

THE POETRY PROJECT

N E W S L E T T E R



"It's Satan!"

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLARK COOLIDGE • GERTRUDE STEIN'S SOCIAL GRACES
DANA WARD ON CINCINNATI POETRY • NEW WORK BY JULIE PATTON
REVIEWS, HOROSCOPES & MORE

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From the Director

I'm holding up the *Newsletter* printing deadline so I can slip in my thank you note for the 39TH Annual New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading. The Marathon is the public culmination of the work that we do year-round, and your support of it is very gratifying! On a cold Tuesday night, with many of you having to report to work the next day, we raised just over \$17,500. Our year-end appeal brought in \$20,000. The Poetry Project is entering 2013 strong and feeling well-loved.

In my rushing around, I did manage to catch some of the reading, and loved the work of many of the first-time performers, such as Beth Gill's dance, Jason Hwang on violin and Khadijah Queen's poem. The winner of our first "Win the Artistic Director's Lucky Reading Spot" contest, Marlan Sigelman, was a worthy final reader. The event, by the way, ended 45 minutes earlier than scheduled! People did so much better at sticking to their allotted times this year, and we also had a lot of cancellations due to cold and flu. (We hope you are all feeling better.) Patti Smith made a surprise appearance and sang beautifully, with Lenny Kaye on guitar. Callers was amazing, as were Ernie Brooks and Peter Zummo. Thanks to all of the amazing poets, dancers, musicians and performers who participated. As Marcella Durand pointed out, this is the last year the Marathon is in its 30s. 39 forever? Heck no. We're already planning a 40TH blowout bash for 2014.

In closing, I'd like to officially welcome a new member to The Poetry Project team. Lezlie Hall joined us in the fall as our amazing new bookkeeper, and had the glee of counting all the benefit cash. Those who know the Project well will wonder, "Where is Steve?!" Steve Rosenthal, bookkeeper for over 25 years, has retired, but unless I was hallucinating, I saw him volunteering at the book table yesterday. I guess my spell is working. The Project's staff celebrated Steve at a bar on Second Avenue with beer and fried pickles.

—Stacy Szymaszek



From the Program Coordinator

The 39TH Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading was a success. Fun was had, great works were read and money was raised so that the Project can continue. It was great to see so many in The Poetry Project community working together to make it happen. Thanks to these wonderful people who donated their time and effort: Douglas Rothschild, Jim Behrle, Will Edmiston, Andrea Cruz, Nina Freeman, Corina Copp, Gillian McCain, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Daniel Owen, Stephen Boyer, Tonya Foster, David Kirschenbaum, Davy Knittle, Cliff Fyman, Edmund Berrigan, Eli Polzer, Erica Kaufman, Evelyn Reilly, Jane Friedman, Sean Callender, Stephanie Gray, Stephanie Jo Elstro, Jeff Perkins, Tim/Trace Peterson, Brenda Iijima, Jeffrey Grunthaner, Adeena Karasick, Dorothy Friedman August, Ana Božičević, Aria Boutet, Barry Denny, Bob Rosenthal, Jen Benka, Don Yorty, Brenda Coultas, Atticus Fierman, Joel Lewis, Marc Nasdor, Nathaniel Siegel, Olivia Grayson, Phyllis Wat, Rachel Berry, Rebeca Rivera, Sara Deniz Akant, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Julia Barclay, Krystal Languell, Kylie Pace, Laura Henriksen, Brett Price, Caitlin Wheeler, Camille Rankine, Robin Hollis Piccinnini, Jeffrey Stewart Bartlett, Joanna Fuhrman, Joe Elliot, Carol Mirakove, Jennifer Bartlett, Chiara DeLello, Christa Quint, Claire Siesfeld, Safia Karasick Southey, Debora Ott, Diana Rickard, Mariana Ruiz Firmat, Tracey McTague and Aurora, Marina Araujo, John Coletti, Desiree Fields, Judah Rubin, Marlan Sigelman, Matt "Nana" Beckman, Jeremy Hoevenaar, Jess Fiorini, Matt Longabucco, Mel Elberg, Douglas Piccinnini, Lezlie Hall, Marcella Durand and Ismael, Anselm Berrigan, Steve Rosenthal, Ted Dodson, Marie Bertino and Tom Savage.

The bookstore in the Parish Hall was well-stocked this year thanks to these very generous presses, bookmakers and poets: Burning Deck, Coffee House Press, Pressed Wafer, Wave Books, Straw Gate, City Lights, Futurepoem, Ugly Duckling Presse, United Artists, Belladonna*, Litmus Press, O Books, Anselm Berrigan, Susan Mills, Douglas Piccinnini, Judah Rubin, Joel Lewis, Jennifer Bartlett, Mike DeCapite and Alan Davies. These friendly local businesses and poets made us some great food: Two Boots Pizza, Porto Rico Importing Company, Veselka, S'MAC, Grandaisy Bakery, Buttercup Bake Shop, Nicole Peyrafitte, Gillian McCain, Bob Rosenthal and Don Yorty. Beer was lovingly provided by Brooklyn Brewery. Thanks for another amazing Marathon!

—Arlo Quint



From the Editor

Having just witnessed another Marathon, I'm feeling buoyed and optimistic about 2013. I walked in when Suzanne Vega was performing and it was electrifying. Also, Taylor Mead is my hero. This was the first year I was able to stay to witness the warmth of the room when the Project's most ardent devotees read at the end of the night. I'll never miss that part again. Stacy, Arlo, Nicole: Congratulations! You are phenomenal.

I am excited to feature the art of Scott Marvel Cassidy in this installment of the *Newsletter*. Thanks to Chris Warrington for introducing me to Scott's work. You can see more at <http://www.scottmarvelcassidy.com>. This issue features ink drawings taken from collages of *New Yorker* cartoons. According to Scott, the collaging is based upon Brion Gysin and William Burroughs' cut-up method of writing. They seem very much at home here.

—Paul Foster Johnson

EMERGE – SURFACE – BE

2013 Fellowship Program for Emerging Poets

Application Available Online: January 15, 2013

Application Deadline: February 18, 2013

Emerge – Surface – Be is a natural extension of The Poetry Project's program offerings. It formalizes the distinct yet unspoken pedagogical aspect of The Poetry Project's programs while providing a unique opportunity to support, develop and present emerging New York City-based poets of promise. Three emerging poets will be selected by and paired with poet mentors Anselm Berrigan, Patricia Spears Jones and Edwin Torres. Over the course of nine months, Fellows will be given the opportunity to develop their craft and complete a project. Ideal candidates will have a project they are working on or want to embark upon, and feel that they would benefit from guidance. Each Fellow will receive an award of \$2,500.

In addition to working one-on-one with their mentors, Fellows will have access to all Poetry Project events (free workshops, free readings, free publications) and will be included in the annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading. Fellows will also read within The Poetry Project's high-profile Monday Night Reading Series as a culminating event with introductions by their mentors. Fellows will be invited to blog about their experiences and to post photos and videos on The Poetry Project's website. There will be Fellows-only gatherings so they may get to know and appreciate one another and their work.

Applicants that have achieved some measure of local, regional or national professional recognition will be judged favorably, as will applicants who have presented work in recognized publications and venues. However, the most important criterion is that an applicant's work shows potential. Therefore, demonstration of a high level of skill and unique stylistic vision will be considered in the decision-making process.

