

THE POETRY PROJECT

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NEWSLETTER



NEW WORK BY KIMBERLY LYONS // OCCUPY AMERICAN POETRY
WAYNE KOESTENBAUM & RONALDO WILSON IN DIALOGUE
ALLISON COBB: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF PLASTIC
ART, REVIEWS, HOROSCOPES & MORE

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The Poetry Project Newsletter

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Contents

Letters and Announcements	4
Occupy American Poetry by Jim Behrle	6
The Last Flower on Earth by Kimberly Lyons	9
Fat Man Thread by Ronaldo Wilson and Wayne Koestenbaum	12
From <i>The Autobiography of Plastic</i> by Allison Cobb	16
Events at The Poetry Project	20
Book Reviews	22
Poet Astrology by Denver Dufay	30
Cover and Interior Art by Haris Epaminonda	



From the Director

I'm already thinking about what's going to be in my glass on New Year's Eve. Brusco is a contender, a wine that required years of research to achieve its taste. The secret is the extended soaking of skinned Sangiovese grapes. Thank you to John Coletti for bringing it to the parties.

And here's a good toast—it's actually how Bob Holman started out the Annual New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading last year: "This year will be different...it will be new!" At 3PM on Sunday, January 1, 2012, The Poetry Project is going to heave the heavy wooden plank barring the inside of the Sanctuary door for Marathon #38. We know quite a bit about what makes this event work, but how will it be NEW? That's what our team has to figure out. One exciting new development is that we have invited each performer to submit one short line to be included in a Marathon exquisite corpse poem that will be printed as a limited-edition broadside. These broadsides will be sold at the book table (readers comped, of course). One thing I love about this event is that the sum of its parts (all of us) packs the biggest wallop, so we would like our broadside to represent this, the Marathon's song of itself.

The first Marathon in 1974 featured about 30 performers; now it features about 140. And that's still not enough to make our job any easier when it comes to curating the event. Each year we go for an array of first-time readers, poets from sister organizations, Marathon *doyens* and *doyennes* not to be missed, and more and more music. It's impossible to ask everyone we want to hear. No hard feelings? The best revenge is to come to the event and volunteer.

We need all the assistance we can get, for the *raison d'être* of the event and its grand scale is to raise funds for The Poetry Project's programming. We present 80-85 readings each year and every dollar we raise from admission, food and book sales, and memberships goes right back out into keeping the Project a public forum for writers and audiences to connect. Thank you for your support and wish us luck as we start our checklist (tune piano, turn off the bells).

Stacy Szymaszek



From the Program Coordinator

2012 is close. Nearly thirteen *b'ak'tuns* have passed since Q'uq'umatz and Tepeu got together to create the first humans out of corn. And nearly thirty-eight years have passed since The Poetry Project held its first New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading. Soon your Gregorian calendars will read 1/1/2012 (that's 12.19.19.0.5 Mesoamerican long count) and we'll be hosting another gigantic benefit reading here at The Poetry Project. Check out the calendar in this *Newsletter* for a tentative list of the poets, dancers and musicians who will be performing.

We three Poetry Project staff members can only plan and organize this thing—we need you to make it real. It will take about eighty volunteers working a couple of hours each for the 38TH Annual New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading to be what we imagine. If you would like to begin the New Year making this event happen, send an email to info@poetryproject.org. Nicole will read your email and be happy. She's the person coordinating all the bookselling, food-serving, hand-stamping action that makes the Marathon go. Also, let her know if you'd like to donate food or books to the cause.

2012 could be a year of cataclysmic geomagnetic reversal, or worldwide collective spiritual transformation, or maybe just plain old death-by-asteroid. We still plan on hosting lots of readings at The Poetry Project. Our New Year's Day Benefit is where we raise the funds that make the other events in our season possible. It's also a really good time. I hope you'll volunteer and I hope to see you there!

Arlo Quint



From the Editor

One of the great things about the editorship is the opportunity to visit Stacy, Arlo and Nicole regularly in their natural daytime habitat. They were so busy the last time I showed up! Even with the uptick in activity as the Marathon approaches, the office remained utopian. I drew upon the corporate *élan* and fellow feeling as I assembled this issue.

To borrow a distinction developed in Jean-Jacques Lecercle's *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*—which you should read if you have not already!—the work in this issue is more *agonistic* than *irenic*. Jim Behrle agitates for occupation; Kimberly Lyons restlessly interrogates the practice of writing; and Ronaldo Wilson is composing battle raps. Yet in some ways, these pieces have something in common with the current protests in their emphasis on the *communication* of critique, their foregrounding of personal connections to social conditions.

Poets' visible roles in Occupy Wall Street suggest that our art is shaping the form of a shared discontent. This feels like the moment to reevaluate the relationship between poetry and politics, and the outcome would seem to depend on whether there remains a craving for solidarity and understanding as the movements develop. I hope your experience with The Poetry Project, whether it be attending events or reading the *Newsletter*, helps you get ready to think this through in 2012.

Paul Foster Johnson

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FOOD COURT

The Poetry Project is seeking donations of baked goods, bread and hot dishes from local restaurants for the Annual New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading. If you know of someone in the culinary arts who is also a poetry lover, please ask them to call Nicole at (212) 674-0910. There are perks for businesses that donate, such as profuse thanks throughout the night and winning the hearts and stomachs of hundreds of people.

MISPRINT

In the last issue, there was a misprint in Abigail Child's biographical note, which should have read "filmmaker and writer," not "film and video maker."

ART IN THIS ISSUE

This issue includes five images by Haris Epaminonda. Epaminonda was born in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 1980 and now works and lives in Berlin. In 2007, she co-represented Cyprus at the 52ND Venice Biennale. She took part in the 5TH Berlin Biennale in 2008 and the 9TH Sharjah Biennale in 2009. Recent and upcoming solo exhibitions include: Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (2011), Museo di Palazzo Poggi & Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna (2010), Level 2 Gallery, Tate Modern, London (2010), Site Gallery, Sheffield, United Kingdom (2010), Rodeo, Istanbul (2009), Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (2009), Circus, Berlin (2008) and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2008). Since 2007, Epaminonda has been developing, with fellow artist Daniel Gustav Cramer, *The Infinite Library*, an ongoing book project.

Cover: *Untitled* *27, paper collage, 25 x 16.6 cm, 2007. Private collection, Vienna.

Contents Page: *Tarahi IIII*, video still from *Tarahi IIII*, V, VI, three-channel video installation (total duration: 07:36:11, color, sound), 2007. Courtesy of the artist and Rodeo, Istanbul.

Page 13: *Tarahi IIII*, video still from *Tarahi IIII*, V, VI, three-channel video installation (total duration: 07:36:11, color, sound), 2007. Courtesy of the artist and Rodeo, Istanbul.

Page 24: *Untitled* *33, paper collage, 26.9 x 20.9 cm, 2007. Private collection, London.

Page 29: *Untitled #07 I/g*, mixed media, dimensions variable, 2009. Installation view from *VOL. IV* at Rodeo, Istanbul, October 2009. Photo: Serkan Taycan, 2009. Private collection, Spain.

Occupy American Poetry

Jim Behrle

Poets have made themselves ubiquitous at Occupy Wall Street and the various “Occupy” movements around the country. Happily so. Like many people across our great swath of land, poets know that the current economic system doesn’t serve them. It serves banks and gigantic global corporations. We’re just the human batteries inside their matrix. In the same way that Charlie Brown of *Peanuts* fame is the Charlie Browniest, if there’s anyone in the 99% getting the long, hard screw, poets are the 99%est. So chant and carry signs and read your poems at protests, poets. It’s all good.

But what about the social and economic systems of American Poetry itself? Shouldn’t they too be occupied and hopefully brought to their knees by protest? Poetry relies on mostly young poets to shoulder the economic burden of the professional side of the art. Where would all those poet professors be if kids stopped putting themselves into permanent debt to study with them in MFA programs? Working at Burger King with me, on the Whopper Board. If there were no MFA programs, you probably wouldn’t see single-author poetry paperbacks at \$16, \$18, \$20. If kids aren’t assigned books for class, are they really going to buy a poetry book for that kind of dough? In general, if poetry stopped having an underclass of people who were interested, engaged and trying to get ahead, American Poetry would stop working for the 1% of poets who get books, jobs, grants, attention and awards, and maybe start working for the 99% of poets who just want to feel like a poet, write some poems and maybe get themselves heard for once.

Who is the 99% of American Poetry? Chances are it’s you. Billy Collins doesn’t read *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. I know literally thousands of poets who deserve a larger audience, who pay into a system of pay-to-play with no actual play at the end. I would argue that Poetry operates in an even more sinister way than the big banks, the hedge funds and whoever is ripping off America. Capitalism only works through profitable exploitation. So what’s Poetry’s excuse? No one is really even making any real money with Poetry. The Poetry Foundation got all that very real and very substantial Ruth Lilly money, but they’re wasting it on buildings in Chicago. Buildings will not save American Poetry; only poems will. And although being taken advantage of is the entry requirement for any corrupt system, why should you allow yourself to work for something that wasn’t going to pay you and was never going to promote you?

And who is the 1%? Well, who benefits from your manuscript reading fees, your graduate school tuition, your membership dues? There have never been more people in the US who identify themselves as poets. Bill Clinton used to say, “If you work hard and play by the rules, you shouldn’t be poor.” So

how’s that working out? No wonder people are camping out in front of the Stock Exchange and demanding changes. And how’s that working out in American Poetry? We should probably be camped out in front of all the major publishing houses in New York City. And we should be occupying the Creative Writing departments of all the universities, putting our feet up on the desk of the Department Chair, like a young, handsome David Shapiro smoking a cigar at the Dean’s desk at Columbia University in the 60s.

American Poetry relies on the lie that if you work hard and pay into the system, good things will happen for you, too. It is likely that no good things will ever happen to you in this art or any art. The Traditional American Publishing System is simply not interested in Poetry in any real way. The big houses select a few poets apiece, continue to publish them over the course of their careers and hope they acquire an audience. Put the right cover and the right blurbs on a book of anything, then put it in every chain bookstore in America, and you’ll sell an OK amount of books before you have to pulp them and turn them into a mystery paperback. Just because a book is well blurbed or published by a big publisher doesn’t mean it’s any good. Right?

Use a Rothko painting, get quotes from Former Poet Laureate A and National Book Award Winner B, that sort of thing. Most poets just give blurbs away like candy. They are paying to play, too. Blurb this and get blurbed. And so there’s a hungry poet who someday wants to have a book with a Rothko on the cover and blurbs from former award winners. That poet will buy this \$18, eighty-page book just to devour all its secrets? I’m pretty convinced that most poets, when they’re reading books of poems, are reading right through the poems to try to understand what the press and editor were looking for. They look for something that can qualify as a brand, that can be recreated in their own work. It ain’t easy being in the 99%. Especially because this American Poetry system continually pits you against all other poets in America to get whatever it is you want from the art. Readings, books, awards, review attention. You think *why did that poet get that?* instead of *why did this system create so few opportunities if there are so many of us?*

It is no stretch to think that American Poetry could benefit a much larger number of poets than it currently does. Once ebook technology becomes available to poets, they will have the ability to publish and distribute one another without the intrusion of middle management. There is plenty of shelf space on the internet. And the taste of editors has always been overrated. Judging a poet’s poems is a fuzzy transaction; judging a poet’s fame is way easier. Poets are not brands of toothpaste or new shows on CBS. Some books are good and some are

crummy. Some poets get chances and opportunities and some just never will. Not out of any sort of brilliant master plan by American publishers. They rejected Emily Dickinson, you know.

More criminally, American colleges and universities have been steadily jacking up tuition over the past twenty-five years. Even paying into this system to get an undergraduate or graduate degree doesn't mean you'll ever get a job. Your professors won't even remember your name after a year or two, if they ever learn it in the first place. The only perceivable benefit from getting an MFA in poetry writing is that someday you may be able to teach poetry writing to other kids. The wheel of crushing debt spins on and on.

Why shouldn't these systems be overthrown? Wouldn't we all be better off, and wouldn't Poetry be better off, if the power in American Poetry returned to the poets? If you pay for a graduate degree, that university should publish your first book. It wouldn't cost the university press all that much. And it lets future students know what your graduate school is all about and if it's worth tens of thousands of dollars to jump through the MFA's flaming hoops.

I've often railed against overly ambitious, deviously climbing poets in our art. But it's the system that makes poets act like jerks. We see some poems inexplicably lauded and other poems ignored. Being published or having ones' poems marketed effectively doesn't mean the poems are any better than anything out there. VIDA's recent counts (emphasizing the underrepresentation of women in publications) have underlined some of the major blind spots in American magazine and book publishing. If someone did a count of minority or queer poets to be found in those outlets, the results would be similarly depressing and alarming. The slush pile is a lousy place to be. Perhaps the one or two poems that somehow miraculously rise up out of that black hole do so for the same reason that balls fall into just the right order in lottery drawings: dumb luck. The lottery is actually a much more fair system than the one under which Poetry operates. There's a very good chance that you'll at least make your money back at some point on a scratch-off ticket.

So what can you do to overthrow this system that benefits the famous at the expense of you? Make some noise. Act out. Demand the things you want from Poetry. Rage against the fax machine. Poetry's ruling paradigm is extremely outdated and benefits only the status quo. You should not have to be a straight, white, male poet in his 60s or 70s to get anything back from American Poetry. If you've paid tuition, paid to enter contests, paid to have your manuscript read, paid to attend AWP, you ought to get something in return. Not the vague, vanishing kind of promises: actual results for your buck. Thanksgiving turkeys line up patiently and nicely at the chopping block, so what's your excuse?

