



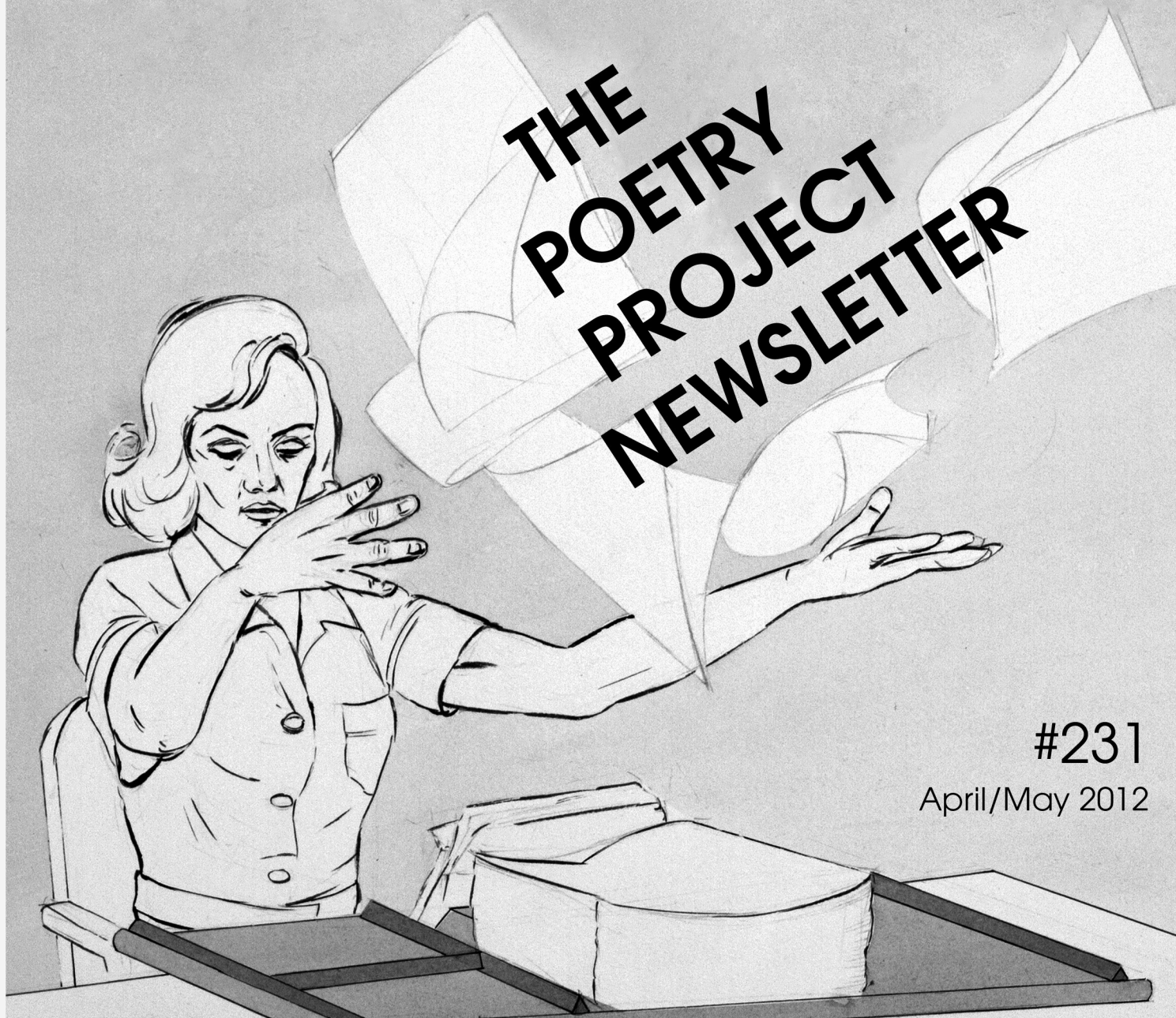
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Johanna Drucker on the End of Conceptual Writing
Rachel Levitsky and Gail Scott in Conversation
Rodrigo Toscano on Poetic Athleticism
Poetry by John Beer
Art, Reviews, Horoscopes and More

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#231

April/May 2012



The Poetry Project Newsletter

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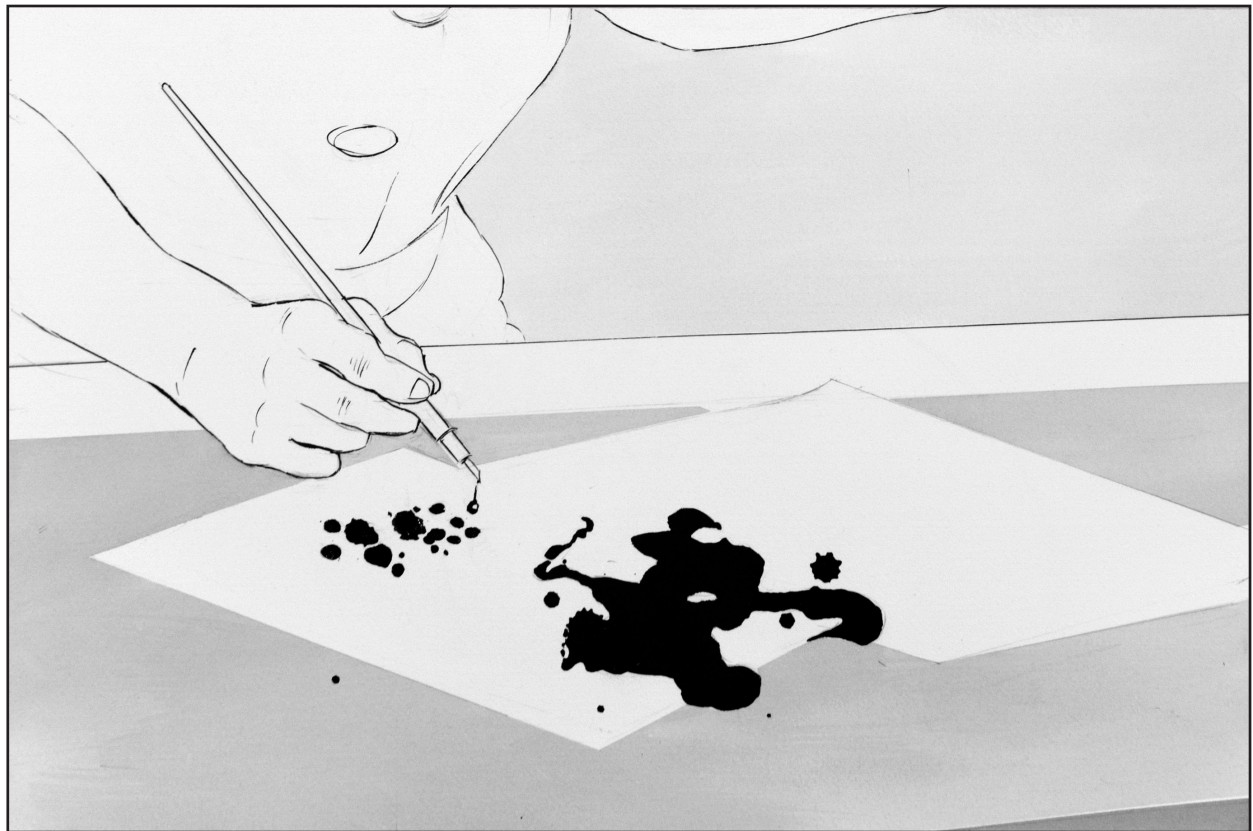
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From the Director

"I always know what I'm going to do tomorrow but (thank God) I'm often wrong." That's from Joe Brainard's "Self-Portrait: 1971." I use a large Moleskine calendar that has already been soaked in environmentally safe silverfish "deterrent" (broken seal), water (leaky canteen), and a cup of coffee (my fault). Events have been arranged and rearranged and come apart and been arranged, and now we have things big and wonderful from things chicken-scratched and ____-logged. Brainard has been on my mind because The Library of America just released *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*, and we are hosting a group reading to celebrate it on Wednesday, April 18. Joanne Kyger will be making the trip from Bolinas, California, to read with Micah Ballard on Wednesday, May 2. And we'll screen Cecilia Vicuña's new cut of *Kon Kon* followed by a conversation between Vicuña and Jonathan Skinner. Everyone turned in a great spring schedule; see the big picture for yourselves on pages 22–23.

The Project is embarking upon new territory with our annual Spring Benefit on Friday, May 4. *SPRINGING* will feature Thurston Moore (electric guitar) and John Zorn (reeds) playing together. A set of poetry with LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, erica kaufman and Dana Ward will precede the music. Things will get started in the Sanctuary shortly after 8PM, and after the performance we'll move into the Parish Hall for drinks. Beer has been lovingly provided by Brooklyn Brewery and a special "Poets Red" wine by City Winery. As with our New Year's Day Marathon Reading, all proceeds from *SPRINGING* are used to keep our programs going full steam ahead.

You can pre-purchase *SPRINGING* tickets at the discounted price of \$25 via Brown Paper Tickets. Sales will open with a special access period to Poetry Project Members only. This means that from March 27–April 8, only Members may purchase tickets by emailing us for the promotional code. Pre-purchase will open to the general public on April 9. Yes, this is also a Membership campaign. And with that comes *merch*. It turns out our logo looks fabulous on canvas bags. Visit poetryproject.org to see what you have to do to secure the coolest tote for your poetry books. You'll also find more information about the performers, tickets, how to become a Member and Membership benefits. To make sure you're getting all the latest news, it's best to sign up (on our website) to receive our

weekly emails. We're very excited for Thurston and John to play together at the Church and to hear new work from LaTasha, erica and Dana.

While I write this we still have three more months of events until Season 46 comes to a close. However, this is the last *Newsletter* missive I'll be writing until fall. I want to thank everyone who attended an event, or more than a few events, became a Member, made a donation, volunteered, flattered me, etc. And if you haven't done any of these things yet, and you are reading this, it's not too late!

Stacy Szymaszek

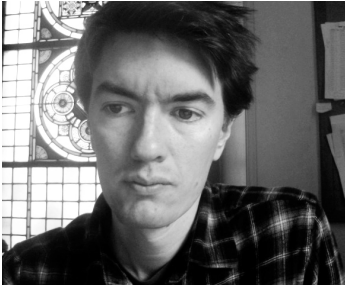
ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Poetry Project Archive Presentation

In 2007, The Library of Congress purchased The Poetry Project's archive from 1966 through 2005. The Project's onsite archive currently consists of some duplicate material from this period, as well as all audio and print material from 2006 to the present. We offer educational presentations of our archival material for undergraduate and graduate classes and other interested groups. Presentations draw on a diverse range of print, audio and video from the archive in order to provide audiences with further contexts for understanding the history of The Poetry Project and the role it has played in contemporary poetry. For information on setting up a presentation, please email info@poetryproject.org.

Unpublished Work by Michael Gizzi

Colleagues of the late Michael Gizzi are assembling a collection of his work for publication. Because Michael often gave away poems to friends, there is no unified collection of work not published in books. The editors would be grateful to hear from anyone who has poems or who knows where to find such work. Please contact Craig Watson at craig@conanicus.com.



From the Program Coordinator

Welcome to your Spring 2012 *Poetry Project Newsletter*. Winter in New York City has been confusingly warm. Little dogs are walking around the East Village without their sweaters, lines are out the door at the Big Gay Ice Cream Shop, and lightly dressed, obnoxious people are drinking at sidewalk tables in front of the terrible new bars on 2ND AVENUE. In February, *The Farmer's Almanac* probably predicted all this but I didn't read it. I've been busy reading Jean-Jacques Lecercle. The previous issue of this publication included his short essay titled "Marxism and Poetry," which led me to read his book *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*. I highly recommend it. The book has me so thoroughly engaged in Marxist thinking on the nature of language that I'm planning to read Jürgen Habermas's masterwork *The Theory of Communicative Action* next. I hope to finish *Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* by the end of summer. Please feel free to contact me via email at AQ@poetryproject.org for my complete list of the best summer beach reads! Also, send me an email if you're willing to lend a hand at our big spring fundraising event on May 4. It will be a perfect opportunity to reflect on the "yo-he-ho" theory of the origin of language and we'll all have a great time.

Arlo Quint



From the Editor

Hello, everyone! I hope this *Newsletter* finds you ready for vernal rebirth. Amazing that this is the last issue of the season—it feels like we only just got started!—but happily, I'll be back for another year, giving you the best that I got.

When choosing featured artists, I think of the best shows I've seen over the last few years and ask the artists if they would like to contribute. I first got to know Zoe Beloff's work in 2005, when I saw *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.* at Chelsea's Bellwether Gallery (now closed). While the centerpiece of the installation was a video reenactment of séances with the titular early 20TH-century French medium, the show also included a full complement of drawings and photographs. The drawings provided a separate means for ghostly apparitions to manifest themselves through semi-transparent figures and scrawled text on the edge of legibility.

By contrast, readers will see crisp ink drawings by Beloff in this issue, on the cover and on pages 2, 7 and 13. These works, from the 2011 installation *The Infernal Dream of Mutt and Jeff*, are based on details from instructional charts. Since the drawings are recontextualized in the *Newsletter*, I encourage you to visit zobeloff.com, where you can download the installation catalog.

Beloff is also the instigator and director of *The Days of the Commune*, the Bertolt Brecht play based on the Paris Commune (daysofthecommune.com) produced in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street. Page 10 of this issue includes a couple of snapshots from opening weekend. The play will be performed every Saturday and Sunday, now through May, from 11AM to 1:30PM in Liberty Square (Zuccotti Park). I encourage you to see it!

Paul Foster Johnson

Beyond Conceptualisms: Poetics after Critique and the End of the Individual Voice

Johanna Drucker

CONCEPTUAL WRITING WAS INTRIGUING AND PROVOCATIVE. In the last few years, its practices have generated much debate. But as its outlines have become more defined, it seems to be passing into another phase. Institutionalization often signals that energetic innovation is becoming history or at least has ceased to break new ground. Anthologized, reviewed, theorized and retheorized, its publications supported by Kickstarter campaigns, its high-profile figures the subject of blogs and tweets, conceptual writing may be over. Many of its identifiable moves are taught in the edgier academic programs where its procedural techniques distance the work from the stock-in-trade of more conventional “creative” writing. As someone who has long advocated courses in “self-repression,” especially for the young, I have no problem with these mash-ups, lists, re-mediations, and other mechanically generated outputs replacing epiphanic or confessional verse in the classroom. But in this derivative second and third generation, the work loses most of its interest. Read aloud, much conceptualism might as well be automated text-to-voice samplings of contemporary language across a spectrum from banal to more banal. Flattened, ordinary, stripped of affect, the text-generating machines of its formulae do not compose as much as produce a text. Some conceptual writing is downright boring. Some is exceptional, even poignantly, richly humanistic, not mechanistic in the least.

