had to simplify for people...who come from outside that experience.” *World Ball Notebook* works through that tendency to oversimplify, offering explanation of heritage mostly through the contexts and experiences to which the speaker is or has been submitted, while at the same time allowing identity to remain in its simplest, most dangerous form: the implied unity of the persistent, emphatic I/me that rolls throughout the book, or the ball that many games have in common. In the middle of all this, the book invites in what might not belong—a shopping list creeps into one of the poems, or Che shirts appear across a scene—but also makes some acknowledged omissions, substituting blanks for words, or beginning lists with numbers that don’t seem to begin where prior pages left off. Because so much of the book is based around a single actor’s perspective, such choices can be seen to mirror the act of perception itself, where some things simply flicker in and out of view, and where meetings between previously unconnected characters or events are forged within one person’s ability to notice. *World Ball Notebook* is at its strongest in those moments where the notebook itself takes on that role. The ruled lines of a notebook take control in a book where the logic of the list becomes the backbone of urban collectivity, and where the game becomes written instruction as much as an invitation to play.

Diana Hamilton is a co-coordinator of the Friday Night Series at the Poetry Project.

DANA WARD
GOODNIGHT VOICE
HOUSE PRESS / 2008
REVIEW BY MIKE HAUSER

What is “voice?” Ron Padgett’s poem from the 1970’s “Voice” pokes fun at the idea of poets “finding their voice,” as if it was something they’d lost, like a misplaced copy of *The Village Voice*. The poem ends with the declaration “I hope I never find mine. I / wish to remain a phony for the rest of my life.” But the sense of a voice is evident even in that poem, and in a lot of poetry that isn’t simply flattened-out monologue. In her essay “Voice” in *Coming After*, Alice Notley argues for a vocality that’s located in the text. “Poetry is vocal,” and voice comes from the body, which is a part-source for the poem. Or, put it this way, no one that I know of has ever written a poem without having a body.

BOOK REVIEWS

Notley's essay ends with this prescription: "the voice must be clear about itself in some way, believe itself, and be consistently unafraid." Dana Ward begins the titular poem of *Goodnight Voice* this way: "As a simple container of impulse I hew / to her book." In these lines you can feel the exhalation and inhalation. But it isn't just Dana speaking. In the dazzling "That Alice Notley & Jay-Z & Dana Would Speak Through The Imperfect Medium Of Dana," several voices are channeled and cross-channeled:

No one can separate my owl ferocity
out from my supine champagne slouch
my immanent flow from my metrical dead lock my dreams
from my knowledge of death or my grief.
The self I make up from constituent loves is a singular
thing that the market can alter the horror
of being unloved, selling poorly & each new occasion
may it change forever from standing
on that corner bopping to finding the measure I need

Here's a poem echoing Notley's "Jack Would Speak Through The Imperfect Medium Of Alice" through her and Jay-Z's vocabulary simultaneously. The word "media" is substituted for "medium." A psychic mixtape is delivered on the tongue. Can one voice be peeled apart from the next? No need! "As a simple container of impulse," this is a book where multiple ascending helices of voice are heard, but no intimacy of address is lost.

It's all in how the flow, as in an MC's "flow," through all manner of fluid concatenations, keeps us on point. A large and varied nebula of icons appear in those head-bobbing measures—John Lydon, Caravaggio, The Millennium Falcon, and Beyonce each near the other the way the things, or could we say various media, strewn around a person's room are. The voice takes up these materials in its polyamorous measure.

In "Imaginary Bay" a kind of permission is asked:

what I dreamed would be such supple measures that
[there'd be
no suavity lost from my line
as if Berkeley light sprang from the old boards youngly
[tread
& I walking them
dipped head to toe in their gradient shimmer
could make limpid song of all my mannered breath.

Is being permitted to return to a meadow really that different from shouting "I got next?" Or more urgently, Who's got the mic and who wants it most?

Once the voice is coming through the mic, we can hear its complexity as maybe the speaker's own complexity, but more importantly as a complexity of "agency teneble." And it's an agency attained by bestowal more than aim:

I have traded my gun for a butterfly net
it's a deep adamantine hue
staging each atom

en route to its 'probable flesh'

(from "More Of The Same Quasi-Mystical Fight")

This agency is always imminent and transitory. It shifts and can't be worn easily, and maybe even requires a little swagger. But the poem finally and always does emerge in its "probable flesh," we recognize it by its changing voice. And unexpected and constant pleasures are had. As a chapbook, *Goodnight Voice* contains more passion and a stronger voice than just about any "full-length" you'll read this year:

In the middle or late early middle of my life I went to the
[woods like
Gucci tote full of horse tranq's, cougar cub on a leash
Who's world is this?

(from "It Belongs To Someone")

Dana! The world is yours!

Mike Hauser lives alone now but welcomes guests.