There are no egalitarian systems in American Poetry, so there are probably no institutions or processes worth saving. If students organized themselves effectively, they could stage walkouts of writing workshops. Refuse to buy their professors' friends books. Want to know who's driving the car? You are, students. Form a poets union at your university and flex your muscles thusly. Eileen Myles had an interesting idea for a Poets Strike last year. But instead of striking against yourself, strike against the powers that keep poets down: publishers, universities, alleged poetic communities and poetic organizations. Ruth Lilly gave the Poetry Foundation hundreds of millions of dollars and still couldn't get into *Poetry* magazine. What chance do you have?



Nothing will change in the world until you demand it, *en masse*. Thanks to Twitter and Facebook, we have the newfound ability to bring complaints about our art to a wide audience without hardly trying. There will always be schemers and climbers in all jobs, arts and hobbies. Maybe for a while we ought to address the systematic failures that make poets act like accountants who are all applying for the same accountant job. Poets want the same things from the world as most people, but are pitted against one another to get it. The things that divide poets from one another are aesthetic, not consequential. Except the things that divide me from Billy Collins. If you have a book called *The Trouble with Poetry*, you're the trouble with Poetry. Instead of exuding a kindly aura of support for Poetry, he seems to begrudge it. Even he isn't happy with what he gets back from the art.

I remember sitting at an Academy of American Poets' Board of Chancellors event while Heather McHugh complained to a very large crowd about her students. Having students is not a right of spoiled, famous poets. Professors actually work for students. Without them they'd be pumping gas or punching the clock. Too often the job of professor comes in second to their job as poet. If you accept money to teach students, you ought to teach them. They're not your interns, they're your bosses.

I can't think of any moral reason to accept the terms of American Poetry for another second. Stockholm Syndrome goes away when you overtake your captors. Likewise, when you cast off the chains of your servitude in the arts, when the art starts loving you back, who knows how that might affect your approaches? These Poetry systems pretty much rely on poets' silence and complicity. I've made quite a little career for myself by ranting and mocking. Imagine if we were all always complaining! Changes would be made.

Whether you pitch a tent on an Iowa campus, organize a walkout or use your poems to demand the changes

you want, you have the ability to change the things you find unjust. American Poetry doesn't just want to get away with ripping you off monetarily and emotionally, it wants to feel cool doing it. They want to be loved for taking advantage of you.

Most poets are incredibly sensitive to criticism. So start criticizing. When American Poetry is occupied, who knows what changes will come about. In the cases of most poets, any shuffle of the deck will benefit them. Poetry is working under the old Reaganomics rules. Nothing will trickle down to you unless you shake the clouds. Time to make it rain upwards.

You can continue to sit with your hands folded very quietly and hope that everything you ever wanted from Poetry falls into your lap. Sometimes that happens to people. Not because they suck up and play by the rules, just out of dumb luck. Or you could get the money you spend on Poetry to work for you. It's just a question of getting a bunch of your friends to agree with you. That's how you change the world.

Jim Behrle's latest chapbook is It Serves Me Right to Suffer (Hotel Poetry).



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—Etel Adnan

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I Want to Make You Safe
Amy King

“Rarely have the nude and the cooked been so neatly joined” as in Amy King’s *I Want to Make You Safe*. If “us,” “herons,” and “dust” rhyme, then these poems rhyme. If that makes you feel safe, it shouldn’t. Amy King’s poems are exuberant, strange, and a bit grotesque. They’re spring-loaded and ready for trouble. Categories collapse.

—Rae Armantrout

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The Last Flower on Earth

Kimberly Lyons

You have to ask: What do I want from this poem?
You have to let the poem jerk your head around.
You have to tell the poem to take you away from here
But stay with the poem in this uncomfortable singular place
Where the flies and moths coexist.
Take the smallest white wax worm from the plastic cup
And pray for it as it is fed to a leopard gecko who snaps
With her perfect little jaw at the worm and devours it.
Notice two sturdy brown leather suitcases from the 1940s.
Notice beveled blue glass on a knotted black string and
That the wind abruptly shifts to cool.
In the final conclusion, at the end of the rope, in the most
Extreme circumstance of trying, trying to remember
The shape of something, expectations finally break down.
I try to give the poem flowers because I want the poem
To give me flowers. The poem sends a woman to open
The glass door. She is carrying a yellow, artificial daffodil
As though it is the representation of the last flower
On earth. She is thin and wears a sleeveless tank top
And her brown skin is shiny. I say: Karen, I won't be here
Tomorrow, please come and see me the next day.
She turns her head and looks at me and her eye
Is a huge brown pond through her bifocal eyeglasses.
I'm not coming to see you, she says and walks past.
I want the poem to let me have a new baby, I guess.
Why else would another, unseen woman and I
In a poem help a third woman to birth a baby
On cement stairs. We are arguing if the swelling in her stomach
Breaking through is a baby. I am ecstatic when I see its head,
The size of a wet puppy head or a light bulb.
I want nature to be seen in my poem as a slice,
A shard, an element obliquely
Encompassing logic.
Instead, the poem sends a map
Of the United States in *The New York Times*.
Each state is colored a bright coral.
The United States looks enraged,
Like a lobster taken out of a pan of boiling water.
The poem says:
You can't have any lobster, you stupid, hungry poet.
No lobster with chutney and Mersault like in Wallace Stevens'
Poem. The poem eradicates food.
Says go trudge with these people
Who are walking for many many miles over the dirt and sand
To find something to eat and drink at a UN station.
The poem steals my cell phone
And says listen very carefully to the sounds of these thundering trucks
And stop talking.

I ask the poem what can
 I learn and the poem
 Takes all the trucks away and the avenue
 Sounds like a vibrating river.
 The poem is making the world smell
 Wet and cool at four in the morning.
 I go and look for my lover in the poem
 But when I open the door
 Everything is completely dark and hot and silent.
 A man is yelling in Creole now. Is this my lover?
 He goes away. The voice, an instrument
 Speaking unintelligibly, pauses. The poem tells
 Me to stop looking and go away too.
 I want to have the moon in my poem.
 I try and see the moon out the window, through the branches.
 Last night the moon was a creamy antique disc
 And now is absent.
 Like food, it is obliterated. In a fit of nostalgia,
 I try to destroy people, food, the room, flowers
 And landscapes.
 Everything is blackness, a baby has been
 Born and the poem is utterly original,
 I tell myself. An abstraction
 Of meshed textures and
 Asymmetrical utterances the
 Shape of an air conditioner emission.
 What does that look like?
 A grayish dirty cloud of microparticles
 That spreads and bathes us in warm air
 As we stand on the other side of the air conditioner
 Where vents and coils are blowing air on our faces.
 Then the poem sends a white monster to lick the street clean
 And it eats up my original poem.
 However, the poems sends the moon, finally,
 As a tiny picture, previously unnoticed on a bookshelf.
 There it is: a feminized, worried-looking male
 Face imprinted on a bluish crescent in a blue sky, *La Luna*
 Next to a black boot, *La Bota*, in a yellow sky.
 La Luna hangs over *El Corazón*, a hunk of red meat
 And over *El Músico*, the poet in his yellow pants who carries
 His yellow guitar. *El Músico*
 Stands in a doorway, probably waiting for a poem, the big dummy.
 The poem says you go on standing there. Here's someone
 To keep you company: *El Soldado*, who stands with his big gun
 And wears his green pants. Each in their own square
 Looking blankly out of the frame.
 They will never know that over their head hangs
La Sandía, the watermelon, which kind of looks like *El Corazón*,
 Which is also red, meaty and imbedded with black seeds.

Well, that's poetry for you.

Kimberly Lyons is the author of Phototherapique (Katalanché Press/Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs) and Saline (Instance Press).

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The Best British Poetry 2011 presents the finest and most engaging poems found in British-based literary magazines and webzines over the past year. The material gathered represents the rich variety of current UK poetry, including lyric, formal and experimental poetry.



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Fat Man Thread

Ronaldo Wilson and Wayne Koestenbaum

RONALDO WILSON: It's my final full day here in Provincetown, working mostly on a foreword to Frances Richard's new book, *The Phonemes*, which is incredible. I've also started going "off the dome" on my walks down Commercial Street. I'm channeling the battle raps I watch on YouTube, where, for instance, Lady Luck goes head-to-head with Reece Steele, or Iron Solomon vs. Math Hoffa.

In my battle raps, I imagine going off on I don't know who, or what. Old, sexy, rich, white guys, the sky, a windowpane, a fat man and his fat son, workers, maybe another "real" battle rapper, but in the end, I just like having a record of my own voice. I've also been taking a ton of pictures at night, of art on the street, myself in bar bathroom mirrors—nothing fancy—or just window tchotchkes and the like, just fun to build up some kind of reservoir as I go along.

And dancing—I go to the local gym, "Mussel Beach," and instead of (or sometimes in addition to) lifting, running and yoga, I dance in the aerobics room on the first floor. More mirrors. I'm actively moving toward performance and documentation as my work gets some hook into the world, this work like an anchor from which I can stretch.

WAYNE KOESTENBAUM: I've been painting. The more I explore the strange career of shapes (lines, colors, squiggles, blurs), the more fearful I become of words—their fixity, their authority, their responsibilities.

Cy Twombly died: he wasn't my only hero, but he was an inspiration. His atopicity. Impossible to pin down what his work is about or why it is exciting—even when his work seems obstreperously to announce its topic, its classicism. Words that drift away from being merely words. Words that give up their duties. Squiggles that perform recidivism's arabesques.

And your battle raps! An inspiration to hear you read in Brooklyn. You played your improv raps as counterpoint (unscripted) to your scripted poem. You used the digital recorder as a musical instrument, percussion, to interrupt the language that the poems were offering. Thereby you introduced flux and counter-urge into your performance, and you made the act of writing seem explosive—an action, rather than a parasitic residue or a mere description of something that has already happened.

My right hand's index finger has become my divining rod, my center of consciousness. When I look at any shape that excites me, my right hand's index finger moves.

When I'm thinking of verbal phrases, my fingers type out the words, or write them, in space. When I was a kid I would lie in bed, writing with my index finger (in invisible ink) on my bedsheets. Recurrent dream: I write a poem or an essay with my finger, or with a pen that gives fragile, illusory ink. The ink begins to fade, even as I write the words.

RW: I love your description of your finger (right hand index into consciousness), lines not out of control, but in excitement, in consciousness, with intent, and then the finger moves in your room without mirrors, openly. As a kid I did a similar thing with my hand, too, drifting/drafting on sheets! I also used to write with piss on the beach in Guam. Once, when I was playing, I threw up on the rug, and while running in a half-circle, I tried to make a pattern. I still remember my furious mom cleaning it up with a sponge, slowly moving in the opposite direction from which I threw up.

WK: Writing with piss on a beach in Guam! Will you forgive me if I take that as clarion call, motto, mandate, epigraph, title? Did the words, piss-written, last only for the 30 seconds between inrush and outrush of the tide? Did the words disappear the minute your piss wrote them? Did you write complete sentences

or just fragments? We're in the territory of Jackson Pollock and his penis-paintbrush: no crime. The summer issue of *Artforum* announced that the Ab Ex impulse is not dead. In that issue, the painter Amy Sillman argues for the queerness of embodied artmaking. Our talk of fingers (on sheets, in air) channels Ab Ex action—though I would hate to house "action" (or fingers) in a chapel (historically out-of-date and of questionable usefulness) called "Ab Ex."

I'm reminded of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus* about Paul Cézanne and haptic vision: to see is to finger. Our eyes finger the universe, or at least the field of daisies.

The color green. Henri Matisse's painting "The Green Line" is ostensibly a portrait of his wife, but a green line unnaturally bi-

sects her face in the portrait, and so the painting is called “The Green Line.” The green line upstages the wife, the face. What is a green line? And where can I find one for myself? Are green lines for sale anywhere? Do I have to manufacture the green line out of my own body?

Mussel Beach: I remember reading *The Duino Elegies* a few blocks away from a beach, and then going to the beach and walking obsessively on the line where the tide regularly met the sand (there must be a proper nautical or geological word for that line), as if to seek, in that beachy fringe, an “objective correlative” for Rilke’s enjambment.

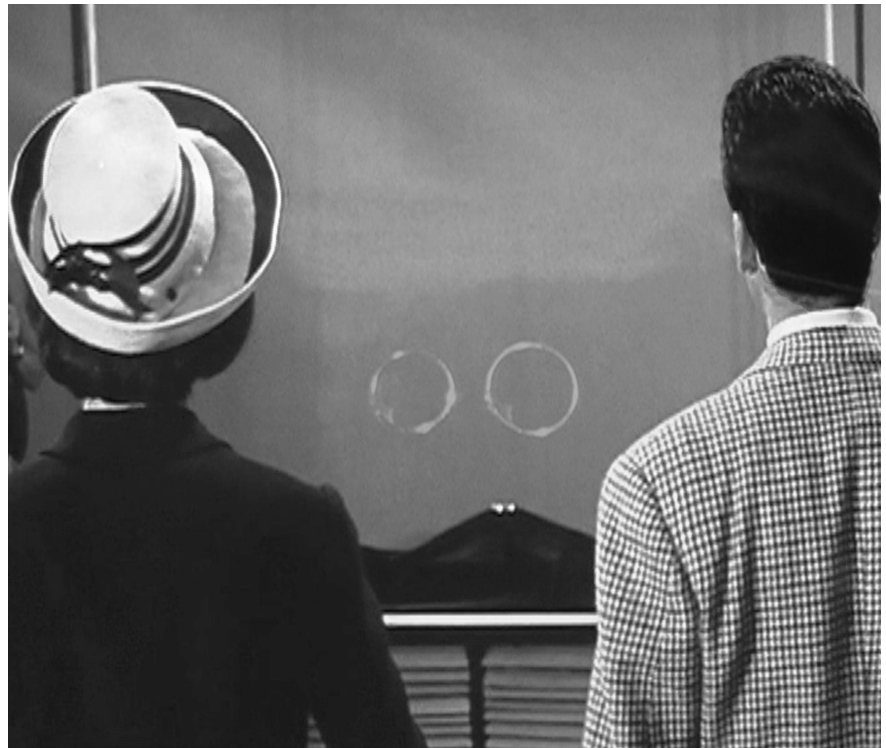
RW: I love that you stage my piss writing as clarion call. Piss Motto. Mandate. Piss ID! I think I was trying to write my name. Perhaps I was so young that it was all I really knew how to spell.