But as an intellectual product, conceptual writing is as indicative of our thought-forms in our time as any other—provided the repeated “our” in that statement refers to some higher-order, emergent form of culture, rather than a self-selected community of elite practitioners whose careers are bound to its promotion. Captured specimens of a linguistic field, conceptual works not only exemplify the crass and bankrupt state of language, its inability to signify with credibility let alone authenticity—except as demonstrations, exemplars rather than representations—they are the discursive formation of an adaptive system bootstrapping itself to the next level of mind meld and social order. Neither its meteoric rise nor its demise can be read as part of a standard life cycle of fashion trends of poetics, in which one style or school is replaced by another in a bid for top billing. Something else is going on here that seems to signal a tectonic cultural shift. Or not. Apocalyptic pronouncements have a way of sounding hollow as soon as uttered. But pausing to consider what conceptual writing’s *modus operandi* says about the state of poetics, the arc of the avant-garde, the longer trajectory of romanticism, and the emergent conditions of language ideologies might still be useful. Individual works and insightful critics have served as the instruments for realizing conceptual writing, but they are as integral to the systemic transformations as agents of any other belief system or aesthetic practice. Which is merely to say, conceptual writing can be read as a cultural indicator in which the end of individual talent, demise of critique, and rise of aggregate authorship are probably in the ascendancy.

Some impulses for conceptual writing can be tracked to the critical texts of OuLiPo’s “writing under constraint,” or LangPo’s socio-formal techniques of the (now very old) “new sentence,” or other defining limitations for poetic writing. Points of inception, within the conceptual art movement or minimalist and

procedural work that came to the fore in the 1960s, also might be used as milestones or reference frames to guide historical understanding of the conditions and contexts from which the impulse against late-romantic heroic individualism sprung. The uncreative impulse, though not interchangeable with conceptualism, is one of its closely associated tendencies, marking a break with traditions of expressivity. Fluxus, happenings and other manifestations of broader cultural shifts in the second half of the 20TH century, offer their own insights into the particulars of practices that eschewed any trace of interior life in favor of socially based and procedurally executed work. Exceptions abound and each case is distinct, but the now well-mapped territory reveals a series of sharp breaks and ruptures in which terms of serialism, process and instruction-based production transformed the post-World War II aesthetic landscape in the United States, Europe, and those parts of South America and other geographies with a shared modernist legacy. A pedant might track such techniques further back, into the esoteric realm of Gabriel Peignot’s 1842 publication *Amusements Philologiques*, whose contents resonate more closely with “All of Billy Joel’s Greatest Hits Played at Once” than with the indulgences of Flarf, the tedium of retypings, or the rigorously crafted exigencies of the best work produced from tightly controlled specifications. Peignot’s anthology has its own prehistory in the meditative acrostics of the 9TH-century monk Hrabaus Maurus, highly formalized sonnet sequences, kabbalistic mutterings and gematrial divinations, among other poetic prescriptions and prescriptive poetics.

But origin myths are descriptive, not explanatory, no matter how they appear at first glance. The question raised now by conceptual writing is what it signaled and how its institutionalization coincides with other shifts and signals. Is this literature at the end of literature? That seems too simplistic

an answer. Conceptual writing is not the same as electronic literature, but the aesthetic sensibility of rule-based work is chronologically coincident with its development. Procedural work finds expression in the computational games that parallel algorithmic processing. Not by accident are the terms of production similar. The implications may be counter-intuitive. Rather than merely imagining that the aesthetic wing of cultural development legitimizes, familiarizes and domesticates the technological, we may be witnessing unintended consequences of changes wrought by communications systems and their cultural effects. If we shift scale, stop looking at authors and works, and look instead at the larger phenomena of literary expression and language systems, what then?

Aggregation engines and natural language processing programs, though challenged by the complexity of linguistic usage and nuance, have made enormous advances. Data mining of large corpora makes use of algorithms that combine word frequency, sequence, context and other factors to sort and condense enormous quantities of text into a reduced restatement. The result is not a summary or paraphrase, but a selection and ordering according to parameters that can be set by the programmer. Just as conceptual writing is not a representation of current culture, but a part of it, an expressed manifestation, so work like Matthew Hurst's "Hapax Legomenon of Steve Jobs" is a distillation of discourse events, not a summary of them:

*...conjure up a magical or incredible new electronic gadget in front of an awed crowd were...a master showman. All computers do is fetch and shuffle numbers he once explained but...*¹

The distinction (between a primary artifact and a representational one) is more than trivial, since the replacement of "secondary-ness" with first order composition as a way of presenting analysis collapses old distinctions between text and commentary, work and exegesis. This processual activity has a resemblance to other forms of aggregate authorship, and the crowd-sourced production of



discourse and widespread, real-time, massively scaled participatory models of social media, are all producing synthetic summary expressions. A project like "We Feel Fine," created by Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar, though not "poetry" *per se* or even strictly literary, is an aesthetic project with collectivity at its heart. Some of Noah Wardrip-Fruin's browser projects, gathering and aggregating language, were harbingers of other text productions to come, among dozens of other examples.

If the "death of the author" rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s promoted a rethinking, showing that cultural subjects were produced as much as they were produc-

ers (i.e., were enunciated subjects who were spoken, not merely enunciating subjects or speakers), the hypertrophic escalation of celebrity culture paradigms in the same era made the benefits of branding apparent even if the bathwater of originality had been tossed out with the creative writing baby. Written text has never been so radically and rapidly subject to the synthetic elimination of all trace of origin or authorship. The deracination of language in the web environment is enabled by the very character of digital text files—their fluidity and fungibility. Counted, sorted, repurposed and reordered, my texts are made of words as shared and generic as the letters that compose them. We may have

our individual stylistic fingerprint, the meme-genetic code with its identifying idiosyncrasies as distinct as our retinal imprint, but once returned to the field of language, poetic elements lose their defining identity quickly enough. The question of how poetic figures emerge from the field of language when discourse streams and live feed artifacts are constantly filtering the cultural soup complicates older distinctions between aesthetic and nonaesthetic objects. Modernism's acts of sublation, the challenge of the ordinary to the extraordinary that were conspicuous features of Dada, collage, and Duchamp's readymades, were gestures that registered because they still could. In our time aesthetic precincts have to be secured in order to guarantee an arena in which violations or outrages might register. Futurism's provocations would never find front-page billing nowadays.

Publicity machines and power moves are intimately related. The leverage

afforded to poetic or aesthetic discourse when its distinctness combined with visibility, when a poet was a mainstream celebrity figure, when a Byron could be the inspiration for an adjective that might characterize fashion, styles, ways of acting, thinking, being and being perceived, or a Rodchenko might aspire to reframe the world through a tilt of camera angle—that potential is gone. Aesthetic activity holds too small a market share of popular and mainstream culture to register on public consciousness, let alone public conscience. But for most of its several centuries' run, modernism's taproot in romantic ideology drew heavily on the notion of opposition and critique. Whether flaunting disregard for bourgeois conventions, or upending the tables of polite discourse, or slapping the face of public taste, the artistic attachment to posing a critique has been one of the hallmarks of the long legacy of romanticism up through the avant-garde and beyond. Attachment to some notion of politics as a

task for poetics, rooted in the notion of critique, is premised on the idea that artistic identity had a privileged role in the culture. Artists were other, somehow apart, the watchdogs, the *agents provocateurs*, the self-styled shamans, outsiders, whistleblowers, or keepers of the flame of moral conscience in a fallen world. Metaphors of salvation and redemption aside (and with them, all whiff of theology), the sense that the artist's role was linked to critique has come to be a feature of the contemporary scene. We can read the writings of the modern philosophers, aestheticians, the passionate advocates of social change, radical epistemological defamiliarizers and imaginative visionaries. All are premised on the same principle of utopian reform. Critique is so much the touchstone of aesthetic practice that it goes unquestioned, the every-other-word out of the mouth of MFA students, the unexamined term of discussion, my work, the work, everyone's work is always "a critique of"—just as the Cult Studs practitioners

Burning Deck 2012

Sarah Riggs: *Autobiography of Envelopes*

"In these brief, crisp and thought-provoking stanzas, Sarah Riggs investigates notions of address and possibilities of correspondences. The poems turn to — and around, tango with written and other characters their surfaces and depths as containers — and ask about the nature of character. They are highly observant and finely tuned time pieces, often in rain, in communication with poetry's insistent concerns of number, counting, what counts and what it may mean to count. This work offers so many tantalizing, illuminated options and questions as to continuity and duration: What are hours and what is ours? The clock is held open by Riggs' inventive spans and tempi. Here, instant after instant, at once stunning and muted, mutably, 'The poem addresses itself. We open, listen, magnify' and 'what we can't contain infuses us with meaning.'" —Stacy Doris

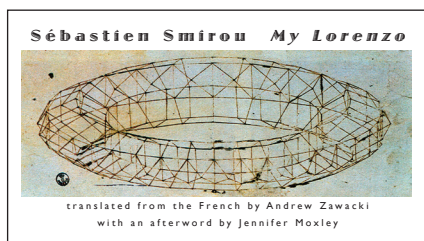
Poetry, 160 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback \$14



Sébastien Smirou: *My Lorenzo*

[Série d'écriture, No. 26; translated from the French by Andrew Zawacki]

My Lorenzo is an elegant, funny, often sad meditation on the fifteenth-century Italian statesman, art patron, and poet Lorenzo de Medici. Obliquely narrated, it telescopes historic depth into intimacy. And it is as concerned with physical arrangement as it is with linguistic ambiguity and matters philosophical, political, and sentimental. Reading the book with its purposely tableau-like shape is akin to touring the Uffizi, its Renaissance paintings hung meticulously along otherwise blank walls. In the lineage of Jacques Roubaud and of Louis Zukofsky's *80 Flowers* for its conceptual and numerical constraint, *My Lorenzo* however combines traditional form with an unapologetically modern idiom that shuttles vertiginously between theory-speak and speakeasy slang.



Poetry, 96 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, original paperback \$14

This work, published as part of a program providing publication assistance, received financial support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States and FACE (French American Cultural Exchange).



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are always laying bare the workings of media and cultural system, performing their “critiques” *ad nauseam* as if they were not complicit in the situations they put themselves outside of.

But as the theoretical precepts of complex systems begin to come online (in literal as well as metaphoric senses), the status of critique changes. If authorship and its myths of agency dissolve in a situation where writing is aggregated, made, constructed, processed so that poetics emerge out of the mass of discourse rather than being other from it, then the grounds of distinction on which the figure of the author gained purchase fall away as well. We become authoresses, components of an authorial stream, bits of the larger code tide. Critique was dependent on apart-ness and distinction, relied on the configured condition of identity to sustain its premises—the outsider otherness, a contrived stance at best, but a much-cherished one, was the requirement for such a practice, rooted in what look now like very mechanical distinctions of self and other, subject and object, self and world, perceiving consciousness and *a priori* phenomena.

In a cultural world where complex systems theory has emerged as a property of the very conditions it arises to explain, and a post-vitalist paradigm erases simplistic conceptions of an essential property intrinsic to “life forms,” the idea of the “living condition of language” no longer suggests a metaphor, but points to an actuality. The old model, in which the artist played moral conscience to the culture, but could never make headway, blocked in a paradigm of contradictions, in which false consciousness necessarily abounds, is replaced by a new materialist approach, in which systemic changes might be brought about to ensure the viability of the system’s own dynamic operations. Probably that is too utopian as well, but at least it removes the stigma of moral superiority from poet practitioners self-styling their work as political in a blunt instrument approach to the business of both politics and writing. The

reaction formation of political rhetoric to its circumstance always imprinted works with the mold of that to which they were opposed.

Is it odd to come to the end of a discussion of the institutionalization of conceptual writing with a description of systems thinking and emergent agency?

In his notion of the noosphere, Ivan Illich created a kind of weird science of emerging awareness in information spaces and systems, eclipsed the social studies of human agency or institutions. Rather than continue our study of media, we recognize we are part of the mediating system of study. Language is no longer merely a medium, but part of that cognitive informatics that subsumes human consciousness the way the alien energies absorbed the children’s awareness in Arthur Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*. All the old binarisms are rethought—subject/object, body/mind, self/other, avant-garde/mainstream, margin/center—and the procedural transformation of being as knowing makes *poiesis* a new *techne* in which we are the medium, not merely a means of its production or use.

Conceptualism is probably over now, even in its newest iterations. The generative energy has gone out of procedural work and gestures of appropriation, retranslation, transcribing, and other methods of production that take an idea as a point of departure and carry out its terms to whatever affectless effect can be realized. What will happen to poetry and imaginative work after the wave of conceptualisms finishes its full dismantling of received notions of author, text, originality and creativity? Conceptual writing signaled the end of the era of individual voice. Poetics of the swarm, mind-meld writing, *poiesis* as the *hapax legomenon* of the culture? Conceptual writing is not the same as algorithmic processing. Aesthetic practice is not the mirror neuron of the mainstream. But the operations currently performed on language and through language are having their way with us with similar effects.

NOTES:

1. http://datamining.typepad.com/data_mining/2011/10/the-hapax-legomenon-of-steve-jobs.html

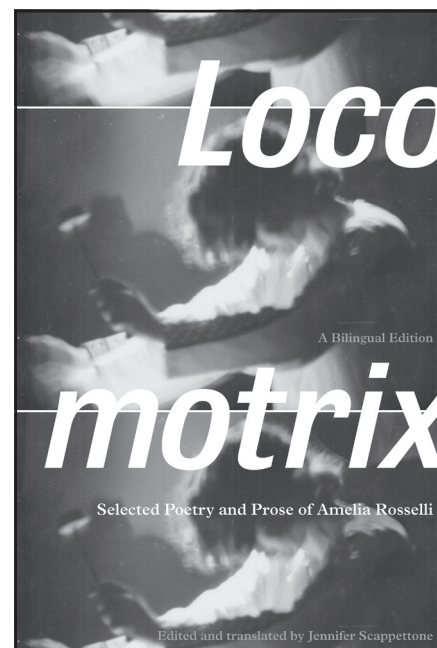
Johanna Drucker is a writer and artist known for her artists’ books, experimental typography and critical writings in the areas of contemporary art, graphic design and digital humanities. She is currently the inaugural Breslauer Professor in Bibliographical Studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California–Los Angeles. See <http://www.johannadrucker.com/>.