MAXINE GADD
SUBWAY UNDER BYZANTIUM: POEMS, 1988-1996
NEW STAR BOOKS / 2008
REVIEW BY MACGREGOR CARD

Or, rather not a subway under Byzantium at all but its acronym, sub, as in submarine, substitution, subversion, and sub-. The sub will help us take our bearings in Maxine Gadd's clamorous epic of underworld descent, whose movement is unusual in katabatic tradition not only for its elemental domain (submarine instead of subterranean) but for its sheer verticality. The book is less a narration of descent into the underworld than of an instantaneous plunge. And less even a narration than an operator's restless turns from transcription to sense-making of the noise emanating from any and every descent story's collapse into one disturbed simultaneity.

As though laying ground for a woolly rebuke to classical drama's rigid temporal measures, the book proceeds through five acts, whose headings trace what would ordinarily be a straight course for the journey. We begin with "Loon," the waterfowl that moves from air to water surface and immediate depths, followed by "Boatload to Atlantis," a destination not only submerged on the ocean floor, but astray in the historical record. At the next chapter, "Styx," we are at the utmost passage not only geologically but metaphysically. The familiarity of these signposts seems almost a willing deceit on Gadd's part. For in actuality there is no partitioned sequence in which we "put me on this boat" or "let drop" "a crash at the lake" without already having been "suspended in the power of hell" and "beyond the ultramarine blindness of the inner spheres." Setting out is everywhere concomitant with arrival and return in *Subway Under Byzantium*. To put it to the Greek, katabasis (the going below) finds vexed implementation through

BOOK REVIEWS

parekbasis (the going aside). “i guess i’m walking to hell, sez bobby.” We imagine you’re way ahead of yourself. “If the devil was the driver, the/ devil is a great driver.” *Subway Under Byzantium*’s time signature is no less imperative for its mutability. “Go off in any direction at all.”

For all its abrupt substitutions of distant and variously speculative civilizations (we’re given not only Byzantium, but Atlantis, Illyria, Babylon, Bedlam...), the work is not aimless but agitated. Its agitations are political and situated in present, lived time and space—Canada, British Columbia, Vancouver, 1988-1996. Maxine Gadd is unequivocal in her political convictions, doggedly anti-capitalist and, with a few intermissions, has been part of Vancouver’s radical Downtown Eastside scene since the mid-sixties, a community with a long (especially in that it yet continues) history of direct action for workers’ rights and fair housing. After I finished *Subway Under Byzantium*, I wanted to know more about who it was who had just punched out my lights. I checked out her contribution to “Woodsquat,” a special issue of *West Coast Line* dedicated to the 2002 Woodward’s Squat. Herself a member of a sanctioned fair-housing concern, the Four Sisters Housing Co-Operative, Gadd’s piece telescopes from local solidarity to a scathing critique of B.C. premier Gordon Campbell’s leadership. I have to admit I’d never heard the name. For that matter, how much do most of us even know about the Liberal Party of Canada? Or Canadian governance generally? For example, Saskatchewan is a legendary and really abominable hirsute blond snow-ape occasionally sited in the Himalayas. We favor large portions in central North America, so it is for our neighborly blindspots, large enough to eclipse a country second only to Russia in landmass.

The lack of attention is not, of course, mutual (and it’s the “of course” that packs the most shame). This seems to go for poetic community as well. As far back as 1962, the Vancouver community received Robert Creeley with an enthusiasm and attentiveness unheard of in what were more often cordial but puzzled U. S. audiences. As anecdote has it, the overflow crowd hissed when the reading was “cut short” at two uninterrupted hours, and after a spirited question-answer session, Creeley addressed the audience, “It’s been a long time since I’ve experienced such energy and attention, and I’m very, very grateful.” Though Gadd would have been a teenager at the time, it says a lot about the community she came up through. Meanwhile, state-side, there seems to be a nagging suspicion that the experimental tradition in Canada begins with Blaser’s expatriation, skips ahead to Steve McCaffery and then finally proliferates with the Kootenay school. Reading in and around *Subway under Byzantium*, one is struck by just how giant this abridgment is. “There comes a point where you can’t refuse yr neighbour at the price of being inhuman. There comes / a point where you must flee a Black Hole.”

Macgregor Card is a poet living in Brooklyn. His first full collection, Duties of an English Foreign Secretary, will be out in Winter 2009 from Canarium Books.

JULES BOYKOFF &
KAIA SAND
LANDSCAPES OF DISSENT:
GUERRILLA POETRY & PUBLIC SPACE
PALM PRESS / 2008
REVIEW BY CAROL MIRAKOVE

Imagine—and witness—public space that is produced by us. In *Landscapes of Dissent*, Jules Boykoff and Kaia Sand remind us that there is a long history and ripe presence of intersections between poetry and politics. Don Mitchell is quoted in these pages as saying that public space is “decisive.”