For eligibility and submission requirements and the Fellowship application, please visit our website at www.poetryproject.org.

The Poetry Project embraces diversity in the broadest sense of the word. This principle is reflected in the choice of mentor poets and will be reflected in the selection of Fellows.

Emerge – Surface – Be is supported with funds from the Jerome Foundation.

Operating within the Irreducible: An Interview with Clark Coolidge

CLARK COOLIDGE'S LONG PUBLICATION HISTORY—a small sample of which includes *Ing* (Angel Hair, 1968), *Space* (Harper & Row, 1971), *Polaroid* (Adventures in Poetry / Big Sky, 1975), *Own Face* (Angel Hair, 1978; Sun & Moon, 1993), *Solution Passage* (Sun & Moon, 1986), *The Rova Improvisations* (Sun & Moon, 1994), *This Time We Are Both* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010), *The Act of Providence* (Combo Books, 2010) and a collection of essays, *Now It's Jazz: Writings on Kerouac and the Sounds* (Living Batch, 1999)—exists between two extremes of scale: microcosmic syllabic fragmentation and massive collaged variation and enfolding. Neither bard, troubadour, minstrel, *jongleur*, nor lyricist, Coolidge is a drummer: one who structures situations, forms atmosphere and feeling, and adapts to shifting tensions. His latest work, to be published by Fence Books this spring, was written mostly in the 1970s. Previously known as the *longprose*, he has retitled it *A Book Beginning What and Ending Away*. It is an impressive thing to behold. Coolidge assembles nearly 600 pages of text developed by methods of appropriation, apposition and accident. For me this book—like all of his work—begins and ends in the mouth: sounds tongued into and out of sense, a conglomeration of possible textures, a cacophony of the phonic. I had the chance to talk with the author about the *longprose*, performance, collaboration, free jazz, and more over the phone. — JOHN MELILLO

JOHN MELILLO: Tell me about the new book coming out with Fence, *A Book Beginning What and Ending Away*.

CLARK COOLIDGE: It's hard because I have to go back so many years, over 30 years, to talk about it. But something that helped me do this is that this last July I taught my own work at Naropa, so I could see where things fit chronologically. Including this so-called *longprose*, which was mostly composed from 1973 to 1978, with the last section to cap it off finished in 1981. It's one of those things where I programmed it so that I could write forever. It had a structure where I could just keep adding sections and accumulating material. It had two poles, like magnetic poles. First, subjects—like geology, music, etc. Second, authors—Beckett, Bernadette [Mayer], and so on. I would write on those in two sections, then I would combine them into another section. After that there was a fourth section, that would combine everything that I had done before. Then I would start the process over again. I could keep doing that, keep adding things. After awhile, though, I began to see what that structure could do, so I didn't feel a need to keep doing it.

What struck me in looking at the chronology of the work was that I was writing my collaboration with Bernadette, *The Cave*, pretty much simultaneously with the writing of the *longprose*. There's a definite relationship between that collaborative work and the *longprose*. We started *The Cave* in 1972 and ended it in 1978. We worked in alternate sections, starting with an account of the cave and adding new material to it, whatever we were reading at the time. We were nuts about John McPhee, for

instance. I remember that Bernadette asked him to read at the Church while she was director of the Project. He wanted to but they couldn't arrive at a date.

Also I was very close to Philip Guston at this point, and we were doing those collaborations. I also wrote a long poem called *Whobody* dedicated to him. The opening sections were printed in Bill Berkson's *Big Sky* magazine, but the whole work has never been printed.

So that was the mood of those years. Plus I was also writing the short poems of *Own Face*, and in 1974, *Smithsonian Depositions / Subject to Film*.

JM: What's the relationship between *Smithsonian Depositions* and *longprose*? It seems that you were working in a similar collaborative process, where you're taking subjects and taking individuals—Salvador Dalí, geology—and reorganizing them in these longer parts.

CC: There might be a connection there. *Smithsonian Depositions* was written because I saw a chronology of Robert Smithson's life in a catalog, and I realized there were parallels. We both liked collecting minerals and going to quarries. He had actually painted a big mural of dinosaurs in grade school, something I had done around the same time in my education. So there were things that were close, and I thought I could bring in material inspired by Smithson with a sort autobiographical framework.

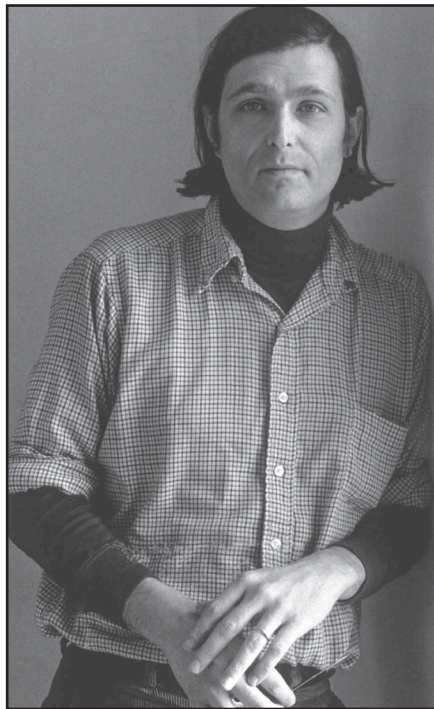
It was all originally going to be part of a book called *Three Essays*, with the third part a collage from the writings of Charles Ives. But I decided that I didn't like that as much, and just published the other two together. That book has been translated and published in French! I tried to help the translator a bit. A lot of that stuff is hard. What do you do with a huge list of B Western movies? I think he did try to translate it all. *Under the Tonto Rim*, how does that make sense in French? I don't think it entirely makes sense in English. Another guy translated *Polaroid* and that really amazed me.

JM: Along the lines of translation, I was just reading your essay on Morton Feldman, from 1977 in *Sulfur* magazine. In that essay you talk about feeling as if you "do not know music again" while listening to Feldman's work. For me, there is a similar sense that I do not know *words* again. I wonder about that feeling and its relation to translation, which simultaneously assumes the possibility of reformatting a given language and a frustrating, untranslatable novelty in every word.

CC: I like to operate within the irreducible. This is a word from Beckett. I like his desire to write something that is irreducible, that couldn't exist in any other form but the one he made on a page. A lot of my early work was trying to revive the energy in the language by going back and taking it apart. I was sometimes misapprehended as trying to destroy the language. John Cage broke it down into individual letters later. That seemed not to be language at all anymore. It made sense because he was coming from a sound point of view. He could make a sound work out of it, and that was fine. But I was more interested in the language. I didn't think I could go beyond the syllable. I wanted to take it apart, look at it, try to revive it for myself and then try to build it back up. The *longprose* was an attempt to do this using sentence structure.

This was also influenced by Guston. When we first met and he did the cover for *Ing*, I was doing just syllables, and

he was beginning to draw little pictures, images of cars and feet and things. Then we were doing something similar for a while. I was becoming more declarative and he was bringing in more images while retaining the abstract, formal nature of the work. That's what's so fascinating about his later work: both of those things are going at the same time.



Clark Coolidge

I thought: Why can't I use all of the language? Not limit myself. I never liked that historical imperative stuff, the kind of thing you'd get from Clement Greenberg. That art breaks down into only what it can do. You keep losing possibilities. I didn't want to end up as some kind of Morris Louis, where there's finally not much to look at. There's a lot more than that to do.