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“Rosselli’s poems stand out as a unique achievement, cultivating oblique, discontinuous forms that mix social diagnosis and satire, memory and introspection, tragedy and utopianism.”

Lawrence Venuti, Temple University
PAPER \$29.00

The University of Chicago Press
www.press.uchicago.edu

The Days of the Commune

A Play in Solidarity with Occupy Wall Street



The Days of the Commune, by Bertolt Brecht, will be performed every Saturday and Sunday, now through May, from 11:00AM to 1:30PM at Liberty Square (Zuccotti Park). Zoe Beloff, whose artwork appears in this issue, is instigator and director of this production. See daysofthecommune.com for more information.

Left: The flyer for the production.

Below: Photographs from the play in its opening weekend, March 3–4, 2012.



Tranströmer John Beer

The zenithed sun hangs offstage, the way
somebody might announce: "Let's load
the poem." The legend fogged.
Photos emerge on the screen,

and Simonson kills the sound,
urges us down unchosen waterfalls.
Where are you hiding? You represent
the misspelled plan, the criminal

conspiracy I'd like to disavow:
the credit check undid me. Shenzhen,
Palermo, the hurt bone held inside,
and finally a scribbled message from my friend.

"Hey wheelbarrow, put orphan clothes on me."
Everyone thought to walk along the harbor,
as even the academy votes to understand,
or would vote, if the members could stand up

like paper towel displays, compact and yellow,
and quit their fated unison. Bashful,
inept, we file toward the door,
leave a stained trail of napkins.

John Beer is the author of The Waste Land and Other Poems (Canarium, 2010). He lives in Portland, Oregon, and teaches at Portland State University.

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Jump Out! Sustain! Kick!

On a Poetics of Stamina, Desiring Finesse

Rodrigo Toscano

I've been asked to interrelate my experience as a youth immersed in martial arts, my current poetic practice and my mid-life dedication to competitive running. There are indeed common threads that run between the three passions.

From karate (five hours a day, six days a week, seven years), the problematic of form and content took deep root in my body—as mind. The very notion of “desirable” outcomes gleaned from controlled environments is something that still propels me forward. I don't think of words on the page as “arrangements” (as in a craft sensibility) so much as tactical nodes of energy in multiple arrays of probable results.

By way of aiming trajectories of meaning-force to a specific part of a body (actual, discursive) and remaining alert to multiple responses resulting from that action, I learn a vital portion of the material dimensions of the matters I am grappling with. I've never been very sympathetic to representations of poetry as being non-collisionary, boundlessly elliptical—the “wise” Zen-inspired poetics of stillness.

Remaining alert—at the physiognomic level—is key for me. The kind of writing I hate to read never responds in *combinations*. The point is not to land a single kick, line, cadence, but to have that kick, line, rhetorical rejoinder, restage the body in such a way as to *re-ready it* into a form from where it can act *again* with a force and efficiency that is either explosively expended or strategically withheld. I've witnessed many a quiet orator of poetry “dismantle” a loud, boisterous co-reader with well-executed combinations—reverse crescent kick followed by counterpunch followed by 360-degree scissors floor sweep and lock followed by double chop to the metaphor.

I am also talking about being profoundly competitive—*against oneself*. The hours, months and years of dedication to form (form as an actual *place* where unexpected, “happy” accidents can occur) is itself a form. Self-competition here means to be increasingly conscious of the overall *shape* of one's thinking.

An early and complete immersion in that world of discrete physical materiality—martial arts—is what first led me to meditate on “space,” its shape. I find nothing more unnerving than poets prattling on about “space” when it's clear to everyone they don't have a developed, tactile-carnal feel for the very *question* of space. Space in no way refers to “silence,” “emptiness,” nor “gaps” of anything. It's more about venturing to gauge the very *horizon* of one's activity—from all sides. *What am I doing, here, now?* Thus, my transition from karate to experimental writing was seamless.

§

Running can be thought of as something most of us are physically “made to do,” and I agree with that evolutionary perspective wholeheartedly; however, running can also be equally thought of as the *achievement* of running. Same goes for language; we can treat it both as a function of biology as well as a cultural endeavor.

Though running is commonly spoken of as a singularity, at base, it is a confluence of several running “systems.” To do it “better,” to achieve endurance, stamina, ease and speed, one has to consciously *sync* several interrelated running systems (aerobic capacity, anaerobic endurance, lactic acid clearing processes, etc.). Each system can be targeted for improvement. Each system is thought of as a site of energy transfer to another.

Writing for me presents those exact challenges. For example, a steady diet of daily writing—slow writing that is not too glamorous (emails, letters, communiqués) provides an overall “base” for other kinds of writing. This would be analogous to the long, slow run. The overall writing “capacity” grows, deepens, and it's from that base, that achieved strength, that short “races”/poems can be executed with greater finesse.

In running, we say that all kinds of training leads to “stress.”

- Stress leading to positive adaptation.*
- Stress that is compressed, “stacked,” race-ready.*
- Stress leading to long-term fatigue—burnout, injury.*

Most poets have seen their colleagues experience all three types of stresses. Wouldn't it be mutually advantageous if we could talk more openly about “syncing” our writing activities—poets speaking as athletes!

Competitive runners are also fond of saying that runners essentially do only three things:

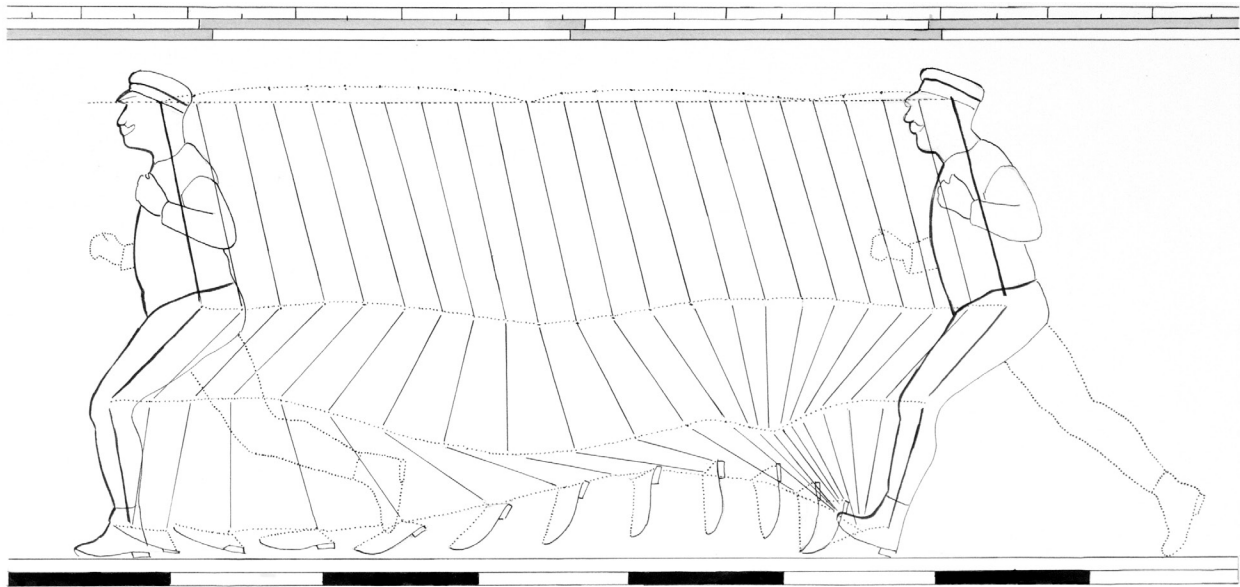
- Run.*
- Recover from running.*
- Do things that aid running (e.g., strength and flexibility exercises).*

When you talk to a runner who's at that very moment not running, trust me, they're *actively* thinking of it as recovery, whether they're at that moment walking, sitting at a reading or having drinks with you.

“How's your writing going?”

“Well, I'm not writing right now.”

“Ah, so what race do you have your sights on?”



La Maratonista (from *Deck of Deeds*)

Inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints had never occurred to her as something to even think about, something to mull over in great detail, let alone something to dote on with deep affection, something to *gift* to people whose devotional admiration of inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints borders on religious ecstasy.

She can spot them a mile away now. The way their pupils lock in and dilate at the first sighting of their terrifyingly demanding object of study. They're slaves, actually, slaves that willingly submit to their bonded condition; the more they prostrate themselves before the altar, the more *bountifully free* they feel!

This strange new world that she's since committed to fully exploring was first introduced to her by accident, by a total stranger, at an unexpected time. The odd thing is that she wasn't wearing carbon electron free-radical released, polyurethane blue-and-gold racing shoes, but fair-trade cotton vegan sandals, when the stranger stopped her as she strode across the Broadway and 42ND Street crosswalk in Manhattan, northwest corner.

YES, she *had* felt those emotions locked in her inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints for a long time. YES, if she hadn't felt all of the fifty-six emotions that the stranger described in minutest detail, then certainly she had felt many of them, *enough* of them. Their mutual empathy was immediately sealed.

As she took off her *non-urethane*, *non-carbon* electron free-radical released fair-trade cotton vegan sandals in her yoga studio, and slipped off her hemp fiber compression socks, she

felt a sensation of excitement in *some* of her inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints as they met the open air by way of the stranger's scalpel. They both shared a giggle that lasted about seven seconds. As soon as the "giggling" ended, she watched as the stranger set up a toddler-sized microscope and straddled it *whole body*; she sensed the glow of the instrument's 200-watt mercury bulb lighting up the stranger's bulging right eyeball.

The sensation of having been dissected was odd at first, but surprisingly pleasing, like the high of a jasmine-raspberry tea coming on as a wide-turning city bus nearly crushes you. The stranger then shifted her focus to a left-calf hematoma just beginning to surface, and then back to the inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints; additional murmurations on lower-limb morbidities worked their way from smooth descriptions of lactic acid hyper-production, to the wrinkled, tubular, curving counters of the newest pharmaceutical speculations about cerebral cortex functions; then something about the bony ridge that ran alongside the lime-encrusted skull of a human ancestor, then back to the four pudgy toes of a nearly extinct ape snuggled next to an imperially imposing distant cousin's fully flexed pinky. Gradually, she felt a mixture of new emotions escape from her inflamed metatarsophalangeal joints journeying throughout her entire body.

Ever since that fortuitous midtown Manhattan day, she's had the ability to synchronize her eyes onto others' eyes whose sole focus is—that *thing*. It is a damage/repair understanding of the world. It is also a *life-injecting* exchange between two random people in the big city.

Rodrigo Toscano's newest book of poetry is *Deck of Deeds* (Counterpath Press, 2012). Collapsible Poetics Theater, his previous book, was a 2007 National Poetry Series Selection. His poetry has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Against Expression*, *Diasporic Avant-Gardes*, and *Poetic Voices without Borders*.

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POETRY PROJECT READING REPORT

FRIDAY 2/10/12
THE HOLE, A GATHERING

In a night dedicated to Stacy Doris—whose life, work and passing created a palpable undercurrent in the room—Brett Price hosted a celebration of Thom Donovan's book, *The Hole*. Not wanting to give a traditional reading, Donovan invited presenters (Melissa Buzzeo, Daria Fain, Brenda Iijima, Madhu Kaza, Robert Kocik, Dottie Lasky, Andrew Levy, Sreshta Rit Premnath, Eléna Rivera, Eleni Stecopoulos, Tyrone Williams and Dot Devota on behalf of Brandon Shimoda) to talk "around" the book or on matters "personally urgent." *The violence of one voice demands a hearing.*

What followed was an extension of the discourse on poetry and community that runs through the book. Through the sharing of poems, appropriations, essays, emails, "radical autobiographical practice" and memories, a community contemplating loss, poetry, politics and friendship (among other things) emerged. *A wreck of voices.*

Was it a gathering of (or for) a coterie? I don't think so, not in any negative sense, at least. Like many communities, it was comprised of those present, those invoked, the absent and the unnamed. *Song getting sung for the numerous.* Donovan acknowledges that he uses coterie, though, as a constraint; specific people were invited to contribute to both the book and the reading. But as is often the case with constraints, the real poetry happens in the fissures, what extends beyond, or in spite of, the limit.

Inexplicably someone hollers back the voice our eager participation has made:

*being before been or now to be home without organism limits us
our limited humanity beyond organism at home beyond the language
we understand to be speaking as clarity dissolves into space
and space into body thrown back like a lyric in which each
they is porous and what's salvageable is that we are here
together and not strangers while our jobs, relationships, etc. fill
or make the void comfortable or not as we skip through the subways
knowing that healing distinct from curing is vital and German shepherds
are transparencies through which meanings fly unquiet and exposed
in pencil shavings that trace the outline of nothing not being nothing
in a fucked subject blur kind of way that asks who has
proprietaryship over a hole and does it matter and why or why not*

– SUSAN LANDERS

Stacy Doris (1962-2012): In Memory and In Work

Sarah Riggs

Laish Gedalya Doris-Wiener (five years old) asked me what I was doing scribbling into a little notebook. “I’m writing a story of your mom’s life,” I said. He asked, “In English?”

I learned from Chet Wiener that Stacy Doris was as proficient in Spanish as she was in French. After graduating from Brown University, Stacy spent a couple of years in Spain, before her beloved French period, which lasted the rest of her life. In the past decade she also applied herself to studying Arabic while in San Francisco and Amorgos, where she also learned some Greek.

Stacy’s is a plural universe, very peopled and full of languages. The notion of separate worlds mingling and weaving through each other was integral to her sense of life, and to her work, both printed and enacted in performances and sound plays. The dissonant symphonies of voices in *Kildare*, *Conference*, *Paramour*, *Cheerleader’s Guide to the World: Council Book* and *The Cake Part*,¹ and the intricate internal music of *Knot* or the forthcoming *Fledge: A Phenomenology of Spirit*, created constant movement:

*To spin carves rooms. Color
pinks. Recognizing shade
you point to your face. ‘Shade,’
you sing out to make sure
it won’t skip. When our shades
skip we hug them to bits.
That scrapes gravity off
see through just for me now*

As an adolescent in Connecticut, Stacy began first to make iron sculptures, larger than life-size, and to paint in her own atelier, as well as to write. At age fifteen she learned of the Pompidou Center opening in Paris, and determined she would go sometime. She was later asked by the Pompidou to contribute a text for *Objet Beckett*, and her last trip to France was to perform her work growing out of *Paramour* with Anne Portugal and Caroline Dubois at the Pompidou in 2010.