Boykoff and Sand investigate a host of opportunities for public space, including its potential and its vulnerability, the situation and capacity of modern-day guerilla poets, how we might connect with an “inadvertent audience,” and ways in which conditions of public space inform authorship and collaboration.

The book is nicely organized into what I read as three sections: the first section of the book defines public space and language-based art; the second section documents case studies in which guerilla poetry has been applied to public space; and the third section extends points of action to the reader.

PUBLIC SPACE AND POETRY

The book opens with four essays by the authors. In “Public Space is Political Space,” Boykoff and Sand examine the meaning and function of public space in our present, neoliberal moment when the controls on that space are not interrupted. They write, “We are poets who are interested in ways poetry and politics intersect,” and here they offer that there is “there is plenty of historical evidence that poetry can make something happen” (7), where they go on to substantiate that claim.

In “The Public Sphere & Public Space,” Boykoff and Sand look at descriptions of the public sphere, such that we might understand how we might assemble and realize collective power. They write, “Poets can be marginalized through participation in a culture that conforms poorly to the logic of capitalism” (15), and remind us that we develop our own structures in which we “sustain the work” (15) of publishing and reading. Clearly poets know how to organize. In *Landscapes of Dissent*, Boykoff and Sand “are interested in tactics poets use to move out into public spaces” (16).

We are warned about the legalities of acting in public space in “Public Space and Litigation Nation.” Boykoff and Sand write, “Culture workers operating in public space must contend with a thicket of interrelated laws that attempt to channel how people can

BOOK REVIEWS

act" (18). They delineate the ways in which spaces are classified within U.S. courts.

Now that we've got a handle on two of our three tools—our space and ourselves—Boykoff and Sand explore the third, our art, in "Language-Based Art & Poetry." In this chapter they reflect on the work of artists including Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Heriberto Yépez, and Raoul Vaneigem, and look at the differences between public poetry that is sanctioned versus that which is not, i.e., guerilla poetry.

FOUR CASES

The center of the book looks at four cases of guerilla poetry. PIPA: Poetry Is Public Art was born in NYC. Kristin Prevallet is quoted at length on the intentions and actions of the collective's projects, and we're treated to many images from public actions and installations in NYC.

PACE: Poet Activist Community Extension acts on the streets of Philadelphia, where Frank Sherlock, CA Conrad, Mytili Jagannathan, and Linh Dinh perform and hand out broadsides. Pages here evidence demonstrations and publicly installed poems.

The Agit-Truth Collective was founded by the authors in a rural region on the East Coast and has since moved to a West-Coast urban area. They have installed outdoor signs such as one that read "You have the right to remain in perpetual fear," bearing

John Ashcroft's face. They have also staged an action on a freeway exit where one member paraded as "a dancing George W. Bush" holding a satirical sign that was followed by faux-CIA agents recording license plate numbers (72).

The final case documented in *Landscapes of Dissent* is Sidewalk Blogger located in Kane'ohe, Hawai'i, and led by Susan Schultz, inspired by Freeway Blogger. Signs were posted and altered in public space. This group addressed the Bush Administration, impeachment, the occupation of Iraq, and threats against Iran.

YOUR TURN

Now that we've seen how it's done, the final three chapters in the book provide us with considerations for taking the baton. Boykoff and Sand examine tactics employed by the groups profiled, and the context of their demonstrations, all towards illuminating factors for effectiveness.

Anticipating the argument, "But That's Not Poetry!," they explain, "[w]hat is called poetry comes down in part to group identity" (107). They acknowledge that some of this work may be classified as graffiti art. Their discussions of definitions of poetry and graffiti are provocative. Under either umbrella, we are reminded that working in public space is crucial.

Boykoff and Sand close with a chapter called "Your Turn," in which they urge the

reader to affect public space. They write, "we believe keyboard activism will never supplant boots-to-the-pavement dissent. Supplement, yes. Supplant, no" (114).

Ultimately, this is a book providing models we can apply to our own landscapes.

Landscapes of Dissent is informative, indeed: the explorations of what public space and guerilla poetry do and can mean are substantial and smart. But I recommend this book to you because it is a pleasure. Boykoff and Sand are energetic and graceful writers who present us with an ample array of photographs to drive home the excitement of their proposals and proofs. Furthermore, *Landscapes of Dissent* is a thoroughly beautiful object, from its format to cover art to typesetting to layout.

Who should read this book? Artists. Activists. Friends. Collectives. Teachers and students. Citizens.