I don’t recall seeing my name in the sand, or if I had enough urine in me to write my name, but I wanted to, so I suppose it was all signature, failed or otherwise. I love Jackson Pollock, too, especially that trunk-like body of his and his compactness. Painter-strength.

Some painters are so fit, like dancers, all that balance and control. Cut arms, strong backs. Ellen Gallagher talks a lot about labor in painting, the pressing down of paint, the layering, the bending fingers I see in her studio shoot, maybe it’s in *Blubber*? Ab Ex. Just got it. Sounds like a wonderful workout machine, the Ab Ex, rendering the perfect body, something akin to the Invisibility Machine, how one sees oneself as between races, genders, forms, themes, theses, tracks, lines, broken, split, saturated in sands. “Beach fringe,” as you say.

I forgot to tell you that I had a dream that roused me out of sleep, floating male genitalia in a mass, hovering, not bloodied, maybe porn screen-ready, throbbing and pulsing. They and the dreamer had nowhere to fuck!

You see the green line, the way it might be produced, revealed, made, maybe for sale. I see white, or “flesh”—the other



white, white skin, color dominance enacted in the psyche, something I both fail to escape and long to mediate. The green line, for me, is the skin I like to draw in: the action, something akin to the veins in the arms of the paintings of young male nudes by the hyperrealist painter Ellen Altfest. Or the dripping, hot/toxic lines of contemporary Ab Ex painter Rob Nadeau.

On the old, sexy, rich, white men and a fat man and his fat son: characters in my own rap, mumbling, one veered around the corner in a convertible, Saab, copper. Nice frames, and then the fat man and his son. I think they were eating ice cream, wife somewhere out of the scene. In any case, I was attracted to their histories, what I wanted, something that could mark my desire to slip right in, hover around them, usurp, if only to feel that power.

WK: Just finished my French lesson. I conjugated *osciller* (to swing), *renverser* (to turn upside down), *disparaître* (to disappear). All three verbs apply to me right now. I also wrote a short composition in French about painting nude self-portraits. I described myself in this composition as trying (with a layer of fluorescent pink acrylic and then a layer of zinc white over it) to render the blush of shame or health on the face of a man in transit between two lives and two worlds. I oscillate, I turn upside down, I disappear. Next week’s verbs are *élever* (to raise), *pâlir* (to grow pale), *étreindre* (to hug).

I’m starting to write an essay about Anne Sexton. It’s called “Diapering the Death Baby.”

RW: I visited Teasers, my favorite porn theater sex club here on Long Island. I’m inspired to discuss this after reading the article about your new book, *Humiliation*, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. What can I do but offer a few scenes from my day: Stomach Pig in booth, gray hair, balding, drops to his knees outside of booth. No. Big man in black and with beard spits in booths as a matter of some gross recourse, an impulse I can’t explain. He moves my arm away at my touch. He’s damp. He makes me sick. Some buzzhead, pulsating dick, flaccid. It still cums, sick taste. All hip dance, no hard-on. Heating and Plumbing Guy, also fat, has a big ballsack, breath stinks. Ape

ass when clothed. Chest hairy, wide, dry, a cross? My leg hurts, back pain shooting down my thigh and knee. I self-massage. Raised back muscle, bulging corpuscle? Wife says “you’re the best” to husband in panties, black, maybe silk. Fucks her. He calls her “grandma.” She calls him “grandpa.” “She’s older,” he tells us.

You describe in the *Humiliation* article how Eve’s making shame sexy was inspiring for you. Well, you brought me Gary Fisher when I needed him most, and Gertrude Stein, too. And you asked me once about my poems, in class or in your office: “Where are your verbs?”

I gave you fragments. You gave me Myung Mi Kim’s *Under Flag*. Another time, when I said nothing in class, maybe it was during Gary Fisher, you said, “I noticed.” Each time, you asked not for my voice but the feeling that could drive the voice, the visitor to the writing self, the crucial act; not the actor, not the act in writing, but the action, the activity.

I’m revising an essay today. You are bringing me to read again what matters. My essay is called “Poetics in Delusion or after Bitterness,” and I am attacking poetry that does not.

WK: Your precision about Teasers reminds me of Renaud Camus in *Tricks*, one of my touchstone texts, recording (like an angel) exactly what erotically happens, without moralizing, without

somewhere else was the very sign of my salvation.” That means: all my life, the only exit ramp to survival and joy has been migration to *another scene, another desire*. And here is where Teasers comes in: Teasers is the *somewhere else*. Ever since I was eighteen, poetry has been, for me, the *somewhere else*. And now, I guess, painting is the *somewhere else*.

Gary Fisher: add him to Renaud Camus, Samuel Delany, Ronaldo Wilson, astute (and unsentimental) chroniclers of the *somewhere else*.

Teasers: I revere your interest in recounting and encountering that which makes you sick, that which stinks—for acknowledging the fellow partisans of an identity-shorn phantasmagoria of the balding, the bowed-down, the wide, the gross, the non-hard. Colette, in *The Pure and the Impure*, went a few steps toward this style of reportage, but she didn’t succumb to the undertow. You let yourself succumb; you surrender to the *somewhere else*. The not-at-home. Once I called it “hotel”; now I’ll call it “Teasers.”

RW: “The *somewhere else* was the very sign of my salvation.” That’s something I needed to hear in the face of questions that seem to float into and around me: “Where’s your origin?” “What books would you put together to explain this, to show this?” “How would you unite these texts, clarify your lens?” All I want to do is to escape into the world that matters to

prosody of the quickie. I discovered online that Renaud Camus, alive and well in France, has a Flickr stream of nude (and not-nude) photos he’s assembled; looking at Renaud Camus’s Flickr stream of naked guys was a strange trespass. What if we could find Proust’s Flickr stream?

I’m reminded of the work of the young contemporary photographer Paul Sepuya, who photographs naked guys who turn him on, or who are his friends or lovers. I’m not sure of their identities. I only know that he renders their figures and faces without sentimentality but with a drenching lyricism and quietness. Sepuya’s guys are silent, solitary, beheld, motionless, available, not available. Nothing more philosophical than the space of desiring someone else and knowing that the desire can’t be pushed to fulfillment. I tried to write about that space of longing in the work of Warhol—the experience of time standing still or slowing down when we exist in the presence of a body we desire.

RW: I am excited by the measures of brown that are happening between each of the culled photographs in this Flickr stream and also in the work of young Sepuya. Lyric quiet: the hard bend of the wrist on the slight hip, the effortlessness of that gesture. Is that *the FIRE* in the background? Is the captured model (with afro) a writer I might know? Are those the pushpins I use? Is that my office?

Just before a reading, a poet asked me if I was the brother of the critic Ivy Wilson. He has great hair like homeboy’s in the Sepuya photograph. Ivy Wilson and I met once. He’s stunning and tall with a thin, chiseled face. The asking poet thought he might be mixed like me (Asian and black), but as I told her, we are not brothers. She also asked if it was racist to ask the question, and I thought, *maybe, but really, who cares!* I didn’t really see the resemblance, but I did think it was a great compliment, because I always imagine myself as his opposite, rounded, soft, and not a cutting figure like I. W., at least in that way.

As I look now, I realize the race of the thin, full-fro guy in the photo is indiscern-

All my life, the only exit ramp to survival and joy has been migration to another scene, another desire.

shame—merely a necessary anthropological (self-ethnographic) curiosity about and reverence for sex’s factuality.

Yesterday I had a tooth pulled, with laughing gas. Laughing gas makes me idealize the dentist, eroticize him. I could imagine that his pulling was like a D. H. Lawrence chthonic thrust into my interior. I pumped a lot of yearning and fantasy into that scene of tooth extraction, as a way of surviving it. And I had a one-line revelation, mid-extraction: “The

me. You take the realm of reading, looking at art, and make it span from within your *somewhere else*. You describe that moment of giving to the *somewhere else* by way of the poetry: gulf, gift.

I did not know of *Tricks*, but I do now. I think I’ll begin reading it this summer so I can keep learning from those you place me in line with.

WK: Camus’s *Tricks*: so important to me as a statement of cruising’s prosody, the

ible. Funny how hair can begin to locate, like the lightness of his skin, the chest hair, who knows? And in some ways looking at the Camus shots, here, make me think about the relationship between time/the body/desire, and what’s left standing still for those not caught up in the activities enough to flex/pose/lean into or coyly away.

WK: “Measures of brown.” Resemblances, imagined or real: you, Ivy Wilson. I’m usually aroused by my doubles, or men I imagine are my doubles. That’s an old habit, an old affliction. A propensity to seek my doubles and to find them arousing isn’t (I hope) merely narcissism; I guess what I’m in love with is the *difference* between my double and me, the fracture or fissure of unlikeness that opens up between our sameness. Usually I consider the arousing double (my Ivy Wilson) to be a better version of me, and therefore I aspire to become not me but my double, to “trade up” for the better model.

Your poem “The Black Object’s Memory” ends: “You want to unload on his beautiful black beard what you give to the urinal’s mouth, a radiant stream splattering on his dim and tired lips.” Ronaldo, I stand behind these lines; I advocate them. To feel alive, I need to be shocked by what I read and see.

RW: Fashion Families. Race Families. Sex Families. Cruising Families. I suppose one could replace “Families” with “Cousins” or “Twins” or “Brothers,” those who overlap. Narcissism as connection, connector. I think you’re on to exactly this when you write about difference as the through line, or find difference as the attracting, perhaps crossing, vector between recognition and realization of the body double. I’m thinking of this in what you advocate, and swear by, not just in my work, but in how you say: “To feel alive, I need to be shocked by what I read and see.”

RW: [Shock Site]

So as to stay calm in the face of danger, the fence that says, DANGER DO NOT TOUCH, you pull the body close to the fence, so that it must connect. I just watched more of your TEASER humiliation videos on YouTube such great advice! To urge the body, twinned split, to claim the despicable, urge embrace, in fact, of the “multiple instances” of one’s acts of unkindness, not to reject but to meditate on these facts, shame, not regret, but repositioning, reiterative, seer, reflect on the shameful act. You confess that you wake up out of sleep, from doing an unkind act, as if you were surrounded by flames of hell, searing you urge the writer to seek lacerations of shame. Write 15 pages, double-spaced to the author you’ve humiliated. Such penance can’t be refused. Such abjection must be pursued you seem to say in the shared act of “fellow feeling,” like in “Dear Wayne, I’ve Been Humiliated: Shy Co-Worker, Dirty Movies,” you ask, why didn’t you follow your co-worker into the porno-store? See the titles of his interest, widen the entry for the gulf in which we meet up:

“I am unapologetically pro-porn as is my book, and I can’t participate in the stigmatizing of perverts.”

TWIN/COUSIN/BROTHER/LINE_____

_____You extend shock’s line, render, Dear Wayne, cross-wiring in the realm of the electroconvulsive, rendering generative statement, urge, lesson, response, perfect advice for us.

Ronaldo V. Wilson is the author of Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man (University of Pittsburgh, 2008), winner of the 2007 Cave Canem Prize, and Poems of the Black Object (Futurepoem Books, 2009), winner of the Thom Gunn Award and the 2010 Asian American Literary Award in Poetry.



Wayne Koestenbaum’s newest book, Humiliation, came out from Picador in Summer 2011. In 2012, he will publish a critical study, The Anatomy of Harpo Marx (University of California Press), and a book of poems, Blue Stranger with Mosaic Background (Turtle Point Press).

From *The Autobiography of Plastic*

Allison Cobb

I am standing inside a dimly lit hangar at the Tillamook Air Museum near the Oregon coast. The trail that led me here started in January. I read a newspaper article that mentioned a piece of plastic found in the belly of an albatross chick on Kure Atoll in the Pacific. Traced to a World War II plane, it was the oldest known piece of plastic from the ocean.

Susan Middleton took the photo of the baby albatross. She first arrived on Kure in Fall 2003, seasick and exhausted from a nine-hour boat ride through rough swells. At 1,200 miles from Honolulu, Kure is the oldest and most remote atoll in the world's most remote island chain, the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. No one lives on these islands and few ever visit them, specks of sand, coral and sheer basalt cliffs in the vast blue.

Middleton had come with colleague David Liittschwager to document the island's plants and animals. They intended to stay on Kure for three days. They stayed three weeks. "I had never been to a place where wildlife is not just a novelty," she says (*useless but amusing object*). "There, it is the predominant form of existence."

Most dominant of all: the Laysan albatross, a large white bird with a black back and dark wings that span six feet. The albatross spends its life in flight. It ranges over thousands of miles of ocean, hunting and even sleeping while it flies. It lands only to breed. In the fall, thousands descend on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, a living snow capped by its own shadow.





Photography by Peter Mauney '93, MFA '00.

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The photographers arrived for a second, eight-week visit in May, after the albatross babies hatched. Fluffy grey chicks crowded the island in nests on the ground, waiting for their parents to return with food from the ocean. They approached humans without fear. "They behaved like toddlers," writes Middleton, "putting everything in their mouths, pulling on tent lines...biting shoes."