JM: I like the idea of finding your ground in the syllable or in abstraction, pure form, and then building something from that basic bottom, that structure. It seems different from someone like Cy Twombly's work, where there is that intensely written or scrawled aspect, but that seems to take the syllable or the figure in the opposite direction, towards abstraction or dissolution.

CC: I remember being attracted to Twombly at one point. I liked the fineness, the beautifully rounded aspect of his handwriting, or "scrawl" as you say. But after awhile I stopped thinking—if I ever really did—that there was always something more modern or avant-garde to be done. Or if there was, I shouldn't be limited to looking for it.

Once you've done a certain amount, the work determines what you're going to do. You know, I wanted to be free. Freedom is something Guston and I talked about a lot. When he had that Marlborough Gallery show in 1970 and so many condemned his work he said that the only person who came up to him and hugged him was Willem de Kooning. And de Kooning said, "It's about freedom, isn't it, Philip?" We always agreed that it's about freedom. Do what you're able to do. Whatever you're able to do. Screw the people who are theorizing or analyzing. That's not your business.

JM: In relation to that freedom, why did you never get away from the basic unit of the syllable? I think of the Dadaists and members of the French avant-garde who tried to get away from language through sound poetry and pure vocalism.

CC: There's a relation between that material and concrete poetry. In the 60s I was close to Aram Saroyan. In 1966 we were interested in that. I put a lot of concrete poetry in the third issue of *Joglars* magazine. Plus some work that I was doing along those lines. But that didn't last for me. It didn't have the sonic element. Sound poetry...I remember listening to Kurt Schwitters' *Ur-Sonata* and the things Cage did. I could see their orientation versus mine, and I began to feel more of a connection to the whole language. There was always a more political impulse to John's work. He was trying to atomize the language, or, as John would say, to "demilitarize" the language. For whatever reason, I couldn't get as interested in that direction.

Sound poetry, does that exist anymore? I know it was a movement, probably more in Europe than here.

Or it may just be a limitation of mine. John does a great thing in stretching single letters and making a kind of hum out of them in performance. But I was more interested in things that didn't go together, to resistance. *Polaroid* is a performance piece, meant to be heard. Polaroid: "Like poles." Poles that resist each other, drive away. You could do that with syllables or complete words. Some words want to cohere into a statement and some don't. That drive away from coherency that you get with words can be interesting.

JM: What do you think the reaction will be to the *longprose* now that it's finally being published? How do you see it fitting within the poetic landscape today?

CC: I'll be interested to see if there's any reaction to this thing being published at last. I wish it had been published in sequence. It probably would have made more sense to a

readership—whatever readership I had—at that point.

I probably don't really understand the poetic landscape now as much as I might want to. Part of it is that I don't take that much time to look at it. There are so many more poets. What I do see I don't think of as that radical. Maybe there are people doing radical things. I hope there are. Maybe my book could be obtuse in a way, show something that doesn't really fit. It probably didn't fit then either. Bernadette and I felt kind of embattled even within the poetic scene to a certain extent in terms of length of readings and the extent of the work. Both of us were writing what would be more formally called poems at the same time but it was the longer work that we were really pushing. We were trying to make ourselves go beyond our abilities.

JM: What were the resistances like to the work in the 70s?

CC: I published a few sections of it in magazines in the 70s, and I did go around and read from it quite a bit. As will be described in the book, I read from it at [New Langton Arts], two hours a night for a week. The language poets were going hot then in San Francisco. One of them said, "So it's a matter of athletics, so many hours, so many words." But no, it's not really. I had this work, and I wanted to read it.

Having been a jazz drummer, I thought of it as being like a club date. Two sets a night. You could make it tonight or Friday or whenever you wanted. I always thought it was too bad that poets were limited by performance time. Bernadette and I always wanted to read really long. We wanted to read for two hours. We probably ended up pissing off a lot of people.

Larry Fagin curated a series at the Paula Cooper Gallery where they just had pillows on the floor so people



MAGED ZAHER

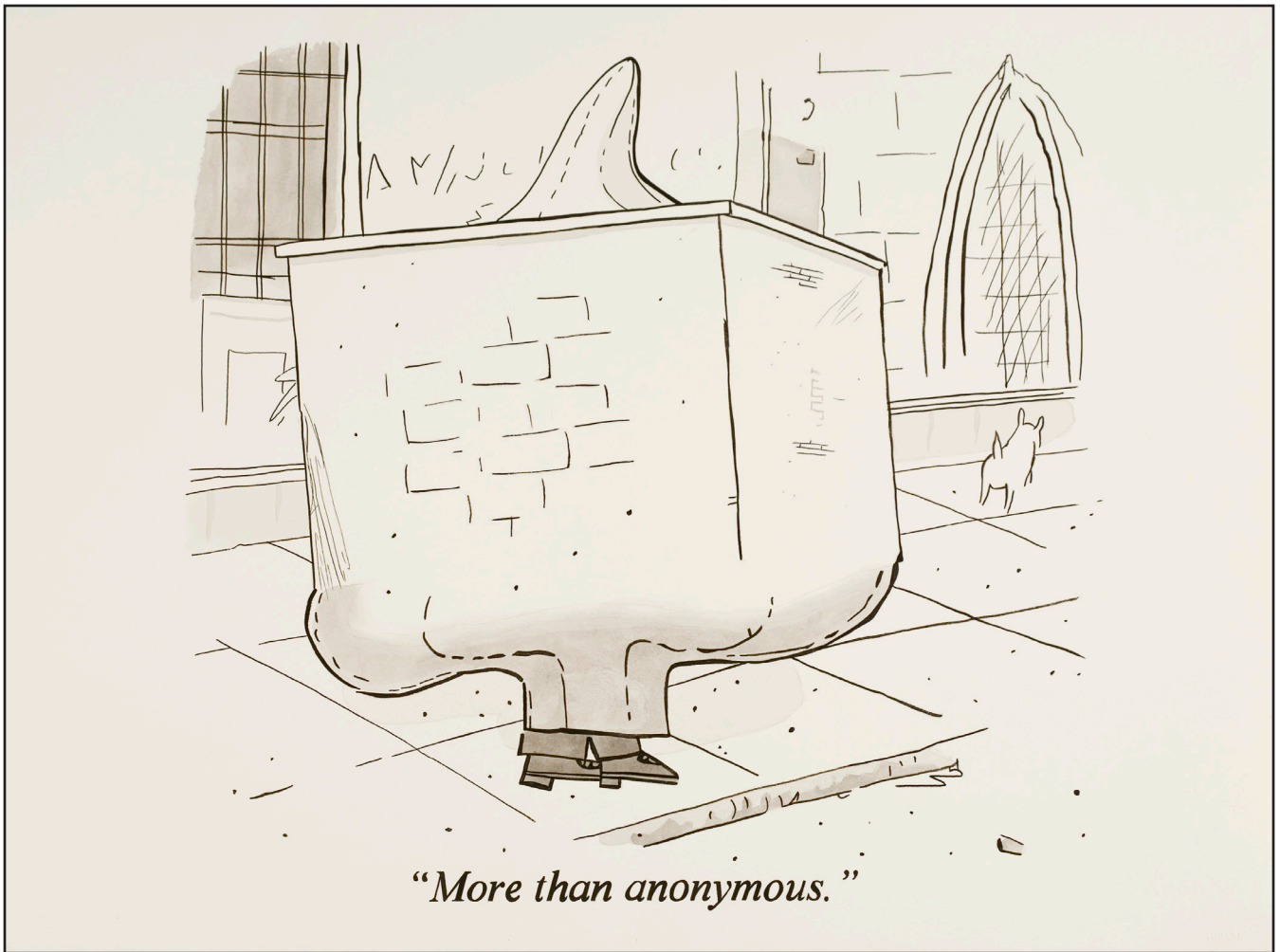
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could literally fall out, and people did fall asleep and wake up. I liked the idea that you could come back into consciousness in the middle of a work while it was being read. In fact, that happened in San Francisco, too. Somebody came up and told me they woke up and heard the word "Pennsylvania" and didn't know what it was. It was like they had heard it for the first time. That's *exactly* what I wanted to happen.