DANSPACE PROJECT WINTER 2009 PERFORMANCE SEASON

JANUARY

8-10 **TRAJAL HARRELL**
15-18 **JEANINE DURNING**
22-24 **TARA O'CON and ENRICO D. WEY**

FEBRUARY

5-7 **YVONNE MEIER**
12-14 **TIFFANY MILLS COMPANY**
14 **KARL ANDERSON and ANNEKE HANSEN**

MARCH

5-7 **DANCE BY ALAN DANIELSON**
7 **MILKA DJORDJEVICH & CHRIS PECK**
and **RACHEL BERNSEN**
12-14 **ANTONIAETTA VICARIO MAKES DANCES**
19-21 **JULIAN BARNETT PROJECT**
26-28 **KEELY GARFIELD DANCE**

TICKETS www.danspaceproject.org or (866) 811-4111

Danspace Project is located inside St. Mark's Church
at 131 East 10th Street (at 2nd Avenue), New York City



St.
Mark's
Book
shop

31 THIRD AVENUE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
10003
www.stmarksbookshop.com
PHONE
(212) 260 7853

ASK ABOUT OUR MONTHLY POETRY E-MAIL!
STMARKSBOOKS@MINDSPRING.COM

BOOK REVIEWS

In reading this book—and daydreaming on its many images—I am left thinking about what belongs to us and how we might belong. In an age in which alienation is among our most prevalent health hazards, *Landscapes of Dissent* demonstrates that poetry may be newly, again, good for you. This book is a gift. Take the power.

Carol Mirakove is the author of Mediated (Factory School), Occupied (Kelsey St. Press), and, with Jen Benka, 1,138 (Belladonna). She lives in Brooklyn.

GEORGE STANLEY VANCOUVER: A POEM NEW STAR BOOKS / 2008 REVIEW BY DANA WARD

I've been madly in love with George Stanley's poetry for a few years now. It's been a total "affair" for me as a reader—his books blowing onto my desert island list, displacing old loves, holding steady on the night stand while others come and go. My romance with the work has gone on long enough that its myriad particular tones and

its preoccupations feel now like these organic parts of my language, my heart, and my mind. Freaky! But totally sweet. And totally not without precedent for most of us who have fallen really hard from time to time. So I've been flinching in the face of my devotion, telling myself there's no need to crusade or say everything I feel I'd love to say about Stanley's work. Telling myself there's no need to insist on too much. Because we're in a season of petty insistence, of political or, more accurately, electoral insistence, dressed in rhetorical certainty, hardening quickly, making it difficult, in Stanley's words to "see the sun through the murk of ideologies." I want so badly to bring Stanley's tonic uncertainty into my life, make that my "Vancouver," and write this from there. But hell, that's no way to write a review.

So, to begin again. George Stanley was born and raised in San Francisco. He was educated there, among the Jesuits, among poets slightly older (Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Robert Duncan) and peers (Beverly Dahlen, Stan Persky). In the seventies,

Stanley moved north to Vancouver. He moved yet again, still farther north, to Terrance, B.C., and has returned now to an altered Vancouver, in the era, our era, "of vegetarian pizza / disappearance of the Government, and of the people." "Vancouver" is a book-length poem, a city poem, modest in length but incredibly rich. The temporal scale of the piece neatly mirrors the brief, civic life of the place he's attending. The abiding deprivations and pleasures of contemporary urban life are all here—walks, train-rides, bars, and commerce. Saints of urban modernity pass through from time to time; Baudelaire, Verlaine. Williams' *Paterson* comes throughout, appearing as sounding board, talisman, & the object of loving derision. The writing oscillates between bursts of prose fragments separated by dashes, and unadorned yet sumptuous verse.

That's the boilerplate, and it's true, but what else? Well, there are two things that keep coming back to me that I'm trying, perhaps wrongly, to connect to one another. First, there's the melancholic sense that an engaged civic life for a person in this city is no longer a viable option. "The people" have been disappeared as a meaningful figure around which to organize place. Commerce, it goes without saying, shapes all. The second is what does this mean for one's mind, trying to organize itself amid "the real" so configured: "The city weighs tens of thousands of tons—or more—wherever you look at it—from—motionless." And then, a few lines later: "it's just an image in the eye—it doesn't exist." There is a constant tension between the outside (the physical fact of the city itself) and the mitigating (mitigated?) human subject at the site of apprehension. An all at once devastated and playful mistrust of "the real." One of the book's most heartbreaking passages plays out with this dynamic in mind. Stanley has heretofore been struggling to accept even the avatar of the city, and then with disarming gentility and brilliance, he writes of Vancouver this way:

Once it's made sure you
were drained of the need
of the will
for everything to be

USF
UNIVERSITY of
SAN FRANCISCO

THE MFA IN
Writing
PROGRAM

CORE FACULTY:
Stephen Beachy
David Booth
Catherine Brady
Lewis Buzbee
Lowell Cohn
Lisa Harper
D. A. Powell
Aaron Shurin
Karl Soehnlein
Jane Anne Staw
Susan Steinberg

RECENT VISITING WRITERS:
Kate Braverman
Bei Dao
Diane di Prima
August Kleinzahler
Kyoko Mori
Bharati Mukherjee
Eileen Myles
George Saunders
Rebecca Solnit
John Edgar Wideman

...in the heart of San Francisco

- Fiction, poetry, and nonfiction concentrations
- All evening courses
- Two-year program culminating in a book-length work

Please visit our new literary magazine, *Switchback*, at www.swback.com

CALL: (415) 422-6066
EMAIL: MFAW@USFCA.EDU
VISIT: WWW.USFCA.EDU/MFAW

FOR A COMPLETE LISTING OF ALL GRADUATE PROGRAMS AT USF, VISIT: WWW.USFCA.EDU/GRADUATE

Educating Minds and Hearts to Change the World

BOOK REVIEWS

marshalled

the city
is not unknowable
it's real.