At Iowa Writers’ Workshop in the mid-80s, she met her husband, Chet Wiener. Her two books written in French are accounts of the life of Chet. She once told me that she would never be able to grasp the humor the French found in these renderings. She was even interviewed on French television discussing *La vie de Chester Steven Wiener écrite par sa femme*.

You must really live with Chester to know how he is the most intelligent and the sweetest and most reasonable man there is. To give you a tiny example, he does not put away plates and bowls according to their size and use, like everyone else does; he puts them away according to a system that is most aesthetical and practical. (Translation: François Luong)

She loved to swim, and would chase the horizon to magnificent points around the globe, lapping the miles with Chet. Water, and the light that filtered through it, was a kind of alternate language for her. For two years after the birth of their children, Stacy and Chet traveled in Greece, Hawaii, Key West and elsewhere, seeking places to swim where their children could romp freely.

Stacy also loved New York. The ability to hail a cab by stepping into the street defined for her the notion of a city, and she felt at home in Times Square. Her teaching life flourished there, and the dozens of poets who studied with her can attest to her polyphonous style, roaming, cross-cutting, treating each individual as a metropolis. She developed a passion for memorization, and, with her students at San Francisco State University, learned by heart several of Keats’ odes, some of Hopkins, early Yeats, and many other poems. Her children could fill in lines when she paused.

Translations were part of her life in several ways, as a means to earn a living (books on cigars, snowdomes and orchids among them), to make a strong aesthetic commitment to

another (notably *Christophe Tarkos: Ma Langue Est Poétique: Selected Work*), and to share with her students.

Stacy died of a rare form of cancer that attacked her abdomen, after three-and-a-half years of colossal efforts to be well, with doctors around the world. During this period there were extended periods of health and enjoyment, including many hikes. On January 31, Susan Gevirtz watched with her the last light that she could see over the bay from her bedroom at home, and Chet was with her when she died at 10:10PM. Norma Cole writes, “This is the beginning. She is not gone yet.... Poetry and the world of imagination meant everything, were everything for Stacy. I say it as though it’s in the past, because she is no longer in the world, but those of us who are her friends, and there are very many, are still speaking with her.”

Lisa Robertson writes in the new anthology *Revolution: A Reader*, “One of the great innovative readers of political disjecta, San Francisco poet, researcher and sound artist Stacy Doris, works at the far edges of the senses, where historical intelligence is a sense also.” Every book and project involved a new constellation of preoccupations, and a deep study of one book, or dozens. Her research into Marie Antoinette at the Bibliothèque Nationale produced *The Cake Part*, and her engagement with Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* led her to call her *Fledge* a translation of Hegel’s book.

Her last work in the making was on time, and on how people like her and her daughter Rayzl (whose name means “rose” in Yiddish) are together in time even before or after their lives begin or end. It takes the shape of notes she wrote for the kids, and of conceptions of time—multiple, full of love, dimensional, earthly and elusively clear as the universe. Stacy’s generosity of spirit infuses our time, being as it is, strangely and tremendously.

NOTES:

1. For enactments, see Stacy’s Electronic Poetry Center page [<http://http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/doris/>] or her Vimeo channel [<http://vimeo.com/user7104620>].

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PARTIALLY KEPT

GAIL SCOTT
THE OBITUARY

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Interview

Rachel Levitsky and Gail Scott

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN AND TALK TO GAIL SCOTT, a great friend and the author of four major experimental novels: *Heroine*, *Main Brides*, *My Paris*, and now *The Obituary* (Coach House Books (Canada), 2010; Nightboat Books (U.S.), forthcoming). As with each of her novels, *The Obituary* is a *tour de force*, in which previously unseen possibilities are written into the very form and concept of the novel. Of this book and its place in experimental prose, Robert Glück writes:

*The Obituary...is a model for what can be accomplished....Scott has put so much pressure on language that she has made her own kind of poetry....The city itself, and the disjunctions of place, language and race are lived through in the most detailed ways, without prudery, and they create schisms in identity that are so present they are hard to endure. That is, the alienations that occur inside the self (class, race) are realized on a formal level, and so here is an example of a splendid leap over that great divide, from content to form.*¹

Scott has also been an critical advocate for experimental prose—as feminist discourse—for over twenty years, from the founding of the magazine *Tessera*, to the Québécois feminist theory group that put out *La théorie, un dimanche* (Remue Menage, 1989; forthcoming in English translation as *Theory, A Sunday*, Belladonna*, 2012), to writing the volume of essays *Spaces Like Stairs* (The Women's Press, 1989; forthcoming in an expanded edition from Bookthug) to editing with Robert Glück, Mary Burger and Camille Roy the website *Narrativity*, which turned into the go-to prose theory anthology *Biting the Error*. – RACHEL LEVITSKY

Rachel Levitsky: I'd like to start right away by talking about your major new novel, *The Obituary*, just now being released in the U.S. How did it originally form as a book project?

Gail Scott: It was generated by an interest in repression of the aboriginal presence, including dead family members, particularly in urban space. But I'm suspicious of quest novels or root novels that bank on the kind of historicizing that Walter Benjamin calls out in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in which he proposes, alternatively, "now-time" (*jetztzeit*), picturing the angel of history, obsessed by the pile of time's detritus accumulating at his feet, while a violent wind catapults him toward the future.

So, the very first challenge in the writing of this novel was to hold the present moment exploding into the space of writing, bearing with it all the traces and debris. I decided to make the novel an edifice, an urban edifice, what we call a triplex, a very particular kind of housing in Montreal.

RL: In which you live?

GS: In which I live.

RL: So, *what*, then, is a triplex?

GS: It's three-stack flats, long and narrow, quite like in San Francisco, except in Montreal we have this strange staircase going halfway up the façade of the building. I felt that the building could breathe this story, that it permitted a setup of three stories of warring neighbors and a basement where I

put a historian. Even the walls speak, reverberating with both the past and with voices from the street. One of the ways in which I challenge the constraint of the novel form is to disperse whatever would be considered a speaking subject. In this novel I try and break down into multiple parts the so-called character "Rosine," who is a woman on a bed or in a window on the top floor of the triplex.

RL: In the introduction to *Nadja*—and this is a place in that book I return to a lot—André Breton writes a particularly eviscerating rejection of conventional "characterization," of the notion of building a "fictional" person based on other "real" persons. The facets of *The Obituary*—I/Rosine, Face, Fly, Gendarme, Police Officer, Grandpa, Veeera, Mac Beth the therapist, the PC Lesbian Historian—these certainly cannot be seen as barely masked characters based on the neighbor or the woman down the street or the one that you met at the bar...and yet there are more voices speaking directly to us in this book than in your previous novel, *My Paris*.

GS: I don't see them as characters, I see them as sharded presences embedded in text....The erotic presence (the fly) who is also Rosine's masculine side, the PC Lesbian, a kind of super-ego. There is a figure on the bed, or in the window, which is a projection of the everyday, and includes voices ventriloquized from the exterior, as well as memories on the computer that a kid in the stairwell is hacking. I don't see them as characters because they don't have a psychological quality.

RL: Do the sharded presences allow for or provide the novel with a simultaneous and various time-space?

GS: As with time and the map in *The Obituary*, the figures bleed; their fluid, indeterminate status opens the door to experimenting with “novel” time—again, Benjamin’s notion of “now-time”—because time is not the matter of a singular speaking voice (Nadja subsumed by André). In Benjamin’s famous Paris history, he achieves this effect of dynamic, dialogic, contradictory construction of time via his montage method. “Now-time” also seems to me to be very grounded in the material, at the same time representing a kind of transcendence in the form of those exploding moments of awareness, especially during struggle, when things come together, and then are dispersed and we are back to being someone, or many ones, walking in the street or whatever.

Very often in *The Obituary*, historical memories are juxtaposed onto an image or an object or a sound, such as the moment when the fly in the stairwell is listening to what he perceives as a dissonant lullaby emitting from the decorations on rue Settler-Nun’s buildings’ cornices. The cornices represent various aspects of imperialism, such as the French fleur-de-lys and the never-setting Sun-of-British Empire, etc. But the fly hears them as a lullaby, and when the word “lullaby” appears in the text, the lesbian at the bottom of the page pops in and talks about the origins of “Rock-a-bye Baby,” written after a Pilgrim lady, seeing a native baby’s cradleboard strung up in a tree, pens a poem imagining—one can’t help thinking she is imagining *hopefully*—the native baby falling off the tree. Time brings threads together into a focused space, and then it disperses.

RL: They are not characters, but they do “voice.” Compared to *My Paris*, a book in which the narrator is equally straddled by details competing for attention—perhaps even more material details—the overall composition of *The Obituary* is vocal cacophony.

GS: In *The Obituary*, rather than tell, I tried to compose sentences, voices, text, songs, ancestors, urban cacophony as counterpoint: the inner stairway, for example, is a sound-box that resonates with

voices and thoughts from the old French gendarme, in love with the Grandfather (and therefore peeking through Rosine’s keyhole); his younger cop assistant, who just wants to put a dress on and play Ligeia at the National Theater School but who has to be in cop school because his uniform-fetishist father wants him to be there; a homeless woman on the street, crazy, saying wild things all way the through, a little reminiscent of the voice coming from the garden in Duras’ *India Song*; dead shale-pit workers who sing drinking songs in Québécois French; and always, the dead.

RL: The dead. I’d like to ask you about ghostliness and time. I think the way that it is set up at the start of the book—viz. Settler-Nun, Shale Pit Workers and Crystal Palace—these ghostly factors precede the entry of the mother, Veeera, who becomes more central later in the book. I have this sense that the ghostly frame is built as a manner of welcoming her.

GS: It’s interesting how the mother is present in the many voices with which we speak, especially the dead mother. Look at the passages we read from Barthes’ *Journal de deuil* aujourd’hui [laughter over Gail’s inadvertent use of French], where he speaks of “*l’endroit de la chambre où elle a été malade, où elle est morte et où j’habite maintenant...*” (“the place in the room where she was sick and died and which I now inhabit...”).

RL: Spectral architecture that welcomes the ghost body of the mother, but also the ghost of that which has been linguistically suppressed: native/indigenous/aboriginal speech.

GS: The architecture isn’t mere backdrop, it *is*, as you indicate, also spectral, ghostly, waving emblems of imperialism from the façades of buildings. Everything is intertwined; the mother’s presence serves doubly as trope for Canadian assimilationist policies, policies thought of rightly or wrongly, by the non-indigenous population in Canada, to be different from those of the States’ strategy of more direct elimination. The Canadian authorities had all kinds of devious tricks bristling with genocidal intention, including

kidnapping children, forcing them into residential schools to make them white.

RL: There were domestication programs in the States in addition to genocide, I don’t know if they were private “charity” or state “policy.”

GS: I was thinking the whole time that at any native event there will be a moment of silence calling the land into the presence of those who have moved there. I was thinking about the “aboriginal” as a kind of presence under the rest of the story, a presence both repressed and present, because indigenous culture is definitely increasingly urban and burgeoning. The mother is part of that past that is present, she is part of the ground, almost.

RL: There’s a duality in the mother, her body is carried through the child’s body, a particular, then through all the other bodies she is also connected to. She is I/ Rosine’s and she is everyone’s. The novel reads like that, the particular of I/Rosine, and the particular of all the parts, speaking at once.

GS: A lovely way to put it. There is a difference between narrative and story. I like the idea that story operates on a completely different web than what we tend to think of as narrative—because we are taught to think of narrative a certain way. Here we can recall Gertrude Stein: “Narrative is anything happening after any other thing.” Story moves back and forth between the so-called inside/ outside, is attentive to the relationality of the process, is not necessarily going anywhere fast. Novels are marketed products—the more you can sell, the better—which seems to mean having a nice narrative arc, an impulse gathering toward the end; every sentence is treated as part of getting there, even if the route is devious. As Joshua Clover has said, “Narrative is out there somewhere—but it is processed into structure before it can appear.”

One of my favorite prose works currently is Roberto Bolaño’s *Antwerp*, a work infinitely more experimental than any of his others. Bolaño himself said it was the *only* one he wasn’t ashamed of. How can

you explain that novel? The sentences maintain a consistently paratactic relationship to each other. There is a kind of metonymic working-out as you go through the passages, which makes the book feel like a novel when you arrive at the end, although the reading experience is *not* that of reading a novel.

RL: *Antwerp* (like your novels) is grounded in a visual architecture that is physically real—perhaps that is one thing that makes it prose, not poetry. I love that novel for a lot of reasons, but politically it is more interior to me than any of your work. I'm not sure why. Perhaps there is less pressure on his individual sentences. Once you said to me that your politics are connected to not performing the poetic line. And yet, I perceive in the course of your body of work, as you work the novel form into greater excess, there is a parallel movement toward condensation and getting rid of the excesses within the sentence.

GS: It seems to me that to write in sentences is to pressure the relationship of address. Bob (Glück) says in “Long Note on New Narrative” that “perhaps narrative reaches outward toward the community whose story is being told.” At the same time, and sometimes contradictorily, as experimental prose moves towards the field of poetry, poets teach us to do away with the excess that makes so much fiction incredibly tedious and predictable. Poetry also instructs regarding the importance of space to breathe, to think. For my part, I like to think that one can put together a sentence that suggests multiple registers of reading—squeals, the cadence of background jabber, rhetoric, stolen kisses, stolen language—composed into something that is not what has come to be known as narration.

RL: I'd like to add to that a reminder of the amazing critique against forward propulsion and closure, period-space-stop-next, that you lay out in your essay “The Sutured Subject,” which will be included

in the reissue this year of *Spaces Like Stairs* by Bookthug.

GS: The period implies the project of telling or recounting. Since I seem to work in longer prose forms and I want to maintain that space as unspoken, the challenge is how to pack the novel with language that is vertical, vertical and layered, or composite. It isn't that *every* sentence has a paratactic relationship to every other sentence; it's not the same as the “new sentence” that Ron Silliman writes about. Rather, I take chunks of events or moments or thinking and recompose them into an assemblage or montage underscoring relation. It's interesting when framed by the shape of the novel, with its very traditional expectation. The novel as form becomes my constraint, and within that constraint I try to do everything to stretch it out of shape and to break open the relations between the parts.

RL: Is there any difference in your mind between the period at the end of the fragment and the period at the end of a sentence that has a verb or a display of action?