JM: I'm sure people have said this before, but there seems like a close connection between what you're saying and some of the longer minimalist pieces by the likes of La Monte Young. Do you have any sense of the relationship between these long periods of read poetry and minimalist performance?

CC: It's funny you mention La Monte Young, whom I don't think of as

minimalist somehow, not like Glass or Reich, that sense of repetition. I went to a performance at the Metropolitan Museum in the early 70s in this big dim room with pillows and carpets on the floor, and he was playing a single pitch. People were falling asleep and nodding out. Me too. You would wake up and catch the same pitch from a different angle, or from whatever your head was doing at that moment. I remember looking and seeing that there was a guy playing next to him. It was Lee Konitz! I loved his jazz work, but I thought: "What an incredibly curious musician to play one note with La Monte Young just to see what that was like."

JM: Do you think there is a difference between music and literature in the amount of time or attention we can give to each? Why can we only handle readings that are 30 to 45 minutes long,

whereas we accept longer symphonic or jazz pieces?

CC: I think a lot of people have a short attention span for music, too. I think of Morton Feldman and his long pieces at the end of his life. Feldman was annoyed at being limited to 20 minutes. His late music needed that length, to saturate our ears, to make those changes. Jazz culture is limited by sets to 45 minutes or so. How many people are able to sit through a four-hour concert, like a Feldman Quartet or an indeterminate Cage piece or one of the longer symphonies? Maybe 45 minutes is a social aesthetic limit. I remember talking with David Harrington of the Kronos Quartet. They had just played the second Feldman string quartet, and he said, "I went from total ecstasy to total hatred of my instrument." Even the performer was pushed to the edge.

JM: I think you're right about this 45-minute-to-hour-long social limit. It seems to manifest itself from school to music to sports.

CC: I started thinking at a certain point in my work that I had to establish my own territory. I never liked the idea of getting up and introducing each poem and interrupting the work and making jokes and telling stories. Some people are really good at that. I'm not, natively. I had this sense that I had to establish my landscape and then gradually get people to see the activity in there. I feel like I have to go a certain length to do that. If not a long length, then at least an uninterrupted one. I've been writing sonnet-length works the past few years and I've noticed that when I read those I don't even want to read the titles because I don't want to interrupt it even that much. I want to make it into a long piece.

I think in a musical sense I'm always trying to make pieces. I started as a musician. Poetry came second. I could have gone on and had a career as a jazz drummer. But something would always happen, and then I'd be back with my pencil again. That happened with Serpent Power in San Francisco in 1967. The writing was always there when the music collapsed, and the music kept collapsing. The usual problems with group chemistry. I always thought it wouldn't matter if we didn't hang out together off the stand, as long as we played well together. But it's amazing any band exists beyond a certain length.

JM: There seems to be something about the context of creating music that is more sociable as opposed to writing. No matter how public or how many performances one does, writing still retains this sense of being a solitary act. If everything else collapses you still have your pencil and paper.

CC: Yes, but writers always have a different kind of trouble because everyone thinks they know about words. It's a disadvantage to poets. People will casually judge you because they think they know your material. It makes it

harder to see what else can be done with the language, which is not what you do with it everyday.

It's confused by certain aesthetics, too. Your voice, using daily language, that stuff that came from William Carlos Williams...I always thought that the poetry from his *Spring and All* period was more interesting than the late work that involved how you talk. And all the stuff about where to break the lines. I began to think that was a limitation. After filling hundreds of pages with broken lines and slashes and dividing lines in many different ways, I would drive myself nuts. There was not a way to exactly

it feed back from the page and into the mind. It's hearing it twice. I have to go through that process. I can't just belt it out. I remember talking with Allen Ginsberg one summer at Naropa. He would say, "Look, if you're really into improv you should be able to get up and just blow!" I thought that the things he did like that were pretty limited, based on end-rhymes, etc. The English language is pretty limited with end-rhymes. It would become a kind of doggerel. *Tune / spoon / moon*, that kind of shit.

JM: It also seems that in those improvising situations one can also let



John Melillo. Photo: Tom Starkweather

notate it. Charles Olson said that thing about the typewriter being an instrument that could notate precisely. But you can't.

It's a similar problem in music. A lot of jazz can't be notated. And then there's Elliott Carter, who divided things up into such tiny time lengths and different meters, that it requires virtuoso playing to perform it. But who knows what he actually heard. Whenever I read my own work I can't make it sound exactly the same way it sounded in my head when I wrote it. It's a thing that happens that's very hard to reproduce. I really wonder about it.

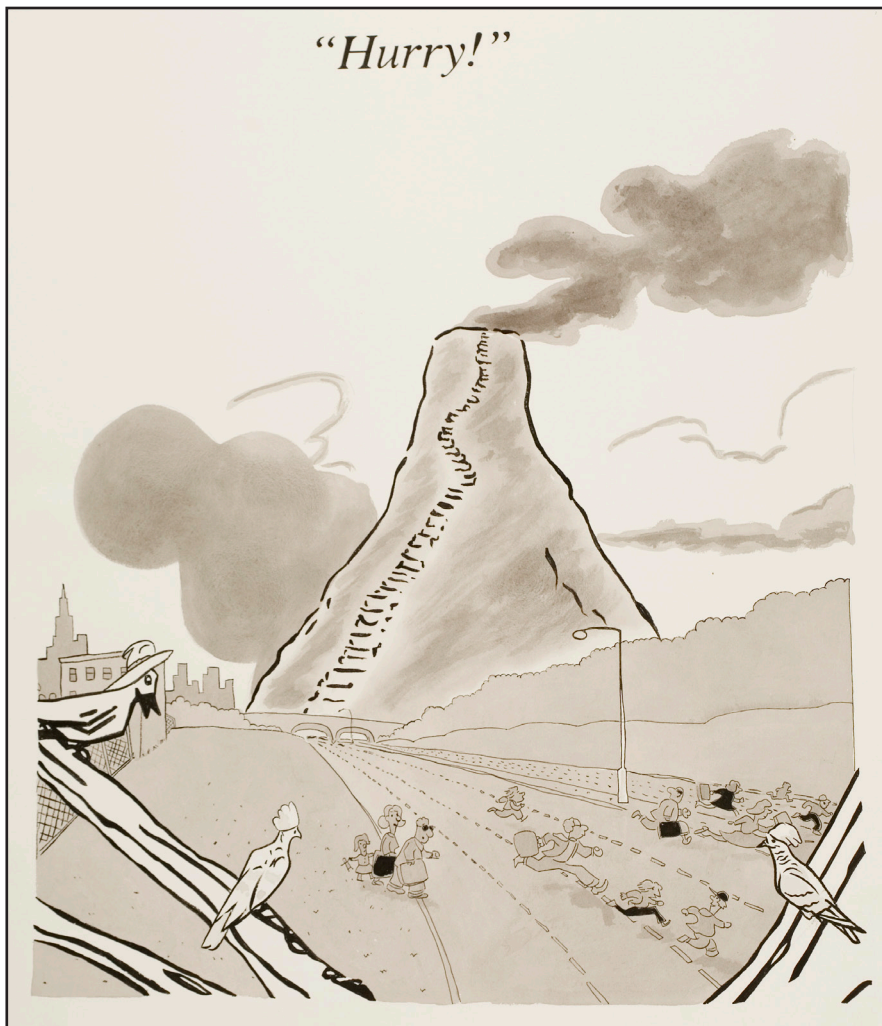
JM: Did you ever experiment with a tape recorder?