Vancouver is also about mortality's hastening saturation of experience as one becomes a "senior," to use Stanley's word for it here. Departed friends' voices echo often through the streets. There are hospital visits (terrifying and sweet), the loss of desire and its sudden, gorgeous recurrence, the bittersweet feeling (of which he's written elsewhere) that the world indeed is for the young. "& yet I feel as young as / unconsciousness can" he writes, holding through, holding on.

Then there's Stanley's method, or method is not the right word, his alighting on a way in which he'll make this poem work: "write carelessly." He reminds himself of this from time to time throughout the book, as if to suggest that another approach,

too insistent, too hard and imporous, would stop the book dead, would quiet the city's transformation in his mind, as it moves there, from malign figment to later, a lover, a body in his bed, turned just so, so he can see him.

All of that, and it's true, and it still feels like boilerplate, somehow, it feels too "not enough." I guess that's love for you. My love of this poetry, coming up short in the language I have to address it. I started by telling you I would not be able to tell you. And in that I guess we're not at all unrequited! I wish that this were a poem instead. Or a private note I could write any of you, allowing myself more room to fuck it up, get things wrong, on my way toward what I really think and feel. There's something in this book, and in Stanley's poetry in general, that slips away just at the point of the telling, the uncanny I guess I could call it. The real. Or a pleasure that has gone just a little adrift, away

from my rote means. Whatever it is, read *Vancouver*. No, seriously. I insist.

Dana Ward is the author of Goodnight Voice (House Press, 2008). He lives in Cincinnati, BC.

GEORGE ALBON
MOMENTARY SONGS
KRUPSKAYA / 2008
REVIEW BY BRIAN TEARE

To read George Albon's *Momentary Songs* might be a series of answers to the question Judith Butler poses in her book *The Psychic Life of Power*: "how [can one] take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes?" Albon's title sequence oscillates between rhymed, metrical verse forms whose rhetoric of critique and dissent contrasts greatly with abstract lyrics and hybrid texts that stake out a space

LITMUS PRESS WWW.LITMUSPRESS.ORG

New & Forthcoming Titles Spring 2009

From Dame Quickly by Jennifer Scappettone ISBN: 978-1-933959-06-1 \$15 US

Bharat jiva by kari edwards ISBN: 978-0-981931-00-5 \$15 US
(published in collaboration with Belladonna Books)

Hyperglossia by Stacy Szymaszek ISBN: 978-1-933959-07-8 \$15 US

Aufgabe #8 featuring Russian poetry and poetics guest edited by Matvei Yankelevich ISBN: 978-1-933959-09-2 \$12 US



Face Before Against by Isabelle Garron translated by Sarah Riggs

Spare brush strokes, fragments, "a trace/ of an inflection of bone." Punctuation in unusual places makes us pause for extra breath—and in these pauses we sense the power of song dammed up by the white space that holds and withholds. Sarah Riggs's brilliant translation is equal to the incandescence caught in this shattered mirror.

—Rosmarie Waldrop

ISBN: 978-1-933959-04-7 \$15 US



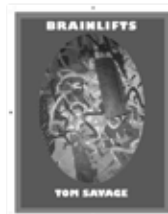
Aufgabe #7

featuring emergent Italian poetry (bilingually presented) guest edited by Jennifer Scappettone

ISBN: 978-1-933959-05-4 \$12 US

All titles available through Small Press Distribution: www.spdbooks.org. Subscriptions & special offers only available through the publisher, please visit our website. Litmus Press & *Aufgabe* are generously supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, in addition to subscriptions and individual donations.

門 STRAW GATE



TOM SAVAGE
Brainlifts



STEPHANIE GRAY
Heart Stoner Bingo



BILL KUSHNER
In Sunsetland With You



VALERIE FOX
The Rorschach Factory

leafscape.org/StrawGateBooks

BOOK REVIEWS

within empire both for intimacy and everyday acts: reading, urban walking, sleeping, loving, musing. On the one hand, rollicking rhymes mock patriarchal figures of power and the gestures they make to keep the public feeling disempowered: "Mister Two / knows what to do, / not me or you. // A master cook, / he wrote the book, / and we can't look." On the other hand, intervening poems note that, within a seemingly totalizing rhetoric of empire, citizens can resist power in ways neither fatalistic nor naively optimistic: "Will celebrate what is / and that it is / and assume responsibility / for this Belief."