The photographers set up their studio in an old Coast Guard shed. They made particular friends with an albatross chick nesting just outside the door. Shed Bird. It grew bigger and stronger day by day and began to spread its dark wings, testing the wind, preparing for a flight that would last years before it touched ground again.

One morning they found Shed Bird collapsed in the sun. They moved it into the shade and cooled it with water, but the next day the bird had died (*a regular weak verb*). The manager of the Kure Wildlife Sanctuary decided to cut Shed Bird open. Middleton watched her make the incision. It revealed a stomach stretched tight to bursting with plastic—lighters, bottle caps, an aerosol pump, a child's toy top, a tiny toy wheel.

This is a common phenomenon. One study says 40% of albatross chicks die from swallowing plastic. Albatross hunt for squid and fish eggs caught in the Pacific's swirling gyres. The same circling currents collect trash blown or washed from every nation lining the Pacific: China, Japan, Canada, the US, Mexico. Albatross parents scoop up debris and regurgitate it for their babies, which eventually starve.

Most of the trash floating in the ocean is plastic. That's because plastic lasts. No one knows how long. Hundreds of years, perhaps thousands. Snatched by wind from garbage dumps, washed from streets by the rain, it returns at last to the source of all things, the ocean (*of unknown origin*), where it swirls around and ends up in albatross guts.

The albatross, misnamed by English sailors using the Portuguese word for "pelican." The bird whose murder cursed Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ancient mariner. He suffered the "Night-mare Life-in-Death." *And a thousand thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I.*

Middleton wanted to know exactly what killed Shed Bird. She put on gloves and began to pick out every piece of debris. The

Opposite: At Kamilo Point, Hawaii, converging currents bring a constant tide of plastic from the Pacific onto the beach.
Photo: Jennifer Coleman.

shards got so small she needed tweezers. She blazed with anger about the death of this bird. It became a forensic investigation, a way to locate blame. Three hours, flies swarming, the stench of rotting. She spread all the pieces out, more than 500. Then she took a photograph.

National Geographic published the photo in 2005. The debris, spread on a stark field of white, formed a slightly elongated circle, like an upside-down egg. A sharp-eyed veteran reading the magazine noticed a white shard of plastic in the lower right stamped “VP-101,” the designation of a World War II Navy squadron.

I wanted to know more about this bit of plastic, this persistent little piece of death-in-life.

I contacted Kenneth Weiss, the *Los Angeles Times* reporter who wrote the article that mentioned the piece of plastic, and asked for his source. He directed me to the oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer, who discusses the bit of plastic in his book *Flotsametrics*. Ebbesmeyer sent me to the naval historian Louis B. Dorny. Dorny first heard about the plastic piece when a researcher for *National Geographic* posted a query on a veterans’ listserv hoping to learn its history (*fact: not true but to make—an art, our trace*).

Dorny repeats to me the refrain he gave the magazine: The shard might have been part of a tag used to identify equipment belonging to the VP-101 squadron. The “first, most obvious place” such a piece of equipment might have been lost? A bombing raid against the Japanese early in the war that ended in disaster.

After Pearl Harbor, in a matter of days, the Japanese forced the US out of the Philippines and back 1,500 miles across the ocean. Half their planes destroyed, the remaining members of the Navy’s Patrol Wing 10 scattered into hiding. A few regrouped in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia (*name: the trace of a wound scabbed over, a scar*).

The survivors formed a single squadron, the VP-101. They flew big, lumbering airplanes designated “PBY” by the Navy and nicknamed “Dumbos” after the then-recent Disney movie. The planes were meant for patrol, not combat. But the Allied commanders at Ambon had no other airplanes left. On December 26, 1941, they ordered the squadron to bomb a Japanese base on Jolo Island in the Philippines. Of the six planes that went, two came back.

Trace:
track made by passage of a person or thing, mid-13th century to make a plan or diagram, late 14th century
straps or chains by which an animal pulls a vehicle

**I wanted to know more
about this bit of plastic, this
persistent little piece of
death-in-life.**

§

I am lucky. The Tillamook Air Museum, just seventy miles from my home in Portland, has one of the few PBYs on public display in the nation.

I have no interest in aircraft trivia. I never built a model. The language seems fantastic, impenetrable: nacelles, cowlings, chine rail, ferrules. I have no feel for the meaning of engines and horsepower (*the straps or chains by which an animal pulls a vehicle*).

But I’ve read a lot about what it was like for the men—average age twenty-four—to fly in this plane. I’ve read about the position of the gunners, the radioman, the mechanic, the bombardier. How they cooked coffee and canned soup on a hot plate and slept in canvas bunks while the engines droned on through the surrounding black of night and water.

I thought that if I saw the plane in person, if I touched it, rapped on it, smelled it, I could get a sense of what it was like to be in that plane in wartime (*1387, the word’s first recorded use: to hyde hem self in werre tyme*).

In the gloom of the hangar’s far-left corner, I find the PBY, shining steel, 63 feet long with a 100-foot wingspan. If it parked on my street it would dwarf the houses on both sides. Wings rise up above its body from a gracefully fluted center column. Engines swell out of the wings; the body curves to a point like the hull of a boat.

It is the hull of a boat. That this plane could both fly and float on the water, that all the terminology around it is naval (*aft, starboard, bow*) seems incredible, a flying boat, a fantastical hybrid now rare (*of uncertain origin, see also “to destroy,” and “to dissolve, to fall into ruins”*).

I cup my hands around my eyes and peer through the windows. I walk around the body, tracing the gray metal with my fingers. I write down in a notebook every word from the informational plaque. I go back and look again through the windows. The pilot’s tiny metal seat, the oblong steering wheel, the crowded array of cockpit controls and dials. Through the curved Plexiglas dome I see where the gunner sat, gripping the machine gun with both hands.

I know the Plexiglas is a plastic advance over the planes that bombed Jolo. Those planes had only a metal sliding hatch. The gunner stuck his head and his gun outside the airplane into the 120-mile-per-hour wind to fire on the enemy (*one who cherishes hatred*).

I step back. I want sensation, the terror of firing wildly into the wind. Or I want a hush, a sense that I have entered sacred space (*from the base "to enclose, protect"*).

What I feel is this: nothing. No albatross hangs from my neck. Those who died aren't here, no "Night-mare Life-in-Death." The piece of plastic stamped VP-101 may have a meaning (*related to an old Germanic word for love*), but I haven't found it in this place.

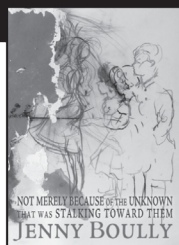
This is the account of my inquiry, from the Greek word for "history," perhaps from the Proto-Indo-European base word "to know," literally, "to see." This is my failed narrative. I thought, writing this, I would conclude that the meaning exists in the trace, life-to-life, that plastic outlasts: pilot, bird, photographer, veteran, historian, journalist, oceanographer, writer. But such a list does not come close. Names remain the wound scabbed over.

Consider this. Plastic is exactly what's left: everything. It comes from the Greek word *plassein*, and it has two meanings: that which can be formed, and also the power to form. Touch anything. It's the scar that marks the pain of the molder, the spark of muscle and thought that pulled dead life from the earth and shaping it, gained shape. That makes all things a mirror (*literally, "look"*): engines, propellers, gears and wheels, Plexiglas, rubber, cotton cloth, welded and riveted steel.

Allison Cobb is the author of Born2 (Chax Press, 2004), about her hometown of Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Green-Wood (Factory School, 2010) about a famous 19th-century cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. Her work combines history, personal narrative and poetry to address issues of landscape, politics and ecology. She was a 2009 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow and received a 2011 Individual Artist Fellowship Award from the Oregon Arts Commission. She works for the Environmental Defense Fund.

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Jenny Boully
*not merely because of
the unknown that was
stalking toward them*



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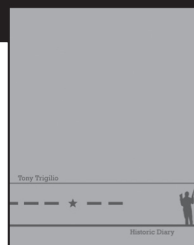
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FRIDAY 12/2, 10PM

ABRAHAM GOMEZ-DELGADO & ACTION THEORY

Abraham Gomez-Delgado is a composer, multi-instrumentalist and performance artist born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. He leads the experimental Latin music group Zemog el Gallo Bueno, co-leads the "avant-Latin" jazz big band Positive Catastrophe and has a Performance Art group under the name Eje. Currently, he teaches sound art and production at Bloomfield College in New Jersey, and is composing a plena suite entitled *Debrujo, Debrooho, Debreujo*. **Action Theory** is a collective of musicians and dancers Taylor Ho-Bynum, Rachel Bernsen, Abraham Gomez-Delgado and Melanie Maar, who are investigating principles of roles, crafts, pleasure, story, risk and meaning in performance.

MONDAY 12/5

JUDAH RUBIN & MARION BELL

Judah Rubin's chapbooks are *The Standard Bearer* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion/ On the Jews and Their Lies*. He is the editor of the *Well Greased* magazine series, poetic habitations of the broadsided biscuit. He has work published or forthcoming in *NAP*, *To the Tune of IGNU in the Key of C*, *The Prague Writers' Festival Café Central* and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. **Marion Bell** is a poet in Philadelphia whose chapbook, *The Abjector*, is forthcoming from con/crescent press. Her poems have appeared on the Elective Affinities website and her writing can be found at nonmoi.tumblr.com.

WEDNESDAY 12/7

TOM CAREY & JAIME MANRIQUE

Tom Carey is the author of *Desire* (Painted Leaf Press, 1996), a Lambda Literary Award Finalist. His poems have appeared in various anthologies, magazines and journals. He is the author of three novels, two as-yet-unpublished novels and many songs. Ordained a priest in 2003, he currently lives at St. Francis Friary in Los Angeles and is the Vicar of the Church of the Epiphany. **Jaime Manrique** is a Colombian author who has written in English and Spanish. Among his publications in English are the volumes of poems *My Night with Federico García Lorca* and *Tarzan, My Body, Christopher Columbus*; the novels *Colombian Gold*, *Latin Moon in Manhattan*, *Twilight at the Equator*, and *Our Lives Are the Rivers*; and the memoir *Eminent Maricones: Arenas, Lorca, Puig and Me*.

FRIDAY 12/9, 10PM

SHONNI ENELOW & STEVE REINKE

Shonni Enelow's play *Carla and Lewis*, developed with The Ecocide Project, premiered at the Incubator Arts Project in New York in March 2011. Her solo performance piece, *My Dinner with Bernard Frechtman*, premiered at

The Invisible Dog Art Center in April 2010, and was the keynote performance at the American Literary Translators Association conference. She is currently completing a companion piece, *Otto Fenichel Presents*. Recent writing has appeared in *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*. **Steve Reinke** is a writer and artist best known for his monologue-based videos. He has co-edited several anthologies, most recently *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema* (YYZ Books) and the forthcoming *Blast Counterblast* (Mercer Union). He has published two books, *Everybody Loves Nothing* (Coach House) and *The Shimmering Beast* (Coach House/Gallery 400/whitewalls).

MONDAY 12/12

DEBRAH MORKUN & GREG PURCELL

Debrah Morkun believes in near-death experiences and prays to the old gods. She is the author of *Projection Machine* and *The Ida Pingala*, as well as several chapbooks. She lives in Philadelphia, where she curates The Jubilant Thicket Literary Series and co-curates (with Kim Gek Lin Short) The General Idea Series. **Greg Purcell's** poetry has appeared in *Fence*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Agriculture Reader*, *Open City* and *New American Writing*, and has been anthologized in *A Best of Fence: The First Nine Years*. With Joel Craig, he founded The Danny's Reading Series in Chicago. In New York, he founded St. Mark's Bookshop Reading Series. He currently lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, where he records *The No Slander Podcast* with his partner, Ish Klein.

WEDNESDAY 12/14

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN:

READING FROM CORRESPONDENCE COURSE AND SCREENING OF AMERICANA I CHING APPLE PIE

The Museum of Modern Art featured **Carolee Schneemann's** installation *Up To and Including Her Limits* in the exhibit "On Line: Drawing through the 20th Century." Seattle's Henry Art Gallery recently opened a career-spanning exhibit including film, video and kinetic sculptures. In 1997, there was a major survey of her work at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. Schneemann's letters are the subject of *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle*, edited by Kristine Stiles. Other publications include *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects and More than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Work and Selected Writing*.

MONDAY 12/19

BEN DOLLER & SANDRA DOLLER

Ben Doller is the author of three books: *Radio*, *Radio*, winner of the 2000 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets, *FAQ*

(Ahsahta Press, 2009), and *Dead Ahead* (Fence Books, 2010). He serves as co-editor of the Kuhl House Contemporary Poets series from the University of Iowa Press, and is vice editor and designer of *1913: a journal of forms* and 1913 Press. **Sandra Doller's** new book is *Man Years* from Subito Press. Her other books are *Oriflamme* and *Chora* (both from Ahsahta Press), and she is at work on a new prose project. Doller is the founder and editor of *1913: a journal of forms* and 1913 Press, and is an assistant professor at California State University.