CC: I did try. And it was unsatisfactory somehow. There has to be that space: coming out of my mind and going onto the page, looking at it and then having

the language slip into certain rhythms or grooves—the four-beat line or iambics, for example. Do you also have a sense that you not only resist doggerel but also those normalizing metrics?

CC: First of all, I don't like drum machines, and I don't like end rhymes that much either. I have an asymmetrical head. I did have a period in *Solution Passage* where I wrote in iambic pentameter. I was reading the English Romantics—Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, etc.—and I was trying out that mode. But it didn't seem to be my thing. I always wanted to make something longer or drop things or slant it. Of course, the best of that work has that already.

But, I don't know, maybe it's just my background. I'm coming from a certain music that moves a lot across the bar lines, whether 12 bars or 32 bars. Lots of off-rhyming and quoting. Paul Desmond



had this amazing ability to quote melodies and do melodic improvisation. I went to a concert of Dave Brubeck's at Rhode Island School of Design in the early 50s with Alvin Curran, and we were just floored. It was his quartet with Joe Dodge and Bob Bates. They were just playing standards but they were stretching them to an incredible extent. The improv was serious. Not that it wasn't funny sometimes, but they were deeply serious in their approach to stretching things out as long as they could over chorus after chorus. They weren't limited by the 32-bar form. They were really getting free in a way, and they needed the length to do it, more than a couple choruses. That was an incredible thing to see and hear when we were young.

JM: To return to this subject of freedom, how did you react to free jazz? Work that

avoided even those abstract structures like 32 bars.

CC: I did like some of that. It always intrigued me. The high point of my jazz playing was with Buell Neidlinger, who was Cecil Taylor's original bass player in the 50s. We played almost entirely Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman tunes. We never got into the free free stuff. We got pretty free within that. He is an amazing player.

In Serpent Power we did some very free things. After the record and when everyone in that band quit but me and David, we formed a new group and would play these pieces we'd call symphonies where we'd sometimes play for over an hour and the only structure was that everybody would play a solo and then a duet and then the ensemble would come in until everybody had

played with everybody. Those things got pretty far into the ozone sometimes.

This summer I was sort of drawn back into that, at Naropa. Thurston Moore was there. I had known him for a while through exchanging books and records, but we had never spent time together. We played and recorded. It was wonderful to play with someone again. We recorded a half-hour jam, drums and guitar. Then we did some poetry and music together. Thurston's really a poetry nut who started with an interest in poetry and then got into the guitars. He had come to my class one day and sat there for two hours writing in a notebook, so I backed him reading some of that, and then he backed me reading some pages written originally to Cecil Taylor's music. It was all very free. We didn't even say anything to each other. We just started playing. We knew that we had a certain reference points in common but it was not formal in any way. Free jazz: that means you don't have to pay to go in, right?

Clark Coolidge was born in Providence, Rhode Island. The author of more than 20 books of verse and prose, including two new releases from Fence Books: 88 Sonnets and A Book Beginning What and Ending Away as well as Own Face, At Egypt, The Crystal Text, The Maintains, Solution Passage, and Mine: One that Enters the Stories, he is also the editor of Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures and Conversations.

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Gertrude Stein's Social Graces

Rebecca Colesworthy

Ida A Novel
Gertrude Stein
Edited by Logan Esdale
(Yale University Press, 2012)

Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition
Gertrude Stein
Edited by Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina
with an Introduction by Joan Retallack
(Yale University Press, 2012)

I.

New editions of previously published works make me nervous—the suggestion that via the discovery of this or that biographical tidbit, historical detail, or archival evidence we will have at last isolated the kernel of what such-and-such author truly meant to convey. To their credit, the new editions of Gertrude Stein's *Ida A Novel* and *Stanzas in Meditation* work to avoid this dubious distinction by putting a strong emphasis on process. In his introduction to *Ida*, Logan Esdale strategically labels his edition of the novel a workshop edition rather than a critical edition. It “contextualizes primarily through Stein's writing,” including early drafts, letters and other texts by Stein from the same period from which she borrowed in writing *Ida*. The novel that emerges is very much a composite text, exemplary of “Stein's particular brand of intertextuality.”

Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina similarly attend to the many different versions of *Stanzas*, cataloging the variations among the original manuscript, the first and second typescripts, excerpts published during Stein's lifetime, and the first full-length Yale edition, published posthumously in 1956 and reproduced in the 90s by Sun and Moon. Yet Hollister and Setina also privilege the original handwritten manuscript, maintaining that it “has some authority as the single text Stein herself prepared” and using it as the basis of their own “Corrected Edition.” By contrast, the earlier Yale edition was primarily based on the second typescript, prepared by Alice B. Toklas between December 1932 and early 1933. During its preparation, Toklas read *Q.E.D.*, Stein's early fictional account of her love affair with May Bookstaver. Reading the many occurrences of the word “may” in *Stanzas* as veiled references to Bookstaver, she “insisted that Stein make substitutions,” which more often than not resulted in the substitution of “may” by “can.” *The Corrected Edition* thus marks a return to Stein's original vision for *Stanzas*.

In reflecting on these new editions of *Ida A Novel* and *Stanzas in Meditation* here, I foremost want to consider the ways in which they help us, however inadvertently, to conceive Stein's aesthetic philosophy, especially in relation to her politics. Notably, both editions largely omit discussion of Stein's politics and political writings. This omission is fairly understandable in the case of *Stanzas*, where the main historical details in question are Stein's love life and Toklas' editorial influence. This omission is far more glaring, however, in the case of *Ida*, which otherwise includes a significant swath of Stein's writings from the 30s. Begun in May 1937 (in the wake of Stein's published critiques of FDR and the New Deal) and completed in May 1940 (on the brink of France's Occupation by Nazi Germany) *Ida* was composed during a period in Stein's career increasingly understood in terms of her fierce conservatism and unabashed support of the collaborationist Vichy Regime. If unconcerned with such details—and admittedly I am not so vulgar a historicist as to think that is necessarily a bad thing—these editions nevertheless help us draw out the political dimension of Stein's aesthetics and especially what I take to be her conception of her writing as a kind of idiosyncratic gift, as a kind of social grace. More than anything, then, I am interested in expanding still further the context in which we read these texts.

II.