In refusing to resort to only one affect or single mode of discourse in responding to power and its abuses, Albon enacts what Butler might call a strategic exceeding of "the logic of noncontradiction": the sequence as a whole is neither singular nor communal, neither subject nor subjected to, neither *either* nor *or*. And though "Momentary Songs" both counters subjec-

tion to power by eliciting identification with its anger *and* staves off political fatalism through humor and intimacy, the result could have been otherwise. As Albon himself writes, "Thinking about a certain poet's work, he imagined it as taking the reader by the hand, leading her to a place of aporia, and leaving." Instead, "Momentary Songs" insists on staging the aporia of complicity with power not as an impasse of conscience the reader deals with in solitude, but as an ethical ambivalence both she and the poet share, something they just have to work with: "Another long way was requisite / taking from studied words / their letters / to throw them in a haze." Thus taken as a whole, the sequence makes for the rare coupling of exhilaration and exhortation:

A private blank space
time passes in
one's eden alone

but the dark jagged trace
fills the room with others

who will write as they can

a choking
crowded scrawl

it could be a lyric
heard the hard way across...

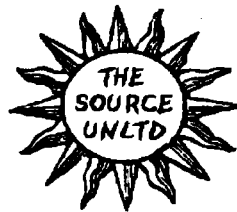
If we take for granted Butler's idea that "social categories signify subordination and existence at once," "Momentary Songs" could be said to recognize the social as an organizing force while choosing to explore alternatives to dwelling within its province exclusively: "in a civitas / of hints and tentacles," "Those who endeavor / to go underneath" must "empty...self / of whole and safe."

That "Momentary Songs" occupies the first fifty-four of the book's ninety-four pages means that we inevitably read its strategies

**4¢
OVERNIGHT
RATE**

**BINDING
&
LAMINATION**

**ALL THIS
& MORE
AT**



**331 EAST 9th STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10003
Tel: 212 473 7833
Fax: 212 673 5248
10 AM - 6 PM Mon - Thurs
10 AM - 5 PM Fri**

"It's Worth The Trip Down The Street!"

**75¢
COLOR
COPIES**

**CD, AUDIO
& VIDEO
DUPLICATION**

COPIES & MORE SINCE 1982!

BOOK REVIEWS

and strivings into the book's remaining three sequences—"Reading Pole," "Sunflowers, A Testimony" and "Seven Admissions"—each of which could be said to explore a mode of coding communication so that its essential meaning passes through normative discourse unnoticed. For instance, "Sunflowers, A Testimony" and "Seven Admissions" utilize procedure to transform the public forms of testimony and admission into records of alterity. While collage wrests difference from personal prose narrative in the former, an acrostic logic sculpts the candor and wit of the latter, a stunning sequence of queer love poems in which "Detained by the touch police they can send / each other paper that looks like a city."

What makes Albon's work both admirable and likeable is that familiar poetic strategies—whether postmodern parataxis or eighteenth-century rhyme—take on in their repetition a new valence. Collectively these repetitions constitute "a reiterated ambivalence at the heart of agency," as Butler writes, and it's this heart that beats in Albon's body politic. Case in point: a "reading pole" is a message board on which hobos leave symbols to communicate with each other about what resources can be found nearby—food, clean water, shelter, charity—as well as what hindrances—stingy or indifferent people, dirty water, thieves. In Albon's sequence, reading the hobo symbols that head each page becomes for the reader a direct line to the subliminal polis, a way "to receive bread and a bowl, a story, on the inside from your wandering, your bowl of events." "Going on with everyday attentions, from a known quantity to an unknown," his speaker is proxy for the citizen-reader who must "Observe, audit" both "Shape of travel" and "Action around it" in order to survive. A companionable, indispensable guide through the signs of empire as well as a "strange educator," *Momentary Songs* reminds us that to traverse the wilderness "can be easy passage if you act clear" and that "You can also do it by writing."

Brian Teare's next book is Sight Map (University of California Press, 2009). He lives, teaches, and makes books by hand in San Francisco.

LAURA MORIARTY
A SEMBLANCE:
SELECTED AND NEW POEMS, 1975-2007
OMNIDAWN / 2007
REVIEW BY SARA WINTZ

One would expect that Laura Moriarty—whose first book was published almost thirty years ago—would title a selection of her writing something other than *A Semblance*. After all, a semblance is something that *seems* to be, words that require the naming of second glances in order to quantify/qualify.