SUNDAY 1/1

38TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON BENEFIT READING

With Alex Dimitrov, Amy King, Ana Božičević, Anne Tardos, Anselm Berrigan, Ari Baniyas, Arthur's Landing, Barry Denny, Basil King, Betsy Fagin, Bill Kushner, Billy Lamont, Bob Hershon, Bob Rosenthal, Brenda Coultas, Brendan Lorber, Brett Price, Bruce Andrews & Sally Silvers, Bryn Kelly, Charles Bernstein, Church of Betty, Daniel Kent, David Grubbs, David Henderson, David Kirschenbaum, Denize Lauture, Don Yorty, Donna Brook, Ed Friedman, Eddie Berrigan, Edwin Torres, Eileen Myles, Elinor Nauen, Elizabeth Devlin, Elliott Sharp, Eric Bogosian, Filip Marinovich, Genya Turovskaya, Greg Fuchs, James Marshall, Janet Hamill, Jennifer Monson, Jim Behrle, John Giorno, John S. Hall, Josef Kaplan, Judah Rubin, Judith Malina, Katie Degentesh, Ken Walker, Kenny Goldsmith, Kimberly Lyons, Lenny Kaye, Lonely Christopher, Mariana Ruiz Firmat, Mark Nowak, Martha King, Matthew Abuelo, Miguel Gutierrez, Nada Gordon, Nathaniel Siegel, Nick Hallett, Nicole Peyrafitte, Pamela Sneed, Poez, Paul Legault, Pierre Joris, Reuben Butchart, Rick Moody, Rickey Laurentiis, Robert Ashley, Sinan Antoon, Stephanie Gray, Steve Dalachinsky, Steve Earle, Steven Taylor, Susie Timmons, Suzanne Vega, Taylor Mead, Ted Dodson, Ted Greenwald, Thurston Moore, Todd Colby, Tom Carey, Tom Savage, Tracey McTague, Tyler Burba, Wayne Koestenbaum, Will Edmiston, Will Yackulic, Yoshiko Chuma, Yuko Otomo and others TBA.

MONDAY 1/2

OPEN READING (SIGN-UP AT 7:45PM)

WEDNESDAY 1/4

NEW HUNGERS FOR OLD: ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ITALIAN-AMERICAN POETRY

Join us as we celebrate the publication of the anthology *New Hungers For Old: One Hundred Years of Italian-American Poetry* (Star Cloud Press). Editor Dennis Barone will guest host. With Elaine Equi, Mary Giaimo, George Guida, Peter Covino, Clare Rossini, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, Ray DiPalma, Daniela Gioseffi,

Matthew Longabucco, J. T. Barbarese, Nick Piombino, David Cappella, Paola Corso, Jerome Mazzaro and Maria Terrone.

FRIDAY 1/6, 10PM

CORINA COPP & MIGUEL GUTIERREZ

Corina Copp's recent poetry and criticism can be found in *The Boston Review*, *CLOCK*, *BOMB*, *Cannot Exist* and other journals. She is the author of chapbooks forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse, Minutes Books and Trafficker Press. Recent plays include *The Whole Tragedy of the Inability to Love* and *Tell No One*. Copp is a curator with the Segue Foundation and a former editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* (2009-2011). **Miguel Gutierrez**, a dance and music artist, has been called "one of our most provocative and necessary artistic voices" by Eva Yaa Asantewaa of *Dance Magazine*. He makes solo and group pieces with a variety of artists under the moniker Miguel Gutierrez and the Powerful People. He is the winner of three New York Dance and Performance ("Bessie") awards. *When You Rise Up*, a book of his performance texts, is available from 53RD State Press.

MONDAY 1/9

MARK LEIDNER & SAMPSON STARKWEATHER

Mark Leidner is the author of *The Angel in the Dream of Our Hangover* (Sator Press, 2011), a book of aphorisms, and *Beauty Was the Case that They Gave Me* (Factory Hollow, 2011), a book of poetry. He grew up in Georgia and now lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. **Sampson Starkweather** is the author of *Self Help Poems*, *The Heart Is Green from So Much Waiting*, *City of Moths* and *The Photograph*. Currently he is the Publications Coordinator at the Center for the Humanities at the CUNY Graduate Center. He lives in Brooklyn and is a founding editor of Birds, LLC, an independent poetry press.

WEDNESDAY 1/11

LYNN CRAWFORD & ALBERT MOBILIO

Lynn Crawford is a Detroit-based fiction writer and art critic. She will read from her new novel, *Simply Separate People*, *Two* (The Brooklyn Rail/Black Square Editions). Previous books include: *Solow*, *Blow*, *Simply Separate People* and *Fortification Resort*. She is a 2010 Kresge Literary Arts Fellow and a founding board member of MOCAD (Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit). Crawford edited *The Poetry Project Newsletter* from 1991-1992. **Albert Mobilio** is the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award for reviewing. His work has appeared in *Harper's*, *Black Clock*, *BOMB*, *Cabinet*, *Open City*, and *Tin House*. Books of poetry include *Bendable Siege*,

The Geographics, *Me with Animal Towering* and *Touch Wood*. He is an assistant professor of Literary Studies at the New School's Eugene Lang College and an editor of *Bookforum*.

WEDNESDAY 1/18

EDMUND BERRIGAN & TOM SAVAGE

Edmund Berrigan is the author of *Disarming Matter*, *Glad Stone Children* and *Can It!*. He is editor of the *Selected Poems of Steve Carey*, and is co-editor with Anselm Berrigan and Alice Notley of *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan* and *The Selected Poems of Ted Berrigan*. He is an editor of *VLAKE Magazine* and serves on the editorial board of *Lungfull!* **Tom Savage** is the author of ten books of poetry, including *Afghanistan: From Herat to Balkh and Back Again*, *Brainlifts*, *Political Conditions/Physical States* and many others. His work has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *Hanging Loose Magazine*, *Vanitas* and many other publications and online venues.

FRIDAY 1/20, 10PM

JOSEPH BRADSHAW & REDISCOVERING GERMAN FUTURISM, 1920-1929

Joseph Bradshaw's investigation into the non-life of one of America's greatest modernists, *In the Common Dream of George Oppen*, was recently published by Shearsman Books. His previous publications include chapbooks from Cannibal Books and Weather Press. Bradshaw currently lives in Brooklyn, teaches literature at the School of Visual Arts, and works in the archives at BAM, where he contributes to the *BAM 150* blog. **Rediscovering German Futurism, 1920-1929** is a lecture/performance/screening by Kurt Ralske and Miriam Atkin that explores the cinema of 1920s Berlin. The fantastic tale of an innovative cinematographer, Eugen Schüfftan, creator of the special effects for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, forms the backstory to strange experimental films screened here. These films raise questions of skepticism and belief, fiction and metafiction, timeliness and timelessness.

MONDAY 1/23

DEBORAH POE & ULJANA WOLF

Deborah Poe is author of the poetry collections *Elements* (Stockport Flats Press, 2011), *Our Parenthetical Ontology* (CustomWords, 2008) and several chapbooks, most recently a four-part edition entitled *the last will be stone, too* (Dusie Kollektiv). Poe's work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Peep/Show*, *Bone Bouquet*, *No Contest*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Mantis* and *Horse Less Review*. The poet, translator and editor **Uljana Wolf** was born in Berlin. Her poems have appeared worldwide in journals and anthologies

such as *Lyrik von Jetzt* (Dumont, 2003), *New European Poetry* (Graywolf, 2008), *Dichten No. 10: 16 New German Poets* (Burning Deck, 2008), *jubilat*, *Chicago Review* and *Harper's Magazine*. Wolf has published two books of poetry, *kochanie ich habe brot gekauft* (kookbooks, 2005) and *falsche freunde* (kookbooks, 2009), and the essay "BOX OFFICE" (Lyrikkabinett München, 2009).

WEDNESDAY 1/25

BASIL KING & A. B. SPELLMAN

Basil King is a painter/poet who was born in England before World War II and who has lived in Brooklyn since 1968. He attended Black Mountain College as a teenager and completed an apprenticeship as an abstract expressionist painter in San Francisco and New York. He began to write in the 1980s and now practices both arts daily. His books include *Warp Spasm*, *Identity, mirage: a poem in 22 sections, 77 Beasts* and, most recently, *Learning to Draw/A History*. **A. B. Spellman** is an author, poet, critic and lecturer. He has published numerous books and articles, including *Art Tatum: A Critical Biography*, *The Beautiful Days* and *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, now available as *Four Jazz Lives*. His poetry collection, *Things I Must Have Known*, was recently published by Coffee House Press. In recognition of Spellman's commitment and service to jazz, the National Endowment for the Arts in 2005 named one of its prestigious Jazz Masters awards the A. B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Award for Jazz Advocacy.

MONDAY 1/30

TALK SERIES: MUSIC AND THEATER? JARROD FOWLER OR KIERAN DALY?

A paraevent may stress antipractical experiments from transdisciplinary nonartists **Jarrold Fowler** and **Kieran Daly**. Without reckoning, Fowler and Daly's experiments might unilaterally and idempotently sample suspended variables, un/including: Category Theory, Chronobiology, Conceptualism, Dialetheism, Ideonomy, Noise, Non-Philosophy, Permaculture, Pessimism, Praxology and "Speculative Realism." Maybe attempting the anti-syzygistics of some necunologically fouled game or off-season with whatever obligate saponihil/obligatory empty sampler? Fowler (1989-2012) may have been an applied exologist and non-musicologist from Massachusetts? Works counted *Rhythmic Fact* (w.m.o/r) and *Percussion Ensemble* (senufo editions). Daly (1980-2012) may have been a dramaturgist from Maine? Works counted *Tentatively nullpropriated assay from Gauss PDF's 36 (missed by two)* (Gauss PDF) and *Plays / For Theatre* (bas-books).

All events begin at 8PM unless otherwise noted. Admission: \$8 / Students & Seniors \$7 / Members \$5 or Free
The Poetry Project is located in St. Mark's Church at the corner of 2ND Avenue & 10TH Street in Manhattan.
Call (212) 674-0910 for more information. The Poetry Project is wheelchair-accessible with assistance
and advance notice. Schedule is subject to change.

Book Reviews

Studying Hunger Journals

Bernadette Mayer

(Station Hill Press, 2011)

Review by Bill DeNoyelles

In October 1985, during the course of talking about art and commitment to it, Bernadette Mayer handed me an impressive stack of notebooks of varying size and thickness: *Studying Hunger Journals* as she had written them. I spent the next two weeks transfixed, reading, rereading her journals chronicling April 1972 through December 1974. Words written in her impeccable hand that cascaded over each other vertically, backwards, from corner to corner, with each letter sometimes a different color. A forest green word mapped out diagonally across an entire page, sentences that faded from lack of ink—the black pen replaced by blue, brown, red and black again. Face-like drawings, multicolored diagrams, scrawled messages to her psychoanalyst. A field of exploration that made every element of language a possibility worth mining regardless of the outcome. A realm where dreams merged with waking states indistinguishably.

Whole sections of *Studying Hunger Journals* have remained in the folds of my memory for over twenty-five years, and now, some forty years since their inception, we have them to read in this handsomely bound and accessible volume. The delay in this masterpiece's availability has been, in part, the reluctance of publishers to take on such a long, diverse volume that defies category: an unapologetic work of grand depth incorporating poetry, prose, autobiography and psychology. Mayer had (and has) few peers who can match her ingenuity or craftsmanship. As much as her previous work, *Memory*, had taken on the exploration of memory within a smaller, dense, more concrete time period, *Studying Hunger Journals* is a thorough exploration of cellular memory, eternal and timeless, bravely merging states of consciousness into a dream life of being awake with a new language. Levels of consciousness that merge in a narrative geared toward psychological freedom and holistic love. Shamelessly, Mayer offers us neurosis, repressed trauma, desire, sex, politics, her address, the agonizing guilt of Catholicism and her healing. From the beginning, Mayer realized that if you delve into your

consciousness you must also delve deeply into language. She rises to the occasion: dense torrents of words are piled on layer after layer, often scraped away in a process designed to expand the limits of language and in doing so uncovering a poetry that had not yet been written or uttered. Artless, dazzling and always full of new territories, *Studying Hunger Journals* becomes a signpost for new space in the realm of modern poetry. The curative powers of this work are undeniable as we are taken into Mayer's personal process of psychological excavation.

At the outset, *Studying Hunger Journals* reads as seemingly straightforward, though embellished, entries. There is an underlying uneasiness, a shadow of anxiety as Mayer sets about her dailiness. The narrative proceeds at a manic pace akin to the myriad racing thoughts of a panic attack. This pace characterizes the book, and at this speed we catch glimpses of autobiography both lovingly and brutally rendered. There is an almost claustrophobic sense at times. You feel like you are living in the deserted, desolate Soho of the early 1970s, pacing the floors of 74 Grand Street with her—north to south, south to north, as she collects the shifts, the fluctuation, dissipation of fears, hopes, plans, decisions, ponderings, coding them with her pen along with the notations to her psychiatrist.

There are few writers who can translate the complexity of an anxiety attack, let alone carry it off so accurately in one sentence, the way Mayer can. Woven within the greater text are vignettes that nail and define the very premise of this work with equal acumen. There is the innocence and adoration of a little girl who helps her father make furniture in the basement; and the heartbreaking loneliness of the young girl afraid to miss school as she reads into the wee hours in the light of a 1950s kitchen, as she does her best to care for her terminally ill mother. There is even a small section we could aptly title "The Merry Christmas of Death" as Mayer focuses her rage at the cold inability of the Catholic Church to comfort the suffering. Herein lies the essence of the work that enabled Mayer to transcend the crippling confinement of her grief in order to become a more full being in the world. A redefining and coloring of

language that reorganized the contents of her mind. A gift she has passed onto us with her brave writing.

Having finally been heralded as one of America's best and influential poets, Mayer should also be acknowledged as one of America's most innovative conceptualists, for as breathtakingly beautiful as the poetry in this book is, it is also an important contribution to process art. Destined to influence generations of future artists, *Studying Hunger Journals* can stand proudly alongside André Breton's *Nadja*, Willem de Kooning's *Excavation* and William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.