If for no reason greater than my odd penchant for experimental narratives by women writers primarily known for their poetry (e.g., H. D., Stevie Smith), I begin with *Ida*. Generally considered one of Stein's more readable texts, *Ida* begins with *Ida's* birth (“There was a baby born named *Ida*”) and ends with her marriage to Andrew (“Little by little there it was. It was *Ida* and Andrew”). As we might expect, however, these fairly conventional novelistic events, along with the narrative they bookend, are complicated in numerous ways: *Ida* is born with a (figurative?) twin (“there she was *Ida-Ida*”) only to have this twin disappear from the text and shortly thereafter reappear as Winnie, whom *Ida* invents when “she had had enough of only being one” and who is thus named for being not only “winning” but a literal winner of beauty pageants. Moreover, Andrew is actually *Ida's* fifth husband, though she never seems to get divorced. The novel is devoid of material details, but *Ida* is clearly financially comfortable: “She had that kind of money to spend that made it not make any difference about the weather,” which we might read as clever shorthand for environmental factors.

Esdale aptly reads *Ida* as a product of Stein's "aim to write a narrative relatively free of cause-and-effect logic." The novel consists of two halves: during the "First Half" Ida moves around—a lot—going from Connecticut to California to New Hampshire to Ohio to Texas to Washington, DC to Wyoming to Virginia, although not necessarily in that order. In the "First Half," Ida is characterized quasi-realistically by movement and a proliferation of American place names, chance encounters, and husbands. The "Second Half" is increasingly abstract in its form and content: "When something happens nothing begins. When anything begins then nothing happens and you could always say with Ida that nothing began." The something that happens is nothing really: Ida and Andrew settle down. And the "geographic restlessness" of the "First Half" (to quote Esdale) is countered by Ida's ongoing *resting* in the "Second Half": "Ida had no habit, she was resting"; "she was always resting when they were there"; "when she was at home she was resting"; "resting is a pleasant thing"; "Ida was resting all day"; "Ida is resting but not resting enough"—and so on and so on. What, then, does it mean to rest—or, rather, to *be resting*?

For Esdale, Ida's resting, like many of the details of the text, can be interpreted in terms of Stein's seldom cited claim that the novel was based on the Duchess of Windsor, Wallis Warfield Simpson. (For

example, having been married many times, the Duchess frequently found herself "resting," i.e., waiting for divorce.) The (in)activity of resting also recalls Stein's far more frequently cited claim that the novel is about what it means to be a "publicity saint"—someone, like the Duchess, who captivates the public, becoming, as we might put it, famous for being famous. As a publicity saint, Ida also functions as a figure for Stein, who became something of a celebrity after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* became a bestseller and often worried about how identity—recognition by others and especially the desire for recognition by others—in her words, "destroys creation." While Esdale and other critics have much to say about the problem of publicity for Stein, the question of what is saintly about the publicity saint tends to go unasked. And yet it seems to me that Ida's saintliness—her benevolence, her generosity—is crucial to conceiving her status as a figure for the writer.

In resting, Ida in effect gives others a rest. The generosity of her resting is suggested toward the end of the novel's "First Half" in a chapter entitled "Politics," in which Ida moves to Washington, DC, and which is the only chapter with a title in the final, published version of the novel. (Thanks to Esdale's inclusion of archival material, we learn that other chapters also had titles in earlier drafts.) Ida's resting

satisfies a need: "When anybody needed Ida Ida was resting. That was all right that is the way Ida was needed." What others need, in other words, is a rest:

Once upon a time there was a man his name was Henry, Henry Henry was his name...He came to Washington, he was born in San Francisco and he liked languages, he was not lazy but he did not like to earn a living...

[Ida] was resting one day and somebody called...He knew that everybody sooner or later would know who Ida was and so he brought Henry with him. Henry immediately asked her to do a favor for him, he wanted to go somewhere where he could talk languages and where he would have to do nothing else. Ida was resting. She smiled.

Pretty soon Henry had what he wanted.

In giving Henry what he wanted, Ida enables not his escape from work but his escape from work he does not like: in devoting all his time to "talking languages," he will not be doing nothing but doing "nothing else." The contrast between the rush of the run-on sentences that describe Henry and the pause introduced by the period in the final description of Ida further

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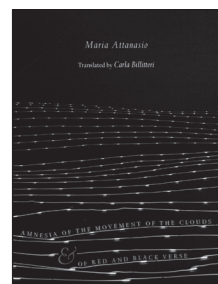
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establishes Ida's gift as a gift of time: what Ida gives Henry is a rest—a rest from the dogged economic imperative to earn a living. Her resting is in a sense *the* rest, the remainder or excess of the realm of political economy.

Of course, in pursuing the logic of Stein's rhetoric of resting, I am inevitably reinforcing the novel's sometimes troubling obfuscation of the realities

in each one" so she could "help them change themselves to become what they should become." Stein thus imagined that her writing, by representing the whole of human possibility, might facilitate the self-realization of, well, everybody—that via the gift of her writing each individual might be given to become what each one is meant to be. This dream of democratic universality is echoed in *Ida's* cryptic gloss on the

as-multilingualism, democracy-as-multivocality—possible.

Indeed, the parallel between Ida's aid on the one hand and Stein's fantasy of writing-as-helping on the other helps us make sense of Stein's anxieties about the Roosevelt Administration and the New Deal. Although hailed as an icon of sexual politics (sometimes seemingly only because of the fact of her



of modern capitalism. After all, what other than a gift of money could relieve one from the burden of having to earn a living? Still it is worth going a bit further, for in helping Henry do what he likes Ida mirrors Stein's discussion of her own aesthetic project in other texts. In "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans," for example, Stein traces her aim of trying to "describe every individual human being that could possibly exist" in *The Making of Americans* to her youthful passion for talking and listening to other people and "for knowing the basis of existence

American dream: "In Washington," the narrator tells us, "some one can do anything"—but only, it would seem, with the help of Ida, whose name, we might note, is an anagram for "Aid." Thus while *Ida* takes pains to suggest that its heroine's gifts are not properly speaking political—"It was not really politics really that Ida knew. It was not politics it was favors"—it also suggests that her gifts serve a supplementary function with respect to politics. Recalling Henry's desire to talk languages, we might say that Ida's aid makes democratic representation—democracy-

lesbianism) Stein was no progressive. In a series of five articles on money published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1936 in particular, she admonishes the federal government for what she sees as its over-expenditure of public money, its excess of "organization," and its concomitant infringement on personal freedom. If her right-wing views on so-called big government become *almost* sympathetic for this left-wing reader it is insofar as they coincide with a certain ideal of aesthetic autonomy. That is, it is insofar as they manifest a desire to maintain a space of rest—a space

that for Stein accommodates difference and thereby enables democratic representation even as it paradoxically exceeds politics.

III.

Read in this larger context, *Stanzas in Meditation* similarly suggests that art and especially poetry might make democracy possible. Of primary concern here, however, is the question of what this means for the poet, of what demand is thus placed on the writerly mind. In contrast to *Ida*, *Stanzas* is notoriously difficult. In her introduction to *The Corrected Edition*, Joan Retallack compares it to Pound's *Cantos* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*—that is to say, other “unreadable” modernist masterpieces. And John Ashbery, in his 1957 review of the first Yale edition, originally published in *Poetry* and reprinted here, provocatively likens it to the late novels of Henry James: *Stanzas* “is always threatening to become a novel.” Like so many modernist novels, Ashbery implies, *Stanzas* does not reject realism so much as suggests that the phenomenological experience of the real of everyday life demands a radical reworking of conventional representational forms.