And yet, doubt and uncertainty are omnipresent in Moriarty's poems: lack of absolutes existing as matter of fact. Or, as the Omnidawn description for Moriarty's book suggests, these poems strive "...to make each lyric phrase into a portal where we find

ourselves turning at once in two directions..." Take, for example, her poem "Six Histories":

My entire forget
not thought to have him
turn me to hope again
...
One entire piercing
me hard thoughts for once
for me they're both him

Again he turns to him
for me not caring
to hope my thoughts over

Pinned to some shoulder turned
away my breast again
entirely him (33)

Moriarty's thoughts turn her lines into circuitous descriptions. "Me" and "he" exist in "Six Histories," but where do their bodies begin and end? Instead of asking readers questions, Moriarty writes about a tenuous and transparent relationship with a ton-bearing knowledge. And then, this next poem, on page fifty-one of *A Semblance*, is much different:

Why am I divided from him?
A continuous line begins with the brow
And becomes the nose by agreement
A piece of linen simplifies
The features of its women like
Masks or any other kind of quiet
A beautiful arrangement by convention
Only if accepted or if not
Why am I divided thoughtlessly?
A stylized head bisecting two scenes
Of life or its embroidered equivalent
House man clouds a child suspended from
Parentheses that by balancing unite and yet
Why am I silent in the foreground divided?

Here, she questions the divisions between a "me" and a "him." As though asking, what difference does it make, what differences are there? In so doing, she is also saying that there is no difference between two people with differences in name. She uses questions to make a point.

Questions usually expose a lack of knowledge, a form of intellectual weakness, or so we suppose. Moriarty champions questions, and the questionable then stretches into a way of knowing.

These questions asked of gender bring her work into a distinctly feminine light. Again, Moriarty uses inversion in relation to a female character:

BOOK REVIEWS

She had lips for his eyes
A man fucked
A woman from behind
Pressed between them
Or buried
The one you don't want to lose
Or blending on the street where
He put himself inside her mind
She had lips painted gold
They close around him
Were thighs made unstable
Because beaten or flattered
From inside a shudder
She took it
She had enough. (58)

At first, the subject of the poem seems to be involved in a very physical dispute: lips, eyes, fucked, pressed, buried. Then, halfway through, the tone changes. Her lips can enclose him, from inside of beaten, flattered thighs. "From inside a shudder," she had what she wanted—she had collected—and taken what she wanted from it. Suddenly the female character is in the power position—not taking it, but collecting it, then walking away from it with *enough*, defiantly.

Moriarty reinforces our belief in questions. *A Semblance* implies doubt: uncertainty that is a matter of fact. After all, there is more to come. What seems to be a sign of completion is just the beginning.

Sara Wintz's writing has appeared in Cricket Online Review, TIGHT, and as a chapbook called Lipstick Traces. She co-directs :the press gang: with Cristiana Baik.

DANIEL COMISKEY &
C.E. PUTNAM
CRAWLSPACE

P.I.S.O.R. PUBLICATIONS / 2007
REVIEW BY JEN COLEMAN

Say you woke up one day, and the "sense" of your world had burned away like a cloud. And in the lifted fog, you realize that meaning—what's significant and real—has all along existed not in the words you listen to, but the words just barely within your range of hearing: monster movies, consumer warnings, internal monologues, ambient chit-chat, business lingo, and hypothetical questions.

You'd be in the *Crawlspace* created by Daniel Comiskey and C.E. Putnam.

The collaborative book of poems put out by P.I.S.O.R. Publications in 2007 promises to be a "one hundred ton creature with a five hundred foot wingspan" whose home is a volcano barn. That it is, but it is also an artfully constructed disambiguation that, with both humor and terror, reveals the absurdity of human social being. *Crawlspace* makes a reader want to call out, as if to a horror flick

ingénue, "No, no! Don't get up early to check the percolator! Stay in bed until the sun comes up!"

We believe, *Crawlspace* tells us, and we go about our lives, as if it is all perfectly reasonable. Or, as the poets put it in "Carny Casting Couch": "I was down / the street humming / the dominant themes / of leisure and industry." But *Crawlspace* shows us how such commonplace routine is actually hysterical and dangerous. As the Yak's voice in "The Island of Dr. Mauer" tells us, we are "unfortunate" in our "calmness in what should be / to most / an occasion for total fucking / panic."

Crawlspace explores the portent of bewildering moments by giving a twist to the ordinary and shining a spotlight on it. Take this scene, from "Which Lunchroom?":

The Monkey said hello to the Pig, and the Pig said
"I don't speak Monkey," in Pig, and then the Monkey said
"would you like a bite of my sandwich" in Monkey.

It's funny, but it is also tragic. It would be mundane if it weren't a pig and a monkey speaking; it hints at something terrifyingly human. And so it fits that the book should open with an epigraph from the notoriously temperamental actor Klaus Kinski, from a 1985 *Playboy* interview:

About 25 years ago, I was in an apartment and next door they put on a radio so I struck the wall with my fist but they did not put the radio down. I took a tool and banged until I made a hole through the wall. It was like a comedy movie.