Bill DeNoyelles is an artist, photographer and writer who lives in Northern New Jersey. His work can be seen at www.billdenoyelles.com and occasionally at the Geoffrey Young Gallery in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

gowanus atropolis

Julian T. Brolaski

(Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011)

Review by Michael Scharf

*I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements and an angelic sprite*
– John Donne

eat shit, hologram

– Julian T. Brolaski

John Donne is less the patron saint of Julian T. Brolaski's first full-length book than is Thomas Wyatt, whose lines weave through the book's cast-iron filigree. And rather than the Inns at Court, or the Court of Henry VIII, Brolaski makes the boroughs xir burrows, moving from the supertoxic Brooklyn neighborhood of the book's title, through a faux-Whitmanic "manahatta," to the entire city as "pseudoarchipelago."

The reason for doing so is not so much a love of Brooklyn, or New York, though both are definitely and strongly there. It's more about wanting or needing to write a set of love poems when the world in which love inheres both does and doesn't exist. The book isn't interrogative, but it answers the questions:

What is the language of love in a city that is in collapse, and appears to be part of the beginnings of a much larger collapse? And what is the language of love that definitely dares to speak its name, and finds a very powerful circuitry in the city, but that also incites some to violence, some to dismissal, some to dismal chatter?

To write those poems means to invent the language that will comprise them, and that is what—in true Renaissance self-fashioning fashion—Brolaski has done in this astonishing book. Rodrigo Toscano is another poet whom this book honors with adaptation, but the resulting poetics, in which archaic spellings rub up against texting conventions to invoke intimates, luminaries and strangers, is able to stage 21st-century urban coterie on a cosmic scale:

*we've all crossed thresholds we dont brag
about
iphegenia oxling
when arbolaf dies
one is hailed to arden
as one goes hitherto
asphyxiating along the gowanus*

There are any number of crossings here, from Brooklyn Ferry to other shared spaces “translocating the thorax.” And the social signifies throughout in a heavily layered fashion—one “asphyxiates” in Gowanus due to the pollution of any number of environments one moves in. To put it another way, Frank O'Hara is the ghost of Hamlet's father.

The coterie aspect is, however, several somethings removed, or different, from “At The Old Place.” “timor yorkis”: best scene-fear poem title ever. Lines like “wimp become hunk / omfg in a pneumatic tube” lyricize on a frequency designed to “optimouse / many beasts,” while always keeping the macro in sight, “agape at the burning bank.” Maybe the most ingenious and beautiful thing about these poems is the way they use the utopian side of atropolizing desire to maintain a world and its elements, the interiority needed to assert that they do exist, and the wit that catalyzes that assertion: “efficiency module in liberty city / cop syndicate w/ hunk output.” The book's staccato orthographic Sudoku (“acchh agog—eruvia / flavia”) is at once a means of approach, of arms-lengthening, and of bringing things into line, “crypto-quotation

agraw.” An atropolypytic situation requires Brolaski's Superfund of linguistic and perceptual resources, taking us from “androgendd tompeepery” to a force that “cleaves the ether.”

Michael Scharf is the former Monday Night Talk Series Coordinator at The Poetry Project.

Armies of Compassion **Eleni Stecopoulos** **(Palm Press, 2010)** **Review by Kristin Prevallet**

In an introduction written for poet Robert Kocik, Eleni Stecopoulos quotes H. D. and articulates a radical vision of mind/body consciousness as epistemology and poetics:

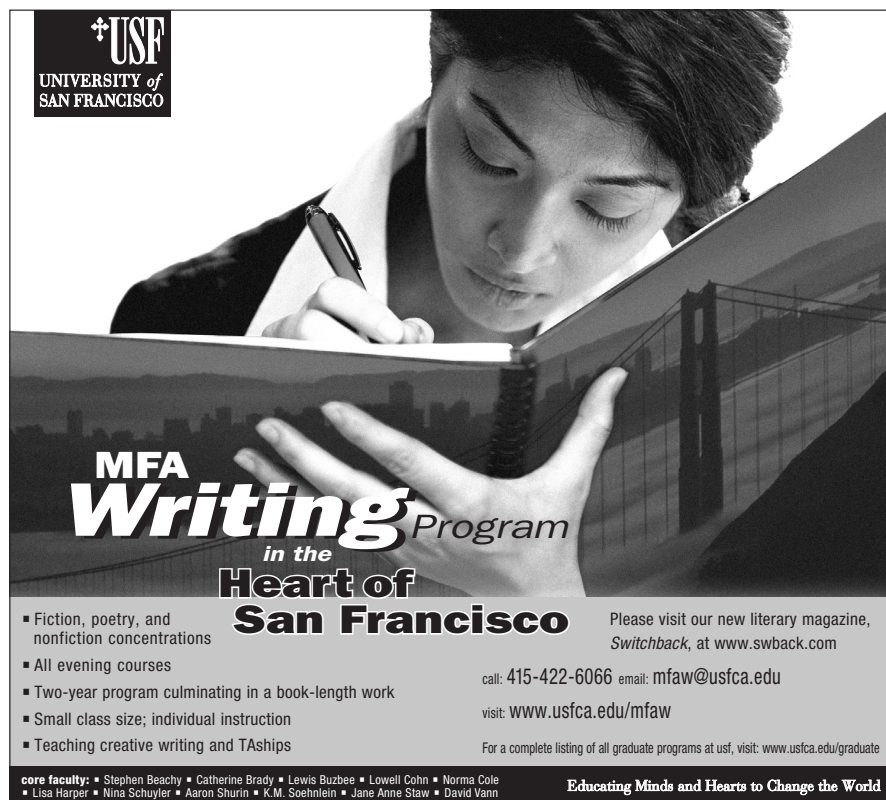
H. D. wrote that 'religion, art, and medicine through the latter ages became separated. They grow further apart from day to day.' In analysis with Freud, this connection was revived for H. D.: an Apollonian time signature where poetry, prophecy or divination, illness and healing are symptomatic of each other, in sympathy with each other. So we begin under this time signature, in this key, and from here we can travel into psychotherapy, hypnosis, prosody, poetry, medicine, consciousness, cosmology.

Armies of Compassion, Stecopoulos' first book of poetry, embodies what it means to read and write the mind/body text in sympathy with broader ailments of social injustice, because all of these things are and always have been (historically) symptomatic of each other.

*Sometimes I do know who we is
recovery
remains
stretched over narration
abducted by church fathers
and returned in fantastic boats*

Written in this poem, there is an entire book on the history of the suppression of healing practices over the past 2,000 years. “Stretched over narration” are the stories that for many centuries have been suppressed, leaving the tellers to bear the burden of a secret—as if it were somehow dangerous to desire “to be treated, not saved.”

Armies of Compassion begins with one of these secrets: belief in the body's capacity to heal itself and seeking out alternative therapies to guide the process. But this is not a narrative about a woman's quest for kinesthetologists, hypnotists, cranial sacral therapists and parasympathetic nervous system tonics.



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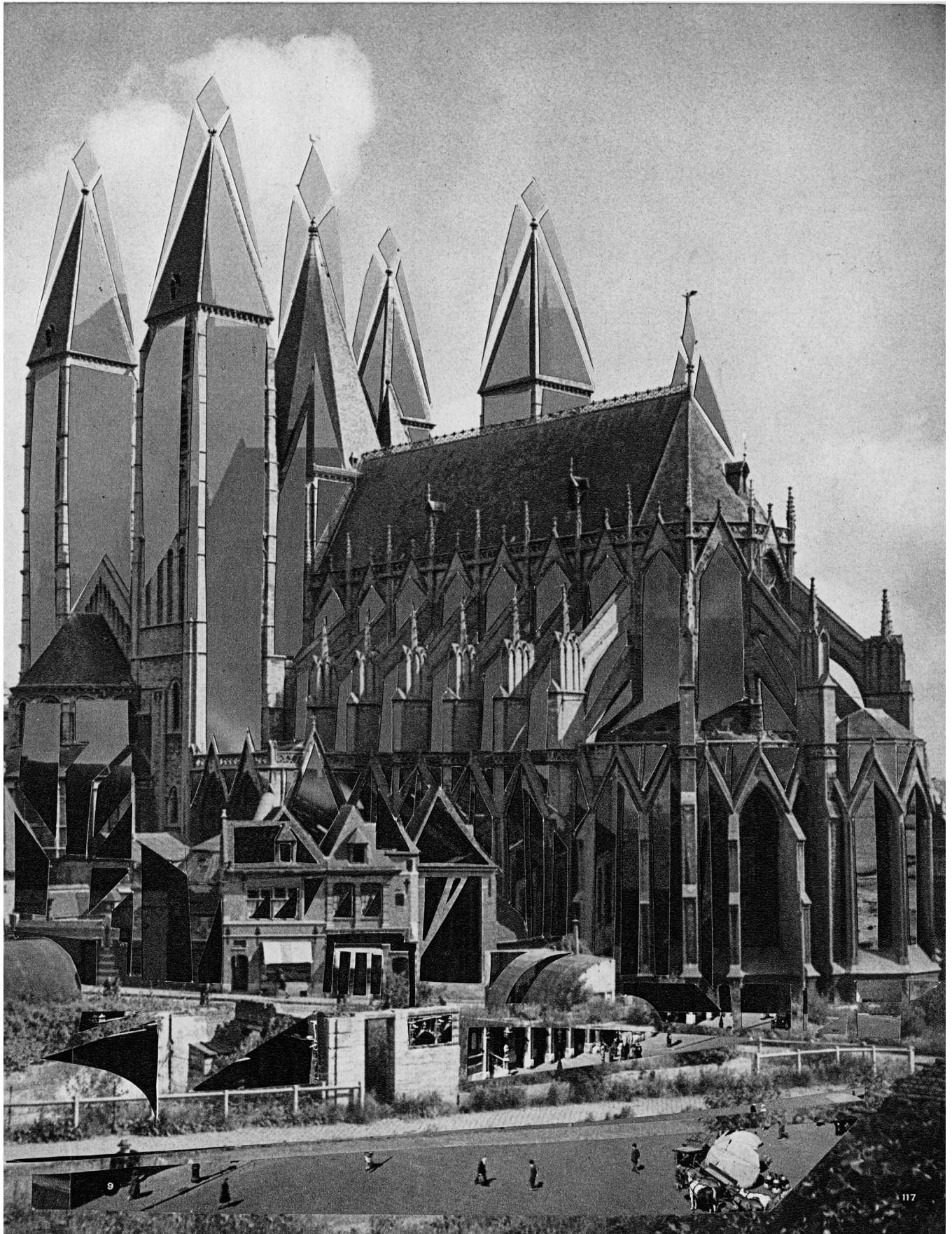
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Educating Minds and Hearts to Change the World



Rather, this is a text that uses language as an energetic force. As she writes in an interview with Thom Donavan, central to her writing practice “is a belief that the material word [has] visceral effect on bodies.” This book of poems, in other words, is a manifestation of the frequency of language as it affects the body of the poet and her process of healing.

If that sounds lofty, think of it like this:

If (as it is known) vibrations are more intrinsic to matter than matter itself...

If (as it is known) thoughts are conduits of emotion that create vibrations in our bodies, causing a physical reaction: think depression and slump, wrinkle, collapse...

If (as it is known) thoughts are powerful emotional triggers, and emotions affect our bodies at the cellular level...

If thoughts trigger emotions that in turn cause biochemical changes in the body...

If this much is now understood to be true (which simply means that neuroscience is finally catching up to healing practices people have been using for thousands of years)...

Then it might not be such a leap to understand that language (a conduit to thought) has a frequency and a vibration that can reach damaged cells, restoring them...

And then you can imagine that poets (conduits to language) are writing a somatic intelligence...

“Kinesiology,” “Autoimmunity,” “Sacral thought,” “Doner nation,” “Phalanx,” “Bakkhai,” “Icons at Sea.” These are the section titles of *Armies of Compassion*. Within each section, prose breaks into poems that become more and more fragmented, which means that they become less concerned with narrating a healing quest, and more concerned with finding alignment between language, the body writing and the body reading.

*learning the switchback between
allegory and the line*

*between rock and air
We enter earth*

In this book, Stecopoulos is riding the frequency of her individual body to the one that connects to a larger collective suffering, a suffering in which wars are being fought on multiple international and domestic fronts,

wars that find their field front and center in the bodies of everyone exposed to the logic of conquer and kill. The healing narrative, in other words, is not personal. Your mind/body is not isolated from any other mind/body in the social system.

*Inside the city
business goes on as usual:
how to get the bodies back
how to swerve as one body at war
becomes a shield of cause*

It was George Bush’s “Duty of Hope” speech in which he enlisted an “army of compassion”: churches and faith-based community centers that “show results” to “save and change lives.” Stecopoulos uses the notion of “army” not in a military sense, because the body when thought of as a “shield of cause” embodies compassion—not aid—as the hopeful action.

She writes: “It’s all psychosomatic. And somatopsychic. I don’t think you really escape your formation; you can only become aware of it and move towards some other understanding/practice that is remedial.” The practice of poetry is part of this evolving formation, and this book provides a chart of the terrain where poetry, blood and intelligence are of the same unfixed field.

Kristin Prevallet is a poet and essayist living in Brooklyn, and a hypnotherapist who runs workshops on TrancePoetics from her office in Manhattan (trancepoetics@gmail.com).

For example, take from the first four poets—ordered chronologically by birth—these three: Colin Simms, Peter Riley and Wendy Mulford. Little can perhaps be said of formal similarity of line, as seen here from Simms:

*so that eventually, after uncertainty, lame, rested in it; we move, against the grain
a name just one species.*

from Riley:

*Seeking in this thronging
vocabulary to think a clear thought about human wrong
which does not disown us.*

or from Mulford:

*bark gleams space fretted woodily
looped with travelling clouds their journey make
& through chords of rooks & pheasant barks the
piping plunging curlew wail of sirens are
as timpani to play
heraldry with winter light*

***The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*
Edited by Harriet Tarlo
(Shearsman Books, 2011)
Review by Edric Mesmer**

Care of terms, a caution editor Harriet Tarlo heeds in her introduction to the recently fashioned *The Ground Aslant*—care of terms applied not only to subtle shifts and clarifications in subtitled an anthology “Radical Landscape Poetry,” but also unto ecology or ecologies as they manifest in concerns of the geopolitical, agricultural and poetical. Not all natures here belong to one canon or organizing vocabulary, and Tarlo’s insistent attention to such is one of the ordering principles that tethers *The Ground Aslant* to the nightstand.