GS: I don't think that I have ever thought about it like that. I proceed with the sound requirements of the moment. That may be disappointing as an answer, but cities have particular sounds. Sounds aren't only what comes out of people's mouths; sounds are also the way the architecture jingles and jangles together, particularly vernacular architectures, and of course various media make their own various noises. In that little passage we looked at in *The Obituary* earlier [before interview], the child Rosine goes to see the movie *Dial M For Murder*, where, instead of hearing someone “dialing” M for murder, the child hears “diming” M for murder because her grandfather is a businessman and he is always talking about diming people, as in the expression “nickeling and diming.” The noise functions as an anecdote that comes back to the language of profit.

RL: That's not disappointing; it leads me to recall Charles Bernstein's introduction to *Close Listening*, accounting for meaning in extralexical content, also pointing out that just because we are not working in traditional forms doesn't mean that there is not some sort of external pressure on the choices experimental writers make, which have to do with sound and the way that people hear. “*Aurality precedes orality*, just as language precedes speech.”

GS: That is apt in terms of what I am trying to do when I talk about composition. As *The Obituary* is a composition of pieces of the everyday, the voices that penetrate that everyday are vernacular, and often they are French voices speaking English with a French accent or with the strange accent of people of the mother's family. This is the third novel that is set in Montreal and I think it is probably the end of that project of animating the city from many different angles.

RL: It's a beautiful project. Yesterday during our walk, I was thinking this exactly: that having read Gail Scott's novels, having visited with her, having walked with her and been in conversation with her about cities like New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, but most especially Montreal, I see and hear this city, animated through three novels—*Heroine*, *Main Brides* and *The Obituary*—and so it is very vibrant, very vivid, and I experience a simultaneity of time through the layering. And although that has already long been done for a city like Paris, for which literature had already detailed most everything by the end of the 19th century, your *My Paris* updates that literature for the 21st-century visitor, if she wants to be in the present.

Rachel Levitsky is the author of two books of poetry and a forthcoming novel. She teaches at Pratt Institute and is a member of the Belladonna Collaborative.*

Gail Scott's fourth novel, The Obituary, was a finalist for the Grand Prix du Livre de Montréal. Her other works include essays, short prose and manifestos. She teaches at the Université de Montréal.

NOTES:

1. Excerpted from “My Two Cents,” an essay by Robert Glück on *The Obituary* written for a forthcoming special issue of *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory* on the work of Gail Scott.

JACK KEROUAC SCHOOL OF DISEMBODIED POETICS

SUMMER WRITING PROGRAM

JUNE 11-JULY 8
2012

WEEK 1 June 11-June 17

Archival Poetics & The War on Memory

Charles Alexander, Rebecca Brown, Brenda Coultas, Steve Dickison, E. Tracy Grinnell, HR Hegnauer, David Henderson, Lisa Jarnot, Dawn Lundy Martin, Cynthia Miller, Prageeta Sharma, Eleni Sikelianos, Stacy Szymaszek, Steven Taylor, Jalal Toufic & Magdalena Zurawski

WEEK 2 June 18-June 24

Cultural Rhizomes & Intentional Communities

Sherwin Bitsui, CAConrad, Danielle Dutton, Allison Hedge Coke, Bob Holman, Laird Hunt, Pierre Joris, Vincent Katz, Stephen Motika, Alexs Pate, Nicole Peyrafitte, Wang Ping, Margaret Randall & Julia Seko

WEEK 3 June 25-July 1

Science, Sanity & Evolution

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Tisa Bryant, Ambrose Bye, Julie Carr, Clark Coolidge, Samuel R. Delany, Michelle Ellsworth, Brian Evenson, Noah Eli Gordon, Anselm Hollo, Joanne Kyger, Karen Randall, Selah Saterstrom, Edwin Torres & Anne Waldman

WEEK 4 July 2-July 8

Performance & Collaboration

Laurie Anderson, Amiri Baraka, Caroline Bergvall, Toi Derracotte, Kenneth Goldsmith, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Bhanu Kapil, Thurston Moore, Tracie Morris, Jena Osman, Brad O'Sullivan, Claudia Rankine, Roberto Tejada & Matvei Yankelevich

RE-INHABIT
LANGUAGE



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EVENTS at THE POETRY PROJECT

MONDAY 4/9

ELIZABETH REDDIN & LAURIE WEEKS

Elizabeth Reddin plays music in a story band called Legends, with Raquel Vogl and James Loman. Her first full collection, *The Hot Garment of Love Is Insecure*, was published by Ugly Duckling Presse in 2007. **Laurie Weeks'** fiction and other writings have been published in *The Baffler*, *Vice*, *Nest*, *Index*, *LA Weekly*, *The New Fuck You*, and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2008*. She has taught at the University of California–San Diego and the New School, and has toured the U.S. with the girl-punk group Sister Spit.

WEDNESDAY 4/11

STEPHEN MOTIKA & BRIAN TEARE

Stephen Motika's first book, *Western Practice*, will be published by Alice James Books in April 2012. He is also the editor of *Tiresias: The Collected Poems of Leland Hickman* (2009), the program director at Poets House, and the editor and publisher of Nightboat Books. A former National Endowment for the Arts fellow, **Brian Teare** is the recipient of poetry fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Headlands Center for the Arts. He is the author of *The Room Where I Was Born*, *Sight Map*, the Lambda Literary Award-winning *Pleasure*, and *Companion Grasses*, forthcoming from Omnidawn in 2013.

MONDAY 4/16

TALK SERIES: LANNY JORDAN JACKSON

"The cave that sets limits to our rage" ...in which **Lanny Jordan Jackson** will project and talk on/over an evening of others' movies. From a cerebral voiced-over meditation on a ruin to a comic assault on pedagogy in an adaptation of a children's book, to a compulsively repetitive short film, and finally to a most burlesque feature presentation, packed with improvised dialogue, stuttering, and a climactic recitation of Poe. Jackson's current projects include designing and editing a small press, bas-books (www.bas-books.com), and acting as editor and participant in the second volume of *Collective Task*, a year-long collaborative art and writing experiment.

WEDNESDAY 4/18

THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JOE BRAINARD

Join us to celebrate The Library of America's publication of *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*. Its 450 pages present, for the first time, the full range of Brainard's writing in all its deadpan wit, madcap inventiveness, self-revealing frankness, and generosity of spirit. With Anselm Berrigan, Lee Ann Brown, Michael Brownstein, Bill Corbett, Donna Dennis, Larry Fagin, Ed Friedman, Michael

Lally, Keith McDermott, Thurston Moore, Charles North, Ron Padgett, David Shapiro, Johnny Stanton, Tony Towle, Anne Waldman, Lewis Warsh and Edmund White. Reading followed by reception. Co-presented with The Library of America and *BOMB Magazine*.

FRIDAY 4/20, 10PM

LAURA NEUMAN & THIS HORSE IS NOT A HOME BY DEVYNN EMORY

Laura Neuman is a poet who sometimes collaborates with dancers. She/xe has performed and co-created work with The Workshop for Potential Movement (www.potentiallymoving.org). *This Horse Is Not a Home* is an exploration in movement, sound and performance by **devynn emory**. emory holds close personal relationships with all three performers in this work, and began research to find out what happens when a body intercepts another body's space and identity.

MONDAY 4/23

B. C. EDWARDS & RYAN DOYLE MAY

B. C. Edwards is a producer at The Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in New York. He is the author of the forthcoming collection of fiction, *The Aversive Clause*, and two forthcoming collections of poetry, *To Mend Small Children* and *From the Standard Cyclopedia of Recipes*. **Ryan Doyle May's** work has appeared in numerous journals. He is the author of the chapbook *The Anatomy of Gray* (Corresponding Society Press) and acted as the lead in the short film *August*, which was selected for the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

WEDNESDAY 4/25

PAMELA LU & MÓNICA DE LA TORRE

Pamela Lu is the author of the books *Ambient Parking Lot* (Kenning Editions, 2011) and *Pamela: A Novel* (Atelos, 1999), as well as the chapbook *The Private Listener* (Corollary Press, 2006). **Mónica de la Torre's** poetry books include *Talk Shows* (Switchback), *Public Domain* (Roof Books), *Acúfenos* (Taller Ditoria) and *Sociedad Anónima* (UNAM/Bonobos). She has translated Latin American poets, has edited multilingual anthologies, and is senior editor at *BOMB Magazine*. This event is co-presented with The Asian American Writer's Workshop.

FRIDAY 4/27, 10PM

JASON MORRIS & SUNNYLYN THIBODEAUX

Jason Morris grew up in Vermont. His two books are *Spirits & Anchors* (Auguste Press, 2010) and *From the Golden West Notebooks* (Allone Co., 2011). He lives in San Francisco and edits *Big Bell* and *PUSH*. **Sunnylyn Thibodeaux** is the author of *Palm to Pine*

(Bootstrap, 2011) and many small books including *20/20 Yielding* (Blue Press, 2005), *Room Service Calls* (Lew Gallery, 2009) and *United Untied* (Private Edition, 2008).

MONDAY 4/30

LONELY CHRISTOPHER & TRISHA LOW

Lonely Christopher is a poet, playwright and filmmaker. He is the author of *The Mechanics of Homosexual Intercourse* (Akashic Books). His latest projects include the chapbook *Poems in June* (The Corresponding Society) and the feature length film *MOM* (Cavazos Films), which he wrote and directed. **Trisha Low** is the author of *Confessions [of a variety]* and *Target Is Bustling and Friendly* (with Tyler Antoine, both from Gauss PDF). Other work has appeared in *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, *Artifice Magazine* and *Elective Affinities*.

WEDNESDAY 5/2

MICAH BALLARD & JOANNE KYGER

Micah Ballard's recent books include *Waifs and Strays* (City Lights Books, 2011), *Parish Krewes* (Bootstrap Press, 2009), *Poems from the New Winter Palace* (Arrow as Aarow, 2010) and *Evangeline Downs* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2006). **Joanne Kyger**, a native Californian, is the author of many books of poetry. Her more recent are *About Now: Collected Poems*, *As Ever: Selected Poems*, *Not Veracruz*, and *Lo & Behold*. She will be teaching again this summer at Naropa's Summer Writing Program.

FRIDAY 5/4, 8PM

SPRINGING: THURSTON MOORE & JOHN ZORN—A BENEFIT

\$25 ADVANCE/\$30 AT DOOR
(SENIORS/STUDENTS \$25 ADVANCE/AT DOOR)
Advance ticket sales will open up March 27–April 8 to Project Members only, and April 9 onward to the general public. See poetryproject.org for details on advance purchase and other exclusive offers. Duo action! **John Zorn** (reeds), **Thurston Moore** (electric guitar), and an opening set of poetry with LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, erica kaufman and Dana Ward. Zorn is a musician/composer who lives and works in New York. He has consistently strived to present a wild, nonhierarchical dynamic in the practice of improvisation, composition and ensemble playing. His works are a multitude of recordings and performances ranging from basement hovels to the whiff of uptown heraldry. As far as we can tell, he never misses a beat. Moore is a tall and searching musician/writer and founder of New York noise-rock experimentalists Sonic Youth, who have been active since 1980. He edits the *Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal* as well as *Flowers & Cream Press*. He approaches guitar and songwriting much in the same way he does poetry: with blindfolds and

prayer. The performance will take place in the Sanctuary. There will be an afterparty in the Parish Hall with beer lovingly provided by Brooklyn Brewery and a special Poets Red wine courtesy of City Winery.

MONDAY 5/7

TALK SERIES: COMMUNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

A panel discussion on conceptualizations of the social as they relate to poetry and poetic praxis. What—and of what consequence—is a poetry “community”? Are reimaginings necessary and/or possible? Panelists include Linh Dinh, Anne Boyer and Brian Ang.

WEDNESDAY 5/9

SCREENING OF CECILIA VICUÑA'S KON KON / CONVERSATION WITH CECILIA VICUÑA & JONATHAN SKINNER

A new cut of *Kon Kon* (2012, 60 minutes) will be screened, followed by a conversation between **Cecilia Vicuña** & **Jonathan Skinner**. In this documentary poem, poet and artist Vicuña returns to Con Cón beach, the birthplace of her art in Chile, where the sea is dying and an ancient tradition is being wiped out. Vicuña's works have for some forty years gravitated between the written word and visual media, involving “earth-works,” installation, art made with thread and fabric, drawing and painting, printed works and book arts, film and video, and live intermedia performance. Skinner's poetry collections include *Birds of Tiff* (BlazeVOX, 2011) and *Political Cactus Poems* (Palm Press, 2005). He founded and edits the journal *ecopoetics* (www.ecopoetics.org), which features creative-critical intersections between writing and ecology.

FRIDAY 5/11, 10pm

ARI BANIAS & EVAN KENNEDY

Ari Banias grew up in Los Angeles, El Paso, and the suburbs of Chicago. His poems have appeared in *Sycamore Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Aufgabe*, the anthology *Collective Brightness*, and elsewhere. **Evan Kennedy** is the author of *Us Them Poems* (BookThug) and *Shoo-Ins to Ruin* (Gold Wake Press). He oversees Dirty Swan Projects out of San Francisco.

MONDAY 5/14

CHRIS ALEXANDER & KRISTEN GALLAGHER

Chris Alexander is the author of *Panda*. You can follow (read/buy) his ongoing experiments and derivative works at his private imprint, *United_Plastics*

(unitedplastics.tumblr.com). You can find him on Twitter @hedorah55. **Kristen Gallagher** published a book, *We Are Here*, in 2011. She has recently published analyses of the works of Tan Lin in *Criticism*, *Jacket2*, *Reading the Difficulties* (forthcoming), and an as-yet-unnamed anthology of critical writings on conceptualism. Alexander and Gallagher are co-editors of *Truck Books*.

WEDNESDAY 5/16

ROB HALPERN & GAIL SCOTT

Rob Halpern is the author of several books of poetry including *Rumored Place* (Krupskaya), *Disaster Suites* (Palm Press), and most recently *Music for Porn* (Nightboat Books). His essays on things ranging from Baudelaire's prose poems to New Narrative appear in various journals and anthologies, and he's currently translating Georges Perec's early writing on aesthetics and politics. **Gail Scott** is an experimental prose writer based in Montreal. Her latest book, *The Obituary*, is a composition of fractal voices and vectors on an urban site where every word has at least two meanings.