Kinski is perhaps best known for his Dracula role in Herzog's *Nosferatu*, but he also appeared in 130 other films—including the 1986 horror flick *Crawlspace*. The movie was originally in 3-D—as is the Comiskey/Putnam poem.

It's true: A copy of the P.I.S.O.R. book comes with a pair of 3-D glasses for viewing the cover, as well as an Audio CD. Give the CD a listen and you'll understand that the book is a libretto, and the blank space on the page comes to life in the CD with a brilliant sound collage.

Comiskey and Putnam launched *Crawlspace* in a one-night-only event in Seattle at OseoO Gallery's Leg to Stand On reading series. But it's not too late to catch your own *Crawlspace* event. You can get the book and CD at <http://www.pisor-industries.org/crawlspace/>. When it arrives, get popcorn, put on the 3-D glasses provided, turn up the stereo sound, and let it wash over you from ear to ear. The poem becomes a thriller of a radio show—or a 3-D movie made up mostly of real life.

Jen Coleman—formerly of Brooklyn, NY, and soon to be of Portland, OR—is former co-editor of the poetry journal experiment Pom2. Her own poems have appeared in Ixnay Reader, EOAGH, and elsewhere.

JOIN NOW!

YES, I wish to become a member of The Poetry Project. Here is my membership gift of:

\$50 \$95 \$150 \$275 \$500 \$1000

NO, I do not wish to join at this time but here is my contribution of \$_____.

(For your gift of \$50 or more you'll receive a year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*).

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

Make checks payable to The Poetry Project. Detach this page & mail to: THE POETRY PROJECT, c/o ST. MARK'S CHURCH, 131 EAST 10TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10003

YOUR GIFT ENTITLES YOU TO THESE MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP [\$50]

Discounted admission for a year to all regularly scheduled and special Poetry Project events.

A year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

Substantial savings on workshops offered at the Project.

Priority discounted admission to all special events.

SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIP [\$95]

FREE admission to all regularly scheduled Poetry Project events.

Plus all other benefits above.

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP [\$150]

FREE admission to all regularly scheduled Poetry Project events for you and a guest.

A free subscription to the Project's literary magazine.

Plus all other benefits above.

DONOR MEMBERSHIP [\$275]

All of the above! *PLUS*

FREE admission to designated special events, including the annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading featuring over 100 poets and performers.

FREE limited-edition photo print: Hank O'Neal mounted color print of Allen Ginsberg, signed by O'Neal, edition of ten.

BENEFACTOR MEMBERSHIP [\$500]

All of the Donor-level membership benefits! *PLUS*

All 2007-2008 Poetry Project publications.

A 20% discount on the purchase of any Poetry Project print (in addition to the Ginsberg/O'Neal photo print)

Grateful public acknowledgment.

PATRON MEMBERSHIP [\$1000]

All of the Donor-level membership benefits! *PLUS*

All 2007-2008 Poetry Project publications.

Your choice of any Poetry Project print (in addition to the O'Neal/Ginsberg photo)

Grateful public acknowledgment.

NEW AND RECENTLY RENEWED MEMBERS: Michael Brownstein, Rackstraw Downes, Michael Heller and Jane Augustine, Eileen B. Hennessy, Bill Kushner, Richard Lefkowitz, Roselyn Leibowitz, Anonymous, Duncan McNaughton and Eugenia McNaughton, Marc Nasdor, Elinor Nauen and Johnny Stanton, Murat Nemet-Nejat, Ron and Pat Padgett, Bob Perelman and Francie Shaw, David C. Tinling M.D., Katharine B. Wolpe, Albert Onello, Rosemary Carroll, Tony Hoffman, Evelyn Reilly, Stephanie Strickland, Josephine McKee, David Berrigan and Sarah Locke, Todd Colby and Elizabeth Zechel, Kostas Anagnopoulos, Ken Mikolowski, Macgregor Card, Contessa Davis, Kiki Smith, Aaron Kunin, Will Creeley, Harvey Zuckerman, Barbara Blatner, Michael E. Lindgren, Jennifer Firestone and Jonathan Morrill, Filip Marinovich, Tim Peterson, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Phyllis Wat, Gillian Conoley, Barry Denny, Rita Stein-Grollman, Will Morris, Ryan Nowlin, Russel Duveroy, Erica Varlese, Sarah Lariviere, Nina Kang, Adriana Jacobs, Lissa Kiernan, Cecilia Wu, Anna Calabrese, Janette Timm, Allan Kaplan and Almaz Kaplan, Beth S. Clarke, Willa Carroll, Nolan Geiger, and Samuel Perry (as of 10/30/08)

THE POETRY PROJECT

ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY

131 EAST 10TH STREET

NEW YORK, NY 10003

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW YORK, NY
PERMIT NO. 7021