Radical. Landscape. Poetry. Let’s begin backwards, let *poetry* become the first geometric circumference by which the “Contents” overlaps and codifies. Modernist ever, Marianne Moore once remarked that her work could only be called poetry because there was no other fitting label to which such writing might acquiesce; and, coy humility aside, the formal innovations of line or field in the overarching cadences of modernism are present here, through lineages from Bunting and Finlay to Niedecker and Olson. Attention to place and to delineation of space on the page—literally, as a field of words—is the denominator. Certainly others who walked the paths and unplowed trespasses before the 20th century are also present in influence, but the encounter with thought beyond an aesthetics of detail-plus-expression-alone is present in each of the poets Tarlo joins as vertebrae.

Scope is always one limitation of anthologies, even as range becomes a horizon of intention along which the reader strides sure-footed and carefree.

Landscape is, of course, what hews the three samples above into idiomatic line. References to and encounters through the terrestrial and otherwise natural mediate praxis. In Tarlo's phraseology, clearing a path from—but not erasing—an "age-old poetic relationship" delineated from Romanticism: "Here it is again, but this time explored in the context, not only of that history, but also of all the variety, intimacy, complicity and complexity of modernity." Be it the interweaving of mariner song and material concerns found in excerpts from Tony Baker's *Binding Affinities*:

(voice 1)	(voice 2)
a long long way my soul is	including property in section two
	haul away boys & bring her down.

Elisabeth Bletsoe's from *Birds of the Sherborne Missal*:

*...the colour of breath condensing on glass;
the chill amnesia of fog. Instances of clarity &
fading as if from radio interference. Shuttered
sentences. Fur-gloved fingers of magnolia buds
poke through submerged etymologies of such
words as 'garden,' 'enclosure,' 'boundary wall.'
Interiors hollowed by absence.*

or Tarlo's own "Workington-Beach":

IRON
*waste pocked, its
thick salt-orange pools rust
sea into cups*

the literal littoral or natural metaphor provide ex- and incursions of the kind that lend credence to ecological cognizance in return and concern.

(Let it also be noted that scapes "unnaturally" modern, *vis-à-vis* Frank O'Hara, and the

dialogically pastoral (quixotically also via O'Hara) may serve as poles which these elide (and thereby elucidate).)

"Radicality" needs little further demonstration beyond the samples above to prove cincher. But consider the fractured manner of Nicholas Johnson's "plei / yt," wherein apostrophic disappearing and titular rupture lead to qualities of song not unsurpassed in the real of the quotidian cosmos:

*plei
yt
quay tal
playt hover all
birds singing s over
stonie towers ahn walls*

Also, Frances Presley's columnar "Triscombe stone"; and, Mark Dickinson's listed, grid-like and spatial transfigurations in excerpts from *The Speed of Clouds*.

Excerpt is a word you take note of here, and the editor is aware of this limitation regarding anthologizing. Nationality is of course one of many quotients of this collection, grounded as it is on British soil; however, take Tony Baker, a longtime resident of France who finds inclusion herein. Lineage, albeit decidedly not restricted to lines of nation or of seascape, still finds relevance in the notion of idiomatic nurture. Poets recently deceased whose corpus fits the rubric of *The Ground Aslant* are excluded, though this seems merely practical in terms of print and finance. Tarlo counters this not only by making mention of Barry MacSweeney, Bill Griffiths and Richard Caddel—poets outside the now of temporaneity—but substantiates their spectral influence in the actual of epigraphs, literalizing and memorializing the come-before.

A last injunction into the inevitable difficulties that face the anthologizer: sampling. While Tarlo moves from soil to soil, crossing in practice, oeuvre, era and—in the broadened sense of kind—genre, the anthology can seem tight when limits in pagination must rely on the few to stand in for far-spanning bibliographies. Still, sorting such seeds is a task worthy of a non-Sisyphean psyche, and Tarlo is up to this task. Though the narrow forensics of place may offer sharp evidence to the contrary, the samples are deep, richly allowing up to twelve pages of one poet's work!

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It should be noted that *The Ground Aslant* also features further fine work by Thomas A. Clark, Ian Davidson, Carol Watts, Zoë Skoulding, Mark Goodwin, Helen Macdonald and Peter Larkin.

Collator of the journal Yellow Field, Edric Mesmer currently serves as the Mary Barnard Research Assistant to the Poetry Collection at the University of Buffalo.

The Iovis Trilogy
Anne Waldman
(Coffee House Press, 2011)
Review by Sara Jane Stoner

My teacher Ammiel Alcalay recently urged in his gentle way that we students and writers of literature and the world must be more bold in our possession of knowledge, more adventurous and epoch-spanning in our essays into the academic enterprise, more curious and participatory travelers and actors in the archive, with hotter eyes to warm the cold areas of amnesia caused by cultural violence. There is no better model or teacher for such a way than the prolific Anne Waldman, who has been so important to the story of 20th-century American poetics, and the teaching and singing thereof. As a *spanner*, she has stretched between American West and East—as well as the so-called, global “East” and “West”—and between the New York School and the Beats.

I think of Ammiel’s encouragement as I read Waldman’s giant text, *The Iovis Trilogy*, and I imagine myself as one of the children who Waldman gathers *en masse* as muse, guided at times by her son, Ambrose. This Virgilian epic song, a vast written *performance* that must be acknowledged for its “orality of intention,” is an expression of knowledge—embodied and disembodied, material and transcendental, violent and pacifist, visionary and starkly realist, present and transhistorical. To read it, to move across its many pages, is to invite a demand for and a belief in freedom that is atomic and phonemic.

The three books collected in *The Iovis Trilogy*—*All Is Full of Jove*, *Guardian and Scribe* and *Eternal War*—together show the force of Waldman’s galloping collection of forms as a vibration of knowledge through ceaseless

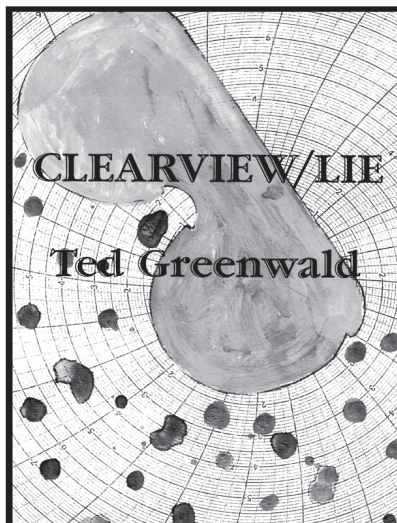
experiment, a sensorium through which the roundness of self burrows in to win the furthest circumference. Her epic is intent on cracking open culture *and* difference. Each canto/chapter begins with a prose context—a time, an experience, a problem/project, a death, a love, an assignment—joining times and spaces in a magical effort that other poetic texts often cannot, in their confined formal economies and generic spaces, afford.

The digested and the undigested come together in Waldman’s work, as well as messages private and public: intimate letters to and from family, loves and heads of state; shaming songs of modern weaponry; critical estimates and defenses of her work and others’; hieroglyphics; lists of politicians; government documents; protest plans; the most refined and raw elements of many languages; photographic images; struck-through and boxed language as signs of protest. Languages rising and falling as concretions of civilizations, hierarchies, scales, events, as markings of the lost or undiscovered or oppressed, achieve

a depth on Waldman’s page that is palpable, sonic and visual.

The three books take up men, women and war in succession. In Book I, there are urgent fuckings and leavings and comings with *ALL* the great men: “She moves through the lives of particular men as a kind of sympathetic magic to catch experience. She wants the men to do the same: change into women.” In Book II, a roving development of a “counter-poetics” that draws through the lived and written annals of women to show how, as “objects of desire,” women are beset and, in consuming, consumed by a force greater than men. And Book III, an epic protest of the “gender divide,” of the force of war as man’s solution, a dissolution in which “all maps all children suffer.”

There is evidence everywhere of Waldman’s faith in the *Sprechstimme* weavings of memory, the enlightened, critical, exculpatory openness of the human instrument, and the honest difficulty of daily living. The body



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TED GREENWALD
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This autobiographical epic from American poetry's best-kept secret dynamo goes streaming onward and veering between electric poles and templates of "anyway," deep in the heart of diction. The poem is a form of reading one life into another, a bridge-and-tunnel work, swift and huge as capital letters.

Bill Berkson

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of the poet in receptive action; writing as a function of reading and receiving messages from life on every scale, aspiring to that infinitesimal exchange, an “obeisance to all directions of space.” And the word rang like a bell before it was struck: a radical *obeisance*. She names it (in the Tibetan tradition—*tonglen*) “the radical crux” of the trilogy in her 2011 introduction to Book III. A submission that consumes that which is submitted to: “take negatively upon oneself, call it out, breathe out the efficacy. Practice empathy in all things. Pick a cause and tithe your time relative to the half-life of plutonium.”

Waldman’s struggle is to possess and be possessed by a mytho-linguistic voice, ear, eye and hand in the present in order to account for what has been and what will be for us. This is a pedagogical position: to conceive a text as a teaching, to frame personal and literary spaces with global knowledge without denying the chaos within and without. Waldman is a brilliant synthesizer of traditions. She and her poems mark the contents that have made and make continents; raise a nation of children to a critical mass of consciousness, of sound; usher the “hungry ghosts,” the awakening designees of the fecund ashes of the “charnel grounds,” Ground Zero, Wall Street. Simply, she writes, very near the epic’s end:

*dear Poets
who spoke out against injustice
I should put it this way
it’s paper coinage that distances people*

Sara Jane Stoner is a writer and PhD student at CUNY Graduate Center and a teacher at Brooklyn College and Cooper Union.

The Other Poems **Paul Legault** **(Fence Books, 2011)** **Review by Anelise Chen**

Monists are so passé: that claptrap was out of style sooner than you could spell Spinoza. The problem with monists is that they have a hard time explaining why we intuit plurality, or why there seem to be more things in the world than fewer. Instead of saying that there are lots of birds and lots of mammals, monists say that there are “monads” or perhaps “tiny congealings in the gigantic all-encompassing

blobject.” This funneling and self-containing can go on forever, which makes things convenient. Categorization becomes a nightmare when there’s too much diversity, so the easiest thing to do is to simplify—but that’s just outdated metaphysics.

If you wonder nevertheless at what it is to be a human person, Paul Legault’s second book, *The Other Poems*, offers an alternate ontology. In the title of one poem, personhood is explained thus: “We Are Made Up Of Smaller Versions Of Ourselves Stacked Up On Top Of The Smaller Versions Of Ourselves’ Shoulders Like A Human Ladder Wearing A Trenchcoat So That We Look Like Just One Normal-Sized Person Coming Through Here, No Reason To Get Suspicious.” According to this conception, we are made up of stacks of multiple selves, or a Busby Berkeley-esque kaleidoscope of fragmented selves, parts of which we can display and spotlight at whim. Throw a trenchcoat over all those little selves, bird and mammal, past and present, and suddenly there is disguise, vessel, form.

The Other Poems look like poems. They look like the most ordinary, white-bread genre of poems: the sonnet. But there is no single sonneteer here, no unequivocal “I.” Actually, there are about 400 different sonneteers in the 75 little sonnets (or micro-plays?) that comprise this book. People Dressed as Houses, a Gay Centaur, Mayakovsky as a Pony, and Vegetables that Look like Body Parts all make an appearance. Even the characters who compose the poems that compose the collection are composites themselves. A centaur is neither man nor horse; Mayakovsky isn’t just a poet but also a pony; vegetables are arms and ears. “If something’s kind of sort of something else, send it out.” Unfortunately, it’s impossible to categorize something if something’s always kind of sort of something else.

So why is it useful to think of the self as a composite? Comparison and relation enable understanding, but the inevitability of time passing also necessitates it. In order to remain intact through time, old selves must negotiate with new selves, and vice versa. Little Helen asks Big Helen why she is little; Old Daniela tells New Daniela that she resents her. In the poem “The Senses,” the Audio Tour Guide reassures the garden wanderer: “In the future, or in three months, the plants will change, /

or else they will be about to have to.” Trees sometimes have leaves, but sometimes they don’t! Transformation is inbuilt—nothing to worry about here.

A typical introductory poetry class will undoubtedly have a difficult time answering its usual questions. “Who is the speaker?” “What is the occasion of speech?” Legault very deliberately eschews the standard poetic address by diluting it (or polluting it, depending on your taste) to demonstrate a point—that the self shifts and transforms at every moment. The self can be 400 characters all at once. To keep up with the book’s fluctuating conativity, the reader must know where to position herself in relation to the speaker. The consequence of such a strategy is that for those readers who can’t keep up, the lines fail to mean much.

The last poem, “[Title Presenting A Situation Used To Multiply The Lines Of Thought],” serves as a kind of structural key to the collection. According to this key, the first couplet of each poem should be a “[Prepositional statement opening into the continuation / of the second line to the end of the first sentence].” Somewhere between a prepositional statement (the relationship between a bunny and a log) and a propositional statement (a declaration) is the ideal line. We are supposed to balk at the phrase “prepositional statement.” To call the first line prepositional is to subvert the notion that poetry is unidirectional; rather, it should serve a more relational function.

Anelise Chen lives in New York and is a frequent contributor to Hydra Magazine.