MONDAY 5/21

UYEN HUA & LAUREN LEVIN & CATHY PARK HONG

Uyen Hua is the author of *a/s/l* (ingirumimusnoctetconsumimurigni). Her work has appeared in *Shampoo Poetry*, *West Wind Review*, *Abraham Lincoln* and *Tacocat*. **Lauren Levin** is the author of *Song* (The Physiocrats), *Keenan* (Lame House Press) and *Not Time* (Boxwood Editions). Recent work appeared or is forthcoming in *Little Red Leaves*, *With+Stand*, *Peaches and Bats*, *Big Bell*, and *Lana Turner*. **Cathy Park Hong's** first book, *Translating Mo'um*, was published in 2002 by Hanging Loose Press. It was followed by *Dance Dance Revolution*, chosen for the Barnard Women Poets Prize and published in 2007 by W. W. Norton. This May, Norton will publish her newest collection, *Engine Empire*.

WEDNESDAY 5/23

DAVID ABEL & MARK WEISS

David Abel is a poet, editor and teacher, and the proprietor of Passages Bookshop. His recent publications include the chapbooks *Commonly* (Airfoil) and *Black Valentine* (Chax Press), and the collaborative artists' books *While You Were In* and *Let Us Repair* (disposable books, with Leo & Anna Daedalus). *Float*, a collection of collage texts, is forthcoming in Spring 2012 from Chax Press. **Mark Weiss** has published

seven collections of poetry, most recently *As Landscape* (Chax Press, 2010). Least Weasel published his chapbook *Dark Season* in 2011. *Different Birds* appeared as an ebook in 2004. His bilingual anthology *The Whole Island: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* was published in 2009 by the University of California Press.

FRIDAY 5/25, 10PM

POETS' POTLUCK

The Poets' Potluck is an opportunity for New York City's poetry community to come together for an evening of readings, performances and delicious food. An array of writers, both new to The Poetry Project and seasoned veterans, will read or perform their work. Admission is free if you come with a dish. Anyone interested in bringing a dish for the potluck will contribute to an amazing feast. If you're interested in bringing food, please email Brett Price at fridaynightseriesp@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY 5/30

TED GREENWALD & ELINOR NAUEN

Ted Greenwald is the author of over thirty books, including *3* (Cuneiform Press, 2008), *Permanent Record* (LRL, 2008), *In Your Dreams* (BlazeVox, 2008), *Two Wrongs* (Cuneiform Press, 2007, with Hal Saulson) and *Clearview/LIE* (United Artists, 2011).

Elinor Nauen has written or edited *Cars and Other Poems*; *American Guys*; *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball*; *Ladies, Start Your Engines: Women Writers on Cars and the Road*; and several chapbooks. Her most recent books are *So Late into the Night* and *My Marriage A to Z: A Big-City Romance*.

MONDAY 6/4

2011-12 WORKSHOP READING

Participants of the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 Poetry Project Workshops will read the work they wrote over the course of the season. Workshop leaders this year were Tan Lin, Brendan Lorber, Anne Waldman & Ambrose Bye and Elinor Nauen (Fall); and Susan Mills, Ariana Reines, Matvei Yankelevich and Will Edmiston (Spring).

WEDNESDAY 6/6

THE RECLUSE 8

Contributors to our annual poetry magazine read their work. Readers to be announced in April. Check www.poetryproject.org.

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

This Can't Be Life

Dana Ward

(Edge Books, 2012)

Review by Lauren Russell

I first heard Dana Ward's work in Fall 2004 at The Poetry Project, where I immediately purchased his Boog Reader 6 pamphlet, *I Didn't Build This Machine*. In the years since, I have eagerly read Ward's chapbooks *Typing "Wild Speech"* (Summer BF Press, 2010) and *The Squeakquel* (The Song Cave, 2011). *This Can't Be Life*, his first full-length collection, is a pleasure long anticipated.

What keeps drawing me to Ward's work is his ability to articulate complex, often conflicted feelings in crystalline sentences that convey an immediate and nuanced truth. It is a truth I recognize as such because I can often feel it viscerally, an experience I identify with very few writers—Alice Notley and Marguerite Duras among them—whose honesty and urgency somehow erode the corporeal boundary between reader and text.

This Can't Be Life is concerned with "Sex / & politics, & friendship, & language & romance & / & death, & poetry itself," as Ward's speaker says in "A Goddamn Magic Show" in response to airplane small-talkers who ask what his poetry is about. "& I'm trying to bait them into saying 'oh, like / just...life!' / But they never say it." Or, as Ward writes in the untitled opening poem, "So there was this space & it wouldn't be wrong to call it life. Nor would it be wrong to call it poetry." The "space" consists of the venues in which companionable drives, lunches and poetry readings are performed, as poetry and life are presented as interchangeable, each a sequence of acts in which every participant has a role to play.

The opening poem recalls a particular reading on a particular day, when even before reading, Ward's speaker "began to feel that our performance had started that morning when Mike came to pick me up & I squeezed into the back seat while Tisa sat in front." When "the venue switched to lunch" his "ignorance...got to play a starring role." The choice of a sushi restaurant reveals Ward's speaker's lack of proficiency with chopsticks

and his distaste for the "green" in the rolls, which actually extends to all vegetables "save for starches," this last failing one he admits to the reader but not his lunch companions. After such confessions, I am relieved to finally arrive at "the part of the reading where we held pages or books filled with words & we used our voices & mouths to say them aloud." The reading is the only event in the poem that is not described in detail, suggesting that a performance openly acknowledged as such requires less energy and attention than all those minute self-negotiations in the interpersonal role play enacted all day.

Near the end of the poem, Ward's speaker recalls a listener's assertion that his writing is not poetry. The "long lines, the occasional prosaic sounds, these things had corrupted it completely. Poetry was vertical he said, & compact, & not full of messy articles or haphazard prepositions." This anecdote speaks to the porousness and expansiveness of Ward's poetics while simultaneously calling his style into question. The irony is that there is nothing haphazard about this book. True, the poems are frequently, though not always, "horizontal," with long lines or prose paragraphs, but if they are "messy," it is a messiness carefully rendered. Ward opens a space where the "prosaic" and the "profound" can squeeze in and roll out together, in a hodgepodge of scenes, details, feelings and grammatical constructions whose "value" is not relative but collective in the recognizable composition of a life—that is, a certain American, middle-class, poetry-driven life.

At the heart of *This Can't Be Life* is the intersection of friendship, community and grief, how they are manifested in poetry, and simultaneously how poetry is manifested in us. In "Typing Wild Speech," a shudderingly frank and exquisitely crafted long hybrid poem at the center of the book, Ward writes,

Some writers claim an important distinction. They are not 'a poet' but 'a person who writes poetry,' & in making this distinction they dissolve an alienating modality that abets false consciousness. Others, & I would include myself here, make a deep claim on the mantle & with varying critiques & complicating models re-fit that space & thus their life....Thus, as 'a

poet,' I must drink, must smoke, must travel, must dodge employ as much as possible. I guard these aspects jealously as I've allowed their presence to assume a causal life inextricably linked to my production as a poet. A sort of Fordist assemblage of romantic clichés that when operating in consort give me access to a consciousness that floods the factory backwards, destroying it, & that's called a poem.

Some of the visceral power of Ward's work arises from this flooding, the onrush of complex truths that emerge while the romantic identification that enables them is submerged but never entirely ceded. It is a power complicated but finally reinforced by the self-awareness with which that process is engaged, even propagated.

Poetic production is also linked to the poet's partner, Sarah, and the numerous friends who appear throughout the collection as confidants, drinking buddies, long-distance Gchat conversationalists, poetic supporters, critics, influences and collaborators. In "Imagine," Ward writes that the word "community" is "so often cheaply used that it can't even find its rose," but the collection is populated by an undefined community of the brilliant, the witty, the ill, the heartbroken, the horny, the unpredictable and the dead.

The most memorable presence is Geoff, the friend whose life and death are the subject of "Typing 'Wild Speech.'" In prose paragraphs and interspersed verse, Ward considers the secrets in even the closest friendships, writing "Our closeness was lush, & in its opulence, hid things." He does not attempt to explain Geoff's suicide but with a rare precision articulates how the long dead continue to permeate the present and the painful beauty of that haunting. Here grief is not a stumbling block to be neatly "resolved" but a continuous lived experience. As Ward writes, "irresolution is a gift."

Even at his most emotional, Ward never slips into sentimentality or cliché. With bold and unassuming frankness, he honors grief while celebrating life, with its cigarettes, its sex, its granola bars, its skittish rabbits and nocturnal cats, its emails and Google Earth views, its bars and college basketball games, its deaths

and its friendships. If, as the interlocutor in the opening poem suggests, that sprawl cannot be poetry, well then, it also can't be life. As Ward writes, "The purpose of poetry...isn't so much inspiration but as to point to opportunities in the audience's real environment." Life is poetry. Poetry is life.

Lauren Russell's latest chapbook, Dream-Clung, Gone is just out from Brooklyn Arts Press.

I Want to Make You Safe

Amy King

(Litmus Press, 2011)

Review by Sara Jane Stoner

Amy King's fourth book, *I Want to Make You Safe*, is a naked threat of love, brazen and humble, epic and satisfyingly sour, offering a kind of relentless attention and need that combine in the senses held and dispersed by her language. King's book builds into an unfurling portrait of a dead-eyed tenderheart, hoisting up her world with a body-shaped ear to pull the insides out and the outsides in.

King is a writer who delivers a queer poetic subject that tenses and flexes in relation to the world, and makes a clear pattern out of refusing the easiest languages of identity. As has been said before of King's work, her poems together make a kind populace of the poet's many *yous*, and the differences they bring to bear on her postures in language produce the evidence of the poems themselves. They shift between postures like face-offs, dances, close studies, seductions and fuck-yous. Familiar here too is King's cosmology of milk and teeth and coffins and pleasures and afflictions. The force of her lines, pulling between object and ideology, seems stronger in this book and weirdly isometric in its centrifugal and centripetal forces: "Justice is just a shaving tool / that keeps murder off the peach." In fact, there's a great deal of force here, as when "The seductive fist / of brimstone lodges deep within the throat."

King brings political language clanging into her poetry in a familiar way, but gooses its discursive power by dashing between registers:

*where it's a sports day
in the midst of a second-wave miracle on
economics in cocked hat and head, for just
three easy payments plus postage.*

And just so with the romantic, too. Love's the thing that feeds you and feeds on you, as well as the telescopic, leveling goal, but its representation is subject to the words we use for it, and the inevitable wrappings for power that grow up in each of us. "Love is a surgery," King writes, "in participles, pus-filled insects," and what makes the surgeon go is a wedding of the poet's "pitch-perfect self / infested with background" and the beloved, lover or idea or world. As immediate to the poet as love's demands is her sense of human nature's incapable isolation: "we're always behind the ocean's metal and glass, / hidden from touch by a laying down sadness, / even in surfaces."

I Want to Make You Safe, in its metapoetic recall of its own lines, is a book that knows itself well, and shows King testing herself and the words themselves, her understanding of those lines once made and two or three times digested. This process culminates in the long poem "This Opera of Peace," which seems to take up the preceding poems in a little world of quieter reckoning and remaking. What's striking about this ultimate poem is that its lines are so representative: of the book as a whole, of King's poetics, of the aggression and desire needed to bear up the responsibilities inherent in thinking, in living. About halfway through, King writes

*I am a fabrication,
a man in sunken traffic, a fiction
who is losing the sun
faster than she can sit beneath it.*

Here is the poet who both confesses in intimacy that "how much we want we / forgo" and who mocks her enemies, "flaunting the sum of all I can want." King manifests the subterranean metaphysics of a spirit so deep in the matter of the matter she's hovering over—stuff and void and material and abstraction at whatever proximity or whichever scale (micro or macro) the moment allows her. And the poems reward a long listening by bringing you down into them, showing you the sweaty, heroic, abject work involved in procuring an honest engagement, maybe salvation, that leaves no one clean.

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

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CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Call the Catastrophists
Krystal Languell
(BlazeVOX, 2011)
Review by Jennifer Tamayo

In foreign countries the release date of an American movie is normally delayed by a couple of months, meaning that a movie that comes out in the U.S. in May won't come out in the U.K. until August, and several months later still in Brazil. Growing up in a foreign country, I experienced this lag time with both anticipation and anxiety. I had to wait almost a year to see *Mannequin*. The trailers had been around for months and word of mouth from family in the U.S. had made it down to us. The movie hovered in the air for those months in a suspended reality where we felt like we had, somehow, both viewed it and not. But that feeling was a bizarro optical illusion, and what we had concluded about the movie from the bits of media that came down to us did not align with the actuality of the movie. There was always a disconnect, a gap between what we expected and what it was.

Many of the poems in Krystal Languell's debut collection, *Call the Catastrophists*, exist in the same sort of ephemeral reality. The poems flicker with a familiarity—travel, homesickness, language, desire. There are lots of poetry books on these subjects. Languell's poems, however, twist, shake and spasm just enough to become estranged from any expectations we might have had about what translation means to the human body.

Let's keep the movie metaphors going: many of the poems in the collection feel dubbed and translated from experience that has gotten lost in the gullet of poetry. Languell writes, "I tried to think of a complete sentence this summer but all I could come up with was *és a többi*, and *all the rest*, which is another way of telling you *blah blah blah*." Much of the book speaks directly to the blah-blah-blah breakdown of language. There's a concern with the meanings present in the gaps of language—as if the unknown substance of "experience" is located between phonemes. The book also seems concerned with specific people and moments that teeter between hilarity and catastrophe—this is not because the poems touch on each, but rather because their tonality is purposefully obscured, costumed. I often found myself wanting to laugh at my own heartbreak.

It is clear we are to see versions of ourselves in these poems, for who hasn't played the role of the native? The tourist? Who hasn't "rearranged the furniture, approximating a distant relative's home"? But the poems pull the rug from under familiarity, and it's their foreignness that really hooks. At one point, while watching the Laci Peterson trial on television, a speaker wonders, "Who is this Laszlo Peterson?" I'm compelled to conjure images of the trial—dark wooden benches, close-up shots of sullen faces—and then I try to imagine a Laszlo Peterson and what seemed familiar now makes me squint; my own memory feels alien.

Like all good books, there are more questions here than answers. Here are some:

Question: What does the "call" to the catastrophists sound like?

Answer: A stream of phonemes rearranged to sound like a specific experience.

Question: What is (the book's) ecstasy?

Answer: "Calling things by new names."

Question: How does catastrophe relate to something that happens in the mouth?

Answer: Anything that happens in the mouth will result in blood. (See "To Your Health")

Question: What is the "slippery verb chart"?

Answer: What is not the slippery verb chart.