And, indeed, the text of *Stanzas* is extraordinarily complex and abstract, an epic series of ungrammatical sentences that repeatedly defy readerly expectations. Its vocabulary consists largely of pronouns, deictics, prepositions and relative clauses—what Ashbery calls “colorless connecting words.” Via so many *theys* and *whiches* and *whens* and *thises*, the poem therefore insistently implies relation and personhood, but without quite allowing us to make sense of the networks of relation at stake in it. And yet that seems to be precisely the point insofar as the poem is in part “about” needing a space of rest, of social disengagement, to foster creativity:

*I had many things to think about quite often
They will call me to say I am dis-pleased today
Which they may in adding often.*

They have a powerful presence in the poem. *They* at once impinge on meditation and serve as the primary object of meditation. *They* can be a capricious, eerily spectral public:

*Nearly what they can like at the best time
For which they need their devotion to be obtained
In liking what they can establish as their influence*

At other times, *they* can resemble the many guests that Stein and Toklas so often hosted in their salon at 27 rue de Fleurus:

*Or just when they feel like it they try
Beside which if they surround my home
They come to stay and leave it as they like.*

As Ashbery notes, reading *Stanzas* can feel like “living a rather long period of our lives with a houseful of people.” Still,

sharing one's home all the time can be a problem: as a gift, writing is a form of hospitality for Stein, but never getting a rest from playing the hostess, whether to the expectant crowd in one's house or in one's head, can make writing, quite simply, impossible. Paradoxically, then, it is by not only withdrawing herself but withdrawing the familiar frames of reference on which we depend for meaning-making that the poet can give us the rest we may not even know we need.

Here is what I mean: the uniformity implied by Stein's *they* is troubling. As the *you* to the speaker's *I*, we share her frustration with it: “we think of leaving them with others. / We wonder about it.” In making *them* an object of reflection and wondering for us, *Stanzas* works to counter the group psychology *they* seem at times to symbolize. The text works, in other words, to produce differences in our thinking—not only through its army of *theys* but through its abstraction more generally. And in this regard, the indeterminacy and textual openness so often associated with Stein's linguistic play have a certain political valence. Difficulty becomes the very means of democratization. At least such is the impossible dream of *Stanzas*, a dream that is then phantasmatically realized in *Ida*'s heroic ability to give everybody in Washington a much-needed rest.

In restoring the word “may” throughout the poem, *The Corrected Edition* of *Stanzas* all but imperceptibly registers this strange link between the rest *Ida* gives and the work of the poet. *May* foremost functions in the text as a modal verb: “They may lightly send it away to say”; “For which they may need needing”; “I may change.” Nevertheless, the biographical explanation for its initial elision gives it the inevitable ring of a proper name; even when used as a verb, it cannot help but refer to May Bookstaver. It is as if the speaker were addressing May throughout: They, *May*, lightly send it away to say; For which they, *May*, need needing; I, *May*, change. This sense of interpersonal address or dialogue is made even stronger when the term appears at the beginning of a line, as in “May we know that there is this difference”—i.e., May, we know that there is a difference.

But we also gain something else by way of this return to the original manuscript—namely, a sense of Steinian etiquette. Whereas the language of *can* suggests ability, self-determination, an aggressiveness echoed in the staccato stop of the hard “c,” the language of *may* suggests permission, not passivity exactly but indebtedness, mutuality. If I *may*, if it is possible, then it is by the grace of another. It is as if, for Stein, every *can* were underwritten by a *may*, as if every possibility rested on a gift.

*In memory of Alan Young-Bryant—deservedly famous for giving
so many of us a rest from the business of everyday life.*

Rebecca Colesworthy has a PhD in English from Cornell University and writes on modernism and literary theory.

(under the vibration *Re Cycle Ops*)

Djouliezelle (aka Julie Patton)

fur Jonathan Skinner & Brenda Iijima

Leave a[n]griculture for the dinosaurs purr...

'fect mate scales

ho humanure loveoilution

beak buck om such a good egg he art soar

zenlighten'd neighbor Paulvalokitesvara Bodhisattva

sutra self come passion Prajna Paramitake

figure out form no other than Mu...

size 'em Mu no other than form

war m b lows misfortune and suffering

fossil fool increase and snow decrease...

Gun! Gun! To the other shore!

waste old age & death...

sindustrial "food" no end to...

gmo feeling thought volition and consciousness...

lumbering around no sight smell touch, etc...

too big to fail mind eyes ears, nose tongue body

large as the Term-

inal Tower, Empire strikes back no attainment indeed...

tyran(t) eye sore terror deck terminal therefore rely on Prajna Paramitra

eat to a pulp plasticky mer made with no hindrance...

Mad Madison Ave goo dot gov no fear...

(ink foil carsboard crumbs plastic rain rip tide hell & back)

Birdysvaha far beyond upside down...

lighter, butter, closer to heaven most perfect...

rose chirping the brightest, most vivid...

fleur morning incomparable Dharani,

shake & bake glory truth...alleluia

goes around comes around so set forth this Dharanisoar

(dove lapwing thrush peacock chanting hum bling mocking Ave.....loketesvara

A

B

C

ngels

irds

ats pajamas

fowls all present & future sutra Birdtha nature relies on & on

(What's in the watershed... In the air... and what on earth lo &

Beeshold its the Ovenbird (Seiurus aurocapilla)! Note that call's a clear sharp tweet cheep...

Treecher, treecher, treecher!

I t'ought I taw a putty cat as the sky is were falling alling hailing helling sky full feelglowballwarningsignskype

wheeze letter y zoo chicken wittle cross road ill for life of meeces to peace us ray urn aground bow knows

wound robin callous whippoorwill

who cooks for whooo

double war bell xsphinx

mystery raptor shrill

Om, khya khya khyahi (speak, speak)! Tistha tistha (up, up)!



Nearer Home

Dana Ward

Kenneth Koch was born in Cincinnati & I kept his nativity close. Whatever curse I thought this river valley labored under (where the production of poetry was concerned) seemed undone by the fact of his birth. He left of course, & left early, setting off for Harvard as soon as he finished up at Walnut Hills High. Later, tracing my finger over the bios in the back of *In the American Tree*, I would find Kit Robinson had started here, went to Walnut Hills too, then set off for that other, sunnier coast to go to Berkeley, & like Koch, to join up with a cadre of poets who would change American writing. The lesson was plain & served to reinforce through particulars what I anyway generally knew—I had to leave Cincinnati, & soon.

Alice & Phoebe Cary left too. They started out up the road from where I'm typing this today, in College Hill, when all this was farmland. They began writing while young, a practice abhorred by their taciturn father. They hid their works in a secret cupboard & wrote by the light of a fiery rag they would burn in a saucer of lard. Eventually they began to send out their works & would thrill to find them printed up in local papers or syndicated & republished in the East. Their reputations grew & so they did what Kenneth did: they moved to New York & hit it big! They hung out with P. T. Barnum, had salons with Cady Stanton, gave lectures, published widely & now they're buried out in Green-Wood Cemetery, instead of down the street in Spring Gove.

Much of what they wrote was quite popular too, novels & poems, early feminist tracts, articles & sketches. Among them is a hymn that Phoebe wrote, perhaps you know it: "Nearer Home." It's one of those "life is an advent calendar / heaven is Christmas" kind of hymns: "Thus the Christian on life's ocean / as his light boat cuts the foam / in the evening cries with rapture / 'I am one day nearer home.'" I can see now, with some serious existential retrofitting, how this hymn described my sense of biding time in Cincinnati as I neared the end of adolescence. Each evening I could go to bed content that I was not long for this philistine town. Soon I'd be carried on the legendary caravan, moved by vanguard impulse & by liberatory feeling, that leaves the mean provincial city melting in the rearview mirror sun.