Becoming Weather **Chris Martin** **(Coffee House Press, 2011)** **Review by Judah Rubin**

Chris Martin’s *Becoming Weather* is seemingly based on a technological platform of the additive appendage. That is to say, the hand extended to test temperature and precipitation is these poems in themselves. The parsing of the world—is it raining here? can this bordered state of experience be actualized out of doors?—is converted to a measurement of extension, of the potentiality of perpetual or

perpetuated motion. Extension, not rotund enlargement, but the irreconcilability of increase, a Doppler effect of poetry, rejecting the referential for the invoked: the space in which a cyclonic whirling of language in space effectively conjoins words, verses, the serialized sections of Martin's book, but does not adhere them one to the next.

Becoming Weather bears the mark of instability present in any discussion of meteorological certainty: 58% chance of rain, winds from the southeast, gusting at times. The three long serial poems which make up this book, with their eyes closed, cannot touch pointer finger

to pointer finger. (Note: Neither can you.) For Martin, however, these fingers dangle plumb lines that measure the contraries of a folding mechanism, of static/movement, of the recurring helicopters that hover but are not perceived as moving, exhibiting the principle of the "small dance," the near-motionless and its broad, sweeping arc.

In its elucidation of hovering, *Becoming Weather* dispenses the make-up of poems in what Martin has termed "eruptions and disruptions." Dispensation, not delineation or demarcation, to hands that reach from windows in determination; dispensation,

against the arrogation of predestined cyclical flux; dispensation *qua* the arrogation of predestined cyclical flux. April showers bring May flowers, etc.

But for this spring weather, what jacket do we need? Is *Becoming Weather* addressed to our eyes, to our ears? Do we always need jackets to read, especially in paperback? Indeed, we are often told we swallow many spiders each year. Then let us address this work to the gut, where we got worms from the dog and lost our balance? Perhaps, for Martin, this work's digestive fold lies further displaced, playing less a part in extracting the nutritive than folding an extra-long tongue or simulating a zygotic cleavage of the verbal.

Martin's infolding verses may best be seen in one of these poems' dream visions of a "sunghost." This term demands further questioning, to be sure, yet is left a naked neologism by its redactor. Is "sunghost" a ghosted sun, a *xenos* of song? Neither, explicitly, and it is uncertain whether the implicit has sway in *Becoming Weather's* poetic schema. The body of explanation in this—and many of the author's conjunctive phrasings—is restricted, a body interchangeable in its borders' permeability; a song, a storage site for invocation and evocation, for the exteriority of the inner life, the throwing open of latched doors.

For readers, this doubling of language may feel much like sticking one's face into a book of prefab paper airplanes. Or, if "simply by moving we implicate the hoax of time," the strained lines of construction behind the Bell X-1 of intimate(d) reading. Certainly, the drunken joys of such action reek of Chuck Yeager-meisterism, which occur through Martin's own eclipsing of sound. The pilot of the poems hears clearly while the virtually secondary mode of textual publication demands an visual attentiveness concomitant with the book's varied typographical formatting. This underscores what the poems seem to suggest "becoming weather" actually entails: a self-test of (pre)diction's hold on our bodies, a diction of bodies beyond the "meddling middle."

Judah Rubin is working harder, each day, for you.



Poet Astrology by Denver Dufay

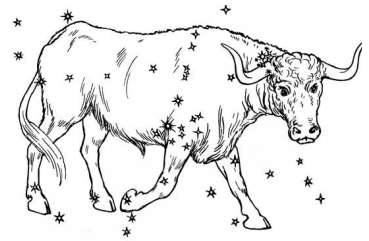


Aries (March 21 – April 19)

Happy New Year, newborn of the Zodiac! This year, no news might be good news, Aries, as the key-word for your new year is *stability*. December and January are months to relish in all that's going well, or at least neutral. I know you've been considering diversifying your stock portfolio and taking up an affair at the office, but the stars recommend waiting until 2013 for major life changes. You know you're superior to, well, everybody, so just stay on the awesome train. Nothing to see in innovation-ville. Eat root vegetables this winter and avoid spicy food. You don't need it! Your flame of even-keeled-ness and immutability burns hot enough! *Aries poets: Laura Moriarty, Erin Mouré, William Wordsworth*

Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

Everybody likes you, Taurus. You're charming, pragmatic, allergic to flakery, and even when you act stubbornly it just makes us want to pet those pretty little horns. Everybody likes you in the beginning of 2012, too...*except your significant other*. Yes, it's going to be a little thorny for partnered-up Tauri, so you might want to stay vigilant and let the little things pass without comment. Dishes in the sink are annoying, I know, but you can go full bull come March. For the single Taurus, though, January is the start of a promising period of new friendships and possibilities. Drink a lot of tea in January and pass on braised meats. *Taurus poets: Tan Lin, Norma Cole, Robert Browning*

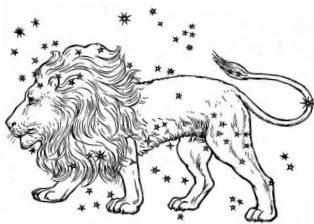
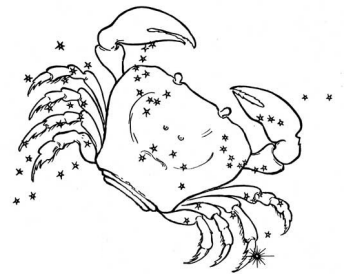


Gemini (May 21 – June 20)

The second half of 2011 has been rough for you, Gemini. Even the imminent collapse of capitalism seems bittersweet to you, especially since you bought your apartment. Tsk tsk. And you can expect even more challenges in the beginning of 2012. Financial challenges don't exactly make you feel sexy and not feeling sexy means not being sexy. Unfortunately, it doesn't look good, so expect trouble to lurk around every corner, with every phone call, with every new dawn. If I were you, Gemini, I'd keep the shades drawn tight for the first quarter of 2012. Run from chapbook contests and beasts that slither. You're also prone to excess mucus this cold and flu season, so stick with almonds and avoid lactose. *Gemini poets: Thom Donovan, Rob Fitterman, Anna Akhmatova*

Cancer (June 21 – July 22)

Typically everyone is out to get you, Cancer, but for the first few months of 2012 it's just surfeit paranoia. So don't brashly tell strangers to *quit following me!!!* if you can possibly avoid it. Anyway, you'll be too busy making genius art in December and January to even bother about your supervisor's incompetence and the enduring hegemony of wicked rascals. If you've been waiting for the right time to get started on that new manuscript, now's the time. Your power is intense, your liver is especially fortified, and your sometimes painful sensitivity muted enough to focus on the job at hand. Eat beans and avoid bread. *Cancer poets: Stacy Szymaszek, Mary Austin Speaker, like half of the New York School*



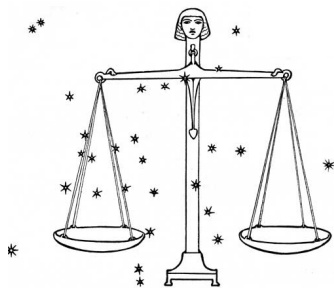
Leo (July 23 – August 22)

With the lion's relentless bravery, hubris, and courage, you'll strut into 2012 with your head high, Leo. And why not? Everything you touch in January is going to turn into literal gold. You're going to be on some King Midas shit *without* the annoying moral at the end. Every time you make a decision about money, it's going to be astute and impressive. Your friends will be shocked, impressed and generous in their descriptions of your prowess. Your hair will stink like old quarters. But one thing to remember, Leo, is that while this influx of ducats does make you 175-200% more attractive to potential mates, if you keep your mind on your money and money on your mind with no sense of human compassion, you're going to find yourself alone, pathetic and rich. Eat mustard and stick with soymilk. *Leo poets: Anne Boyer, Ron Silliman, Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Virgo (August 23 – September 22)

There are going to be some changes in your life in late December and early January, Virgo, and we all know that the only thing you like less than major changes in your life is...*why is there DIRT all over this STREET?!?!?! Aaaaaaaahhhhhhh!* Well, Virgo, put down the bleach and try to get versatile; these changes are going to be for the better. Try not to follow your disposition to distrust people—they're not all out to get you. Some are out to supercuddle and hypercuddle. Deep breaths. As always, you're prone to some weight gain if you overindulge in holiday lard. You'll want to consider getting into digestifs after the 11TH of December. *Virgo poets: Carol Mirakove, Rod Smith, H. D.*



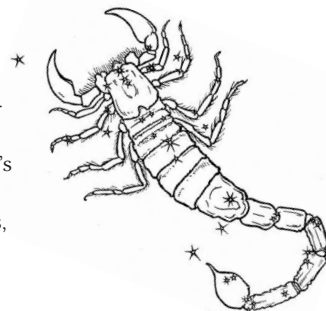


Libra (September 23 – October 22)

This is maybe the one time you're really happy you *are* in grad school, Libra. Because you are on fire. That last conceptual link connecting Baudrillard, Haraway and Mötley Crüe has just become Crystal. Fucking. Clear. This astonishing clarity and facility for articulating concepts is going to give you plenty of time to bring food and provisions down to Occupy Wall Street. You might consider running for public office after January 15. Watch out for a burst of brattiness the week after. You're also going to be extremely photogenic from December 14 to December 20, so maybe even take a risk with that reindeer sweater. Lime juice not sugar. *Libra poets: Arthur Rimbaud, Amiri Baraka, Judith Goldman*

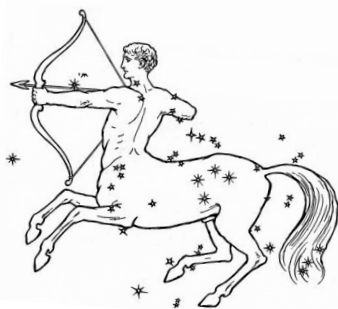
Scorpio (October 23 – November 21)

Scorpio's favorite part about the imminent collapse of capitalism? The postrevolutionary spike in hot, nasty, previously repressed...breakthroughs in scientific research. I know, not what you typically imagine for sweaty Scorpio, but I don't arrange the stars in their celestial spheres, I just read what they tell me, and what they're telling me, Scorpio, is it's time to get comfortable with lab glasses. I'm guessing it's inevitable that your lab partner is going to find your statistical finesse irresistible. Ditto for the way you rock your lab coat. Test results? Positive. Lab sink besmirched? That's also positive, Scorpio. As always, stay far away from hot sauces and fermented cacti. *Scorpio poets: Ted Berrigan, Alice Notley, Sylvia Plath*



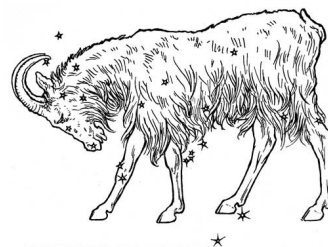
Sagittarius (November 22 – December 21)

You've always been popular with children, but in late December, you're going to be covered with them. They will drape themselves against your legs when you're walking in what used to be called the "mall." When they see you on the bus, plane or train, they'll immediately quiet that horrifying crying jag to the imminent relief of both their guardians and your co-passengers. And I know that this unprecedented display of devotion and fondness from toddlers and even tweens is going to make you consider having a child, or another child, of your own. But before you do that, it's imperative that you consult with someone older than you, pretending to ask about someone else. A perfect thing to eat while discreetly surveying your older friend is pho. It warms the blood and bones of January, Sagittarius, like the approving glance of an adoring child. *Sagittarius poets: William Blake, Anne Tardos, Eileen Myles*



Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

In mid-January, several people are going to start talking badly about your genius artwork out of jealousy, Capricorn. But who can blame them? You were so ambitious in 2011, your artworks were so genius, and even as capitalism started crumbling all around us, half of the time people had to skip a night of occupying their cities so they could read your books. The key thing is to endure the month without letting these haters ruin the brilliance of your new year. One way to distract yourself from their chatter is to hit the town, single Capricorn, because you have never been this pheromoneful in your damn life. Don't wear navy on December 15 or December 16, and stay away from corn drink until Valentine's Day. *Capricorn poets: Kevin Killian, Robert Duncan, Nada Gordon*

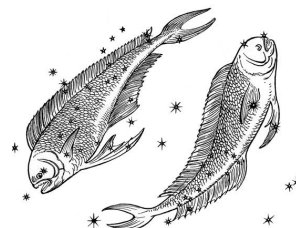


Aquarius (January 20 – February 18)

Usually, Aquarius, your renowned versatility and flexibility is what makes your life easier. But for the first half of December, try adjectives like "stubborn," "unflinching," "old dog" and the like. Any new tricks you do try to do are more than likely going to end up burning down the nightclub, and who wants to add an insurance nightmare to holiday stress? Not you, Aquarius. Just settle in and fake it until January 1. In terms of poetics, you're going to have the most success with regular lines of verse ending with similar sounds arranged in a pattern. What in other months felt like gimmicky repetition now sounds like goddamn Shakespeare. Stick to white foods, especially flour and cocktails mixed with egg whites. *Aquarius poets: Gertrude Stein, Cedar Sigo, Stephanie Young*

Pisces (February 19 – March 21)

Oh my god! Oh my god! You're thinking to yourself...because December 2011 seems to exist for one reason and one reason only, to stress you the fuck out. But the worst thing you can do in the face of all this stress is what you'd really like to, Pisces, and that is snap at those nearest and dearest to you. You're going to need those friends come January when the stress disappears like Calgon in water. Practice yoga, drink green tea, take hot baths. If you don't have a yoga teacher, google. If you don't have green tea, go to the store. And if you don't have a bathtub in your tiny apartment, move. In mid-January you'll find that your student loans and credit card debt have been paid back more than you thought. Celebrate with profiteroles and espresso. You've earned it. *Pisces poets: Steve Farmer, Laura Elrick, John Coletti*



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