Question: What do I do now?

Answer: "Take things that look pretty and install them in a new light."

I end with the following suggestions for reading *Call the Catastrophists*. Please read with your best wig and your best pair of boots; costumery of many forms is essential. Please read this book with your tongue on vibrate. There are sexy moments and there are moments of disconnect that require your electricity. And finally, please read this book while squatting so you can feel your haunches and the ground simultaneously.

Jennifer Tamayo is the author of Red Missed Aches Read Missed Aches Red Mistakes Read Mistakes (Switchback Books, 2011) and is Managing Editor at Futurepoem.



WALKING AFTER MIDNIGHT

BILL KUSHNER

86 pages, paperback

ISBN 978-1-933132-91-4

\$16.00

Cover art by Pamela Lawton

Published by Spuyten Duyvil

spuytenduyvil.net

What is it Diana Ross sang? About a Love Hangover? "If there's a cure for this I don't want it, don't waaaant iiiiiiit!"

CA CONRAD

Bill Kushner's poem mind is tender and lavish. It likes to say things a second time, or maybe more times. It is very loving in old age, and fearless. You the reader are never exactly sure what's "true" in these poems; but, on the other hand, you're in on the rush. Kushner has asked you there, and why be anywhere else? What a beautiful arrival, Bill! Thank you.

ALICE NOTLEY

Walking After Midnight

Bill Kushner

(Spuyten Duyvil, 2011)

Review by Peter Bushyeager

Bill Kushner's latest book of poetry offers stories, parables, lyrics and memories that flash back and forth between pathos and self-conscious bathos, the heartfelt and tongue-in-cheek, and the (maybe) true and (maybe) fictitious. Often elegiac or valedictory, *Walking After Midnight* has Kushner, at age eighty, singing, singing, singing—sometimes in an almost reflexive, feral way, other times with an edgy intensity because he wants attention to be paid.

As is always the case with Kushner, love is the book's primary theme, but that doesn't mean he's repeating himself. While Kushner has hewed closely to his favorite topic over the years, his tone, degree of specificity and overall focus have evolved.

Early books reveled in acute (pornographic?) details of gay sex delivered in a breathless, cagily meandering, streetwise voice. Humor played an important role in poems that detailed sexcapades with extraterrestrials or delivered deadpan cliché cowboy sex scenarios. Later, in the books *He Dreams of Waters* and *In the Hairy Arms of Walt Whitman*, Kushner adopted a slightly sleeker diction and meditated with greater regularity on mortality and human frailty. In *In Sunsetland with You*, he showcased his sometimes touching, sometimes unnerving child persona, Billy, via a series of poems about a boy's fantasy relationship with, of all people, Abraham Lincoln.

In his newest book, Kushner glibly skirts the edges of archness and sentimentality, producing poetry that is sometimes almost embarrassing for its bald-faced adherence to emotions. And isn't it great to be almost embarrassed, given the huge amount of intellectually "clever" poetry collections issued each year? Punctuated by Pamela Lawton's moody, noirish drawings, which appear throughout the book, *Walking After Midnight* stakes claim to a lifetime of obsessions and memories—and a plethora of selves that are boldly asserted: "I'm a sword swallower"; "I'm a back door man"; "I'm a seething being"; "I'm eleven today." Kushner is right on all counts; he embraces multitudes.

"When I Was Five," the book's first poem, sets us up for the relentless songs that will follow: "When I was tiny balls of tinsel and / lust. When I was five I was already / in deepest love. You can say what you / want, and you will, but back then that / love it was love."

"Ghosts" is one of many poems that engage the past: "Hello, this is the ghost of me / talking to the ghost of you. Me, I was but a dream / ketchup sandwiches I ate under deep deep / cover....You get a little nervous when two eyes from the past beam on you....Back then, I did a lot of things, dumb things...."

Fractured parables and fairy tales provide the light, humorous touch Kushner's readers expect. A prime example is "Chiwawas": "I saw a chiwawa eat a sheep once, / and then knit himself a sweater with the / leftover wool....A chiwawa can smell your secret in you, and / spell it out 'I'm gonna tell on you, sucka.'"

Just to remind you that he can still be a lubricious narrator, Kushner offers "Tongues," a scenario in which "they've woken up the stable / master who, like some cruel, tattooed / piece of machinery that pounds and pounds / until you just become lust delirious and / continues on until there you are and you / you are babbling away and away in tongues."

And there are some surprises along the way, too—wonderful, disjunct poems that willfully defy Kushner's narrative bent. "Dorothy, I Think" is one of my favorites. There's a jumble of information about Dorothy: "She had a habit of rolling her great blues upwards / Into a large suitcase, and there would be home.... And even then it was necessary to look fast and / At a small Dalmatian restaurant on Butter Street / Dorothy looked vaguely sad." A guy called Beefy Johnson gets murdered, then someone named Margaret appears to intone a one-word summary. "'Infantine.' She got the word from Henry James who got it from God."

I keep going back to this poem—not just because the story is elusive and I can fill in the blanks in whatever way I choose, but because some of the words seem surprising and new. I mean, how could I have forgotten "infantine" and "Dalmatian"? Don't these words look great on the page? And isn't it great that a street is called "Butter"?

Peter Bushyeager's work has appeared most recently in the online journal Press 1 and in the chapbook In the Green Oval (Straw Gate Books, 2011).

Street Mete

Sam Truitt

(Station Hill Press, 2011)

Review by Matt Longabucco

It's easy to go back and forth on whether or not a poet needs to be a good talker—maybe yes (the word is the voice, even if you need a few drinks to prime the pump), maybe no (you pent-up Baudelairean albatross, taking flight only on the solitary page). But it's always interesting, maybe necessary, when a poet is exceptional at talking, out loud, to himself. Recently, in these pages, Ronaldo Wilson discussed his experiments walking the streets with a voice recorder, "going off" on whatever crosses his path and, in the process, building up a "reservoir" of experience as shaped by the attitude of forward motion and the rhythm of a moving mouth.

Sam Truitt's new book, the sixth in his "Vertical Elegies" series, makes transcription of that kind a key strategy—the verse comes in quick, sharp breaths—though not the only one. There are also photographs of the kind one takes at night in a city with a camera phone (the information nearly rubbed away) as well as textual fetishes (footnotes, protocols) and even a QR Code in the back that leaps out of the book and onto a URL where the parts may better unfold simultaneously. In other words, it's still a book, but it's also straining at every moment towards performance, video, hypertext, website. How "mete" that it should be so for this peripatetic poet. But hear "meat" and "meet," too, both terms of embodiment, one at the zero-level of flesh and the other at the humbly spiritual level of everyday human coincidence. What a syllable.

We begin "at the mouth of itza," approaching the Mayan ruin, "the jungle's drooling thicket the edge of the clearing left toilet paper purple flowers blue flowers crimson flowers and so i have come to nothing banging a drum." It's an overwhelming, self-annihilating place, god-haunted, where finally "there is no place to stand...jaguar behind steel cage...

cannot stay. we cannot leave." William Blake, Rainer Maria Rilke and Ted Hughes all peered at a big cat, increasingly caged, but here the reversal is complete: the cat's decamped, we're the ones stuck fast in our looking. To New York, then:

*hodehum walking between vales of the exposed manhattan schist
how real can it be "we be"
wobbles but we don't fall down
we be rock
we be walking through the tunnel toward the zoo*

The old and brand-new keep tumbling toward each other, sizing each other up, departing again. And, as the book unspools, lines and fragments reappear in different poems, recontextualized even as they remind us that they were spoken, at least once, in spontaneity. Repetition evokes presence: neat trick, and without the necrosis.

What's the street like for Truitt, and through him? These poems are dated 1996–2004, so 9/11 can't help but be a fulcrum: the day the urban walker confirmed the fear that to look up from the kaleidoscope of street-level life really is to risk watching the edifice come crashing down. What's strange, or not, is how much imagery of looking up toward fire pervades the poems here that *predate* that event. Not that Truitt plays prophet (well, a little), just a reader of history's codes: in New York: strata of stone, native culture, colonial conquest, James Schuyler, old love affairs, art exhibits and concerts caught rather than missed, apartments moved into and out of, the Times Square HoJo's getting shuttered (vertical elegies, exactly). And there are other landscapes, too: a Hawaiian romance/convalescence section and a Catskills home where the earth is close at hand and the closest to harmonious Truitt will dare imagine.

The voice of the poet isn't dispersed by the procedures of this book. We're with him on this ramble. He's radically open, morally astute, wry, stunned, strung-out, prepared as a Boy Scout for postmodern travel in our hemisphere. We're dazzled and spooked and barely keeping pace. It might be an elegy but it's no grim vigil, rather it's a Dantean power-walk, delirious but with the presence of mind to have pressed "record."

Matt Longabucco is a poet and the co-curator of the POD reading series in Brooklyn.

the new black

Evie Shockley

(Wesleyan University Press, 2011)

Review by Stephen Lawrence

Throughout *the new black*, Evie Shockley summons African American artefacts and artworks by actors, sculptors and photographers. She invites readers to search out, or revisit, artisans and poets such as Louise Bourgeois, Anne Spencer, Langston Hughes and Lucille Clifton. Shockley also exhibits Frida Kahlo, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald—even friends and colleagues Amy Chavasse, Aimie Meredith Cox, Mendi Obadike and Lisa Crooms.

Shockley invites mostly black artists into her gallery, as steps in discussing a cultural landscape that weaves the artistic, the intimate

and the political. It is unavoidably a personal trajectory—"race is not biological: it is / the way the wind blows when you enter / a room, how you weather the storms"—but *the new black* is a comprehensive argument taking a poetic route. Her personal is indisputably political.

She starts with the "miracle" of Barack Obama's presidency:

*a clean-cut man brings a brown blackness
to a dream-carved, unprecedented
place, some see in this the end of race,*

*like the end of a race that begins
with a gun*

To the poet, this event is the (re-)rebirth of her country, and it also obliges a renewal of her artistic approach. In a way, Obama's manifestation creates the new black. But "the hard part comes afterwards."

In her collection's first section, "out with the old," she begins with the exquisite "my life as china": mineral elements mined from mountains, then fired as clay and glass, come to human lips. It is lovely; yet through the poem's limpid, Schubertian depths one can read of racial passages from another continent, market transactions, bodily alterations, shameful deals.

The poet's visit to Monticello, in "dependencies," inflames complex, uncomfortable reactions. Her personal response to the curated Jefferson is always evident: "i hear you loved / wine (we have that in common)." Manifold approaches lean upon each other in this multi-voiced dramatic poem—it is almost a theater piece, dividing selves into different speakers as part of the search for understanding and qualified acceptance.

The rest of Shockley's collection continues to source artists, various branches of knowledge and her personal history to explore blackness and nationhood. She skillfully and provocatively opens up the complexities, disputes and schisms that will remain with the U.S. until the end of culture. Although she unseals then coldly peers into wounds, at other times hers is a warm, sympathetic approach.

On her dedications page, she offers "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." This oscillation between positions of victim and oppressor keeps her collection in jittery motion. Nothing is cozy, even at the poems' most relaxed. Demanding words ("maquette," "fugacious," "callithump") stalk her comfortable-seeming winter poem, "on new year's eve"; it ends with a stern cut "that severs soul from bone."

She bends slogans to her purpose ("it was a dark and nightly / storm") and coaxes nouns into verb drag ("baroqueing / libraries"). Triplets of puns and rhymes skip through her last sequence, "the fare-well letters." And Joycean wordplay peeps from lines in "the cold": "merritory," "sunly." There are also uneasy conceptual standoffs in this poem, as climate, literary theory and religion edge around each other. The skittish dance hints at bravado, and sometimes feels like a misstep. But Shockley's intentionality can't be disallowed. The quarrels of knowledge are held in concert, and converge beautifully, pivoting at the poem's center:

*the footprints didn't sully
the snow until
they doubled back*

As well as gaming with words and phrases within the poems, the collection's title echoes playfully, biting, throughout. "New" becomes an acronym for "not especially white"; "murk was the new black"; "abnormal is the new natural": all piece together the puzzle of her book's naming.

Shockley tours a wide range of poetic forms, never settling on a single formula. The variety is so broad that this, her second book of poetry, has been accused of resembling a first collection's stylistic "grab-bag," intent on showing off formal flair. Too-easy subjects—such as her shrill Halliburton-in-Iraq poem (its title, "in a non-subjunctive mood," attempts to validate its inclusion)—seem unnecessary to her thesis. She relies heavily on responses to art and photography: "gold chain hanging over a worn collar, / a thick textured ring bright on the finger / beside the one she gives the photo- / grapher." Common advice to blocked poets is to visit a gallery and transcribe what you see there, as a means of resuming writing.

*Kahlo tacked her self-
portrait to canvas with oil to give herself
nerve, nerves*

Shockley's poems can be disarming, and are always clever, but petitioning museum art and pop culture may not be trying hard enough.

However, responding to artworks that in other circumstances should speak for themselves is a necessary part of her inspection of political and cultural landscapes. The poet passes meaning beneath various microscope lenses, and across the face of carnival mirrors. Shockley's broad cultural resource, combined with her poetry's relaxed intentionality, helps give context to, position and display pieces in the vast puzzle of race and politics in America. Her argument is fulsome, convincing, seductive, but can never be complete.

Stephen Lawrence has a PhD on political poetry, is the author of four poetry collections, edits compilations of South Australian writing, and has two poems in the Anthology of Contemporary Australian Poetry (University of Louisiana, 2012).

Music for Porn Rob Halpern (Nightboat Books, 2012) Review by Evan Kennedy

It's a mean trick played by the academy in luring Rob Halpern out of San Francisco, but I will play a meaner one by praising what academe can't teach: the ear for lyric. A poet shouldn't expect to triumph better, and *Music for Porn* passes this sniff test:

*If I could sing the dead uncomely
Tones don't issue sounds can't hear
Torn things tear whose pain's a pun
Where no one's body is I can be*

*Seen for shame whole nations
Leaven big inside my loins mon-
uments remains assume this shape
O sleeping boy but for the stain*

I keep a natural sympathy to Halpern's writing because we're of the same tribe, since we feel that noble, San Franciscan affection for men. In navigating *Music for Porn*, I'm relying on my ear to intuit the issues at stake for me, a twenty-eight-year-old poet, and, especially given my town of residence, an inheritor of gay cultural identities oriented in death.