Because the heaven of New York or California promised more than relief from whatever I then perceived were the ineluctable stupidities forever to reign over this little city. They promised what salvation swears to the Christian—bliss & communion with one's truest company. That's what I longed for most of all. The thing was, though, I didn't feel alone in Cincinnati, & while I didn't know anyone else who was writing or reading poetry I was surrounded by extraordinary friends—no small thing!—

even when measured against the moony ambitions of a verse-obsessed kid. So while I was always proclaiming my disdain for this place, plotting my escape & acting in every way superior, my dearest friends were staying here. Thus the city remained, through their love, indispensable.

Yet, to be a poet I had to leave, right? This was the lesson of Kenneth Koch, of Kit Robinson, of Alice & Phoebe Cary, of Nikki Giovanni & all the others who counted Cincinnati as a place that had to be abandoned in order to achieve a life in art. So my stay-or-leave deliberations continued, creating a wishbone in my mind I couldn't break. It finally snapped when I fell in love with Sarah. She was just back from a year in Manhattan & didn't seem anxious to tackle the financial strains of that city again. Cincinnati was cheap & dumb & easy, we were in love & surrounded by friends. It was settled in this "fuck it, we'll stay" kind of way. Unofficially & slowly, day by day, I let myself really become "of" this place, its pleasures & disasters, in ways I'd resisted before, when I was living through the form of time described in "Nearer Home." I would live in Cincinnati & be a poet—the wishbone's uneasy repair.

What's weird is I am not exactly from Cincinnati. I was born & raised on the Ohio River's southern side, in Northern Kentucky. My parents came up from the Commonwealth's mountains & farms, so growing up my life ran south. Four spring hours up the Mountain Parkway through flowering hollers to Paintsville had felt safe as houses, yet a five-minute drive to a child psychologist's office in Clifton was fraught with the threat of getting lost. Thus Kentucky, even at its most far-flung, had been given to me as familiar. In this construct Cincinnati's proximity was flimsy, a mirage that went solid for baseball or shopping, only to recede into its holographic looming glimpsed as constellated buildings from this or that hilly bluegrass vista near our house. While I felt like I needed to leave Cincinnati, it turned out I'd never quite lived there.

So it wasn't New York or San Francisco, but all of this regional identity vertigo did provide a vantage by which to think the city's life as slant. Fresh idealizations gave dewy momentum to sweeter effects I was pursuing in my writing, while the city's reactionary aspects offered localized objects for critique & for the enrichment of an integral dissent. Sarah & I got an apartment in East Walnut Hills, a neighborhood that bleeds into sprawling Eden Park. From its overlook I could see the river & Kentucky. I wandered around the park constantly, always with some book (I remember especially Blaser back then, & Kevin Davies' *Comp.* was fairly new. Arendt & Mandelstam. Spicer. Hejninian. Mayer. Simone Weil & Cage. Both Gizzis & Moxley. Notley & Watten. Genet.) I hoped someone of similar interest

would notice & take as a signal, an opening, to say, “You like Mayer?,” & from there we’d begin some grand adventure. I swear to god I would picture just such an encounter but the other in the frame was always blurry, a prismatic burn in a Polaroid the mind takes when it makes a spirit photograph of friends you’ve never met. How passive & Disney these daydreams seem now! Still. It was nice to feel like I was waiting for you on that hill in the city by the river.

So that’s a part of my little story. Cincinnati & poetry for me—soft slapstick with a yearning heart & hopeful reveries invested with the high stakes of writing, some pretty little gyroscope skipping back & forth between the riverbanks & looking for mystical torque to lift off & fly away & come back. But of course there is another, deeper way to think of that river.

“Counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life’s principal joy was reckless indeed,” Toni Morrison wrote, & from there we’ll flash back to locate Cincinnati in history, its relation to the trauma of slavery, the city as evoked in *Beloved*, just beyond the river’s Mason-Dixon marker. Her book gives you a mid-19TH-century picture of the place, stunning in its dimensionality & graceful in its manner of establishing numerous vectors—escape from the genocidal culture of the South for the barely less genocidal culture of the North, ghosts, both specific & general, both incipient & vestigial, woven through the air of the place as brute fact. She also gives you a sense of the city’s young economy, its grim labors & depravations, shattered bodies working for pennies on the docks, or butchering hogs. You get the feeling of the streets awash in pig’s blood, as they were.

It’s around this time that local manufacturer Proctor & Gamble is starting to go over big, making products to hygienate the happy face slapped on white tyranny. So. Cincinnati as a place of soap & blood. As for the literary culture of the time there were a lot of predictable shenanigans—bromantic “societies” where dudes held forth, smoking pipes & reading poems. Taking

off their top hats. Putting them back on. In this general period, Eliza Potter would write her scandalous memoir *A Hairdresser’s Experience in High Life*, exposing local high society’s hypocrisy & dumbness while at the same time contributing foundational thought for theories of a beauty industry just then beginning to take shape in the States. Emerson came for a lecture or two. Charles Dickens passed through & incited Bieber-fever. When a rose tumbled from his lapel & shattered, ardent admirers, gathered at some mansion, scrambled to collect the scattered petals. Elocutioners rocked the Antoinette Ballroom at the Alms. Local farmer & big shot Robert Longworth sent Longfellow a batch of his Catawba wine, inspiring the poem that would give Cincinnati its nickname, “the Queen City.” Literary activity seems confined to now lost secret cupboards or to officialdom’s tedious aspirants.

I have it in my mind that the city’s ugly side is beginning to find a deeper purchase at this time, as the uncongealed frontier feeling begins to harden into a nasty & censorious “civics,” the living sediment of soap & blood that remains part of the city’s root structure. Here the motivation for our poets’ departures might become clearer. It’s not just that the city is small, or that it lacks for sufficient literary culture (the latter less true now than ever); it’s that it is imbued with what I take to be a peculiar & locally cultivated cruelty, a low, stupid anti-egalitarianism that exaggerates the worst of market fundamentalism & so, by extension, the worst of the American too.

But our story is not only one of departures, it’s one of arrivals as well. So let’s jump forward several decades, into the 20TH century, the long postwar era, when Dallas Wiebe gets to town by way of rural Kansas, taking a post at the University of Cincinnati. There he’d found the *Cincinnati Review*, the city’s longest running poetry rag, & begin to create an extraordinary body of work that’s like nothing else in American writing. Like the Carys he wrote novels & short stories & poems, tried his hand at everything, & may be the closest thing to

a laureate our city’s ever had. Of special interest for our purposes here is a book of his that’s set in Cincinnati, an alter-Cincinnati of Wiebe’s design, *The Vox Populi Street Stories*. I bring this work up for special mention because of Wiebe’s scathing attention to that uglier side of Cincinnati I mentioned, the side that expelled so many poets. In the book’s penultimate story, “Prolegomena to the Study of Apocalyptic Hermeneutics,” Wiebe’s alter ego roams Ludlow Avenue (one of the loveliest streets in the city) on Christmas Eve, encountering a soft sort of Dantean inferno, shop windows “glowing like the fires of a gentle hell.” His appraisal of the city’s public life:

I didn’t tell the my friends how familiar the Cincinnati Republicans seem to me since I grew up in Nazi Germany. There the people elected the same