Yet in this book Halpern goes to war, rather, the topic of it, and San Francisco is his point of departure. In homage to his New Narrative affinities, he recounts a walk with Bruce Boone where he expresses dejection over "what I've made of my community," a broad term that connotes various posited and manifested collectives, and hesitates over the poems that follow: "...the soldier, he's my sick muse and deserves more compassion than I appear to offer, but he's already hardened into allegory." Halpern, with this apology on record, skirts past the pity of war, and the poetry in that pity, toward issues of finance and eros within warfare.

To the agreeance of my picky taste in men, Halpern prolongs a fantasy about a soldier, which recalls for me the fetishized image of young male bodies turned pulp throughout Great War poetry with the deaths of twink jingoist Rupert Brooke and mustached masochist Wilfred Owen (guess whom you'd find in the Castro and whom on Folsom Street). Halpern actively engages the Civil War everyman Billy Yank out of Whitman's *Drum-Taps*

as the "convergence of lyric and ballistics" speeds along: "So come again my troops no / -iseless mists vapors gather / Round me boys phantoms all / Fragments of a mobile space / Seared with our metaphysics / Of service." It was startling to return to *Drum-Taps* and superimpose Halpern's rhythmic sensibility onto verse I previously found too akin to prose: an exercise in ventriloquism that busied my tongue.

Pricked is the lyric ear of a punkish queer. Concurrent with this sonic engagement are images of shock, fragments of grisly military memos, corpse (or whatever's left) identification procedures, admissions of impotence and admissions of emissions, and necrophilic asides. Here is perhaps the first poet to posit phantom limbs as means of self-gratification: "my soldier with no hands...I imagine his fist up my ass." I blush to foreground this soundbite because there is an array of loftier sentiments that recast the soldier as "a blank that both arouses and frustrates my longing for a habitable world, at once portal and obstruction." I estimate that my cousin the Marine will be in Afghanistan by presstime. All a poet can do today is warn.

I guess what exhilarates men about the soldier is his role in an economy of violence; what baffles me, but must be true, is how this exhilaration toward death escalates in a gay context. Dependent upon this violence, Halpern cannot liberate the soldier from peril but opts to investigate the inner workings of their mutual entanglement and the age-old matter of homoerotic affinities among soldiers mobilized through imperialism. He writes, "erotic body and murderous body are inseparable," but there are enough moments of pity—a sentiment that actually cannot be skirted—for me to feel it tragic that Halpern cannot redeem the image of the soldier, not even the deathlessly dead and archetypal one in his own poems. At the end I have no reconciliation but "a certain unsingable tenderness for a dead soldier's body" attained in the musicality of his language, a solace that cannot withstand the brutality of its subject. The impossibility is saddening.

Evan Kennedy is the author of Shoo-Ins to Ruin (Gold Wake Press, 2011) and Us Them Poems (BookThug, 2006).

Poet Astrology by Denver Dufay



Aries (March 21 – April 19)

Aries rules the head and the face, the regions associated with thinking and perception, and you Aries are sharp, shrewd thinkers just full of common sense. If only everyone knew how superior you are in your own mind! But there's a dark side to your excellent muscle coordination and energetic sexuality, and that's the constant headaches you're experiencing. Migraine headaches, congestion headaches, sinus conditions, subrenal gland inflammation and failure. There's nothing you can do to absolutely erase these symptoms from your life, but you can make some headway by making sure you consume a *ton* of potassium phosphate. You are going to love going out for North Indian food, Aries, because you want to eat tomatoes, beans, brown rice, brown lentils, red lentils, orange lentils, yellow lentils, walnuts, olives, cauliflower, spinach, figs and pumpkin. Milk is gross but you might want to try to have *crème brûlée* after a dinner of lentils and cauliflower. I hate to tell you what you already know about having too much salt and alcohol, especially at the same party.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

You know, you'd make a *terrific* sommelier, Taurus, because your taste buds are like the crown jewels of the Romanovs, by which I simply mean "precious." The throat and the neck, as well as the vocal chords, tonsils and palate, are ruled by Taurus. No wonder you're always fucking *eating*. To you, the gustatory experience of a plain wheat cracker provokes the palatal fireworks of fattened duck liver on top of buttery bread paired with macaroni and cheese and Scotch. The glory of your simplest lunch makes our greatest efforts sickly by comparison. But you pay for it with your constant colds, coughs, sore throats, laryngitis, sore necks and tendency toward corpulence. It doesn't help that you avoid exercise like it's flesh-eating bacteria lodged in fresh mouse shit. It's critical, therefore, that you maintain a diet low in starch, fat and sugar. Try asparagus without the blue cheese for once, spinach that's not just in a feta cheese and spinach pie, and cranberries that aren't diluted with Smirnoff. It's already an embarrassment of riches in your mouth. Leave some for the rest of us.



Gemini (May 21 – June 20)

Mercury regulates the delicate links between the mind and other parts of the body, and Mercury trouble is the story of your life, Gemini. Nobody likes to be so anxious that they choke on a little bit of their own puke, but this is Gemini's daily state. Gemini needs a lot of potassium chloride, a deficiency of which can lead to blood clots and circulatory problems. Fresh air is key for you breathy Geminis, to aerate the windy blood in your veins and the bubbling blood in your brains. When browsing citrus, go for grapefruits. Your nut is almond. You know how Ludacris writes, "Now we eating lobster / shrimp and things" in order to emphasize his wealth by naming the particulars of his consumption? That should be you too! Shrimp, lobster, anything that lives in the sea inside a shell. And stock up on Lactaid because you need to be drinking just a *ton* of milk (eww). But keep that milk coffee-free. You're already at 11 when we need you more at like a 6.



Cancer (June 21 – July 22)

Cancer rules the breasts and the stomach, and Cancerians suffer from gut troubles: weight gain, digestive problems, ulcers, gas pains, nausea and gastritis. Unfortunately for Cancer, the thing they most like to ingest, alcohol, doesn't help any of those things. Cancers need a lot of calcium fluoride, so add egg yolks, whole grain rye, yogurt, beets and oysters to your diet. And go ahead and have a glass of Sauvignon Blanc with those oysters, you've earned it. But maybe pass on a twelfth glass. If you don't want to bloat into expansive infinity, try to have as many fresh vegetables and fruits as possible. If your mouth is full of sliced apples, you'll have less room to consume potatoes, high-fructose corn beverages and horseradish, the quickest ticket to total swelling. Next time you're mad at a Cancer, remember that they are always constipated, a miserable fate to pile onto their famous sensitivity and emotional tenderness. Something is always breaking your heart, fragile Cancer, and unsurprisingly you overcompensate at those two critical horizontals of contemporary life: the buffet line and the bar.



Leo (July 23 – August 22)

They can accuse you of being proud, narcissistic, brutal, predatory and ruthless, Leo, but two things they can't accuse you of are lacking heart and missing backbone. Your robust constitution is only matched by how well coordinated you are. But if you want to experience that famous Leo longevity, you've got to make sure you're ingesting heavy amounts of magnesium phosphate. Magnesium phosphate forms blood albumen and maintains good blood fluidity, activating digestive enzymes. And what that means is you can tell your vegan friends to scram because you should be eating lots of meat. Think of a lion in the jungle. Faced with the choice of ferruginous plants swaying in the breeze and the bloody shanks of a zebra, there's no contest. I mean *eat so much meat*. Now, nobody wants to get gout, and you're too vain to put on too many extra pounds, but there should always be a smoking carcass somewhere in the vicinity of your plate. Consider healthier cuts and offal. It's hard to be so pretty and fierce. It's almost heartbreaking.



Virgo (August 23 – September 22)

You might as well not even ask Virgo how they're doing. Here's how it usually goes. "Hi Virgo, how are you feeling?" "Omigod I feel terrible. My stomach hurts. And if you have a minute, let me tell you about the 5,000 other things that are wrong with me!" Okay, that's an exaggeration. But Virgo, you know that you both *have* a stomachache and just *think you have* a stomachache. Try and minimize the groaning by a diet high in potassium sulfate. Green leafy vegetables, whole grains, oats, almonds, bananas, brown rice, melons. All of these things are excellent for Virgoans. Consuming lemon juice will help you with that disastrous dandruff problem that's driving you totally crazy. Put down the Splenda and grab some honey for your (herbal) tea. Whatever you do, you've got to stay away from chocolate. I know that's cruel. Sadly, Virgos don't do well with recreational drugs either. But at least it's consistent. What would be worse than being totally stoned and not being able to eat like 2,000 Snickers bars?



Libra (September 23 – October 22)

It's so nice to look at Libras. Their features are so pleasant! Venus, the planet that rules Libra, holds sway over skin, hair, veins and the throat. Skeletal structure? Outstanding. But Libra, you're prone toward weakness in the lower back and this is the first place you'll suffer if you overdo it. Balance, of course, is the key to Libra's diet. Balance, and sodium phosphate, which itself provides a terrific balance of acids and alkalis in the body. So you can feast, just do it in a moderate, balanced way. Eat buckets of meat, just make those buckets come from a bird or fish. You do best with a high-protein diet that's low in acid-producing foods. Because while Libras are excellent to behold, you wouldn't want to come face-to-face with their *kidneys*. Ew! Everybody ought to do the alternate-a-glass-of-wine-with-each-drink rule, but especially you, Libra. I know you'll feel like you're being left behind at the afterparty, so for a confidence boost sneak off to the bathroom with your fizzy water and look in the mirror. You are one beautiful, handsome, righteously pissed-off, semi-sober, totally balanced *beast*.



Scorpio (October 23 – November 21)

Well, I've got good news and bad news, Scorpio. The good news? You're getting laid like crazy. The bad news? You're especially liable to, um, uncomfortable little growths and stuff on your genitals and whatever. We've got to keep you clean, Scorpio, not only for your own sake, but for our sake (we want to lay you!). So the best thing Scorpio can do is drink bottled water and eat foods rich in calcium sulfate, like tomatoes, cherries and coconuts. Scorpions also need a lot of calcium and protein, so yogurt, almonds, seafood, lentils, walnuts and pineapples. You don't need a hack astrologer to tell you that you have a drinking problem, Scorpio. And not just the kind where you drink too much, too often and too sloppily. Drinking alcohol wears out Scorpio more than any other sign and in the worst ways. Your skin looks like somebody's compost. Which is just confusing for the rest of us, who start to get insanely horny as soon as we're in your presence. Keep it on the straight and narrow, Scorpio—you won't have any paucity of delights.



Sagittarius (November 22 – December 21)

Sagittarius rules the hips, thighs and the liver, and those are the very spots that will cause you the most trouble. It's not your brain that's in danger, so put down the Sudoku and pick up a barbell. Of all the signs, you need physical exercise the most. Otherwise, you're going to be vulnerable to sciatica, gout, hip disease, hepatitis, numb extremities, lank hair, dull skin and receding gums. So which would you rather have, all that shit or a gym membership? Your cell salt is silica, which you'll find in raw and natural foods. Eat raw kale, green peppers, the husks of grains and egg yolks. You should also have a high-protein diet, Sagittarius, with lots of broiled poultry and fish, beets, skim milk, yogurt and brown rice. This has all seemed like pretty grim news for your diet, but here's the good news. While you should never eat anything decadent, like gravy, or cotton candy, or cream cheese, you should be eating raw vegetables and whole grains *all day long*. Like, you should never not be shoveling a handful of quinoa into your mouth. Except when you're on the treadmill—that's just sloppy gym etiquette.



Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Capricorns are built to live forever. Good thing Capricorn is the sign of high ambition! It's sort of sad to imagine a bunch of 135-year-olds sitting around not giving a shit. The downside of living for a billion years is, of course, that dry and sensitive skin, the bane of your existence. What really keeps Capricorn in the game, primarily, is their beautiful bone structure. Capricorn, you'll need a lot of calcium phosphate, but that's the only thing you'll need a lot of. That infamous ambition keeps you up all night working on your epic American long poem—but when you forget to eat you're bound to binge. If you don't want to gorge or have teeth disorders, you'll want to make sure you're eating a lot of lemons, celery, cabbage, dandelion and brown rice. You know you tend to get in a rut about what you eat. Why think about eating when you're about to solve the problem of appropriation in the dregs of late late capital?!?! But don't default to that weird Nutella peanut butter grilled cheese thing that you think you like so much. Sit in front of some chlorophyll, Capricorn. You'll be happy you did on your 171st birthday.



Aquarius (January 20 – February 18)

Floaty Aquarius is always eating the wrong things when they're on the run, flitting from one activity to another. All that running and flitting about is the reason why you've got such beautiful calves, shins and ankles, Aquarius, but you've got to be more careful about how you snack, lest you suffer from hardened arteries, anemia and low blood pressure. Don't be offended by the fact that your cell salt is sodium chloride, or common table salt. There's nothing common or boring about you, Aquarius. We can't even pin you down long enough to be bored! You'll need a healthy amount of this salt, but before you pick up those frozen raviolis with frozen pesto sauce and their 5,000 grams of sodium, consider foods naturally high in sodium chloride: ocean fish, lobster, tuna, radishes, cabbage, lentils, peaches and oranges. Aquarius is drawn to the foods of European antiquity: pomegranates, figs, dates, yogurt and feta cheese. I can just see you, lounging at a café in Mykonos, watching the surf lap the naked bodies of sunburned Germans, cracking black pepper over a Greek salad. But whatever you do, skip the coffee after. We all know what you're like when you've had too much—or any—coffee. Yikes!



Pisces (February 19 – March 21)

Pisces rules the feet and the toes, and that's why there's a good chance that sweaty thang just annihilating everybody on the dance floor at the club, hugging Hennessy to xir sweater and whoop whooping, probably falls under the sign of the fish. But you've got to take care of those feet, Pisces. All those long nights at the club are going to give you corns and bunions, not exactly what anybody wants to talk about over another round of Jager and Red Bulls. You've also got to have a lot of iron, unless you're turned on by the prospect of anemia, inflammations of the glands and irregular heartbeats. Now's a great time to be a foodie, what with that nationwide craze for offal. Liver, kidneys, hearts, gizzards and tripe are all excellent sources of iron for you, wan Pisces. Pass on chocolate cake in favor of a fruit dessert, preferably one with apricots, peaches, grapes, apples, lemons or oranges. Your true antagonist, besides all these fools constantly butting in on your quiet time, is table salt. Also, coffee overstimulates you and should be cut down to a bare minimum. I guess on that note, it's time to rethink the Jager and Red Bulls. Because first of all, ew. Secondly, that's just way too many jitters for you, nervous Pisces. Get a glass of white wine—try not to let it slosh on those beautiful shoes when you're doing your thing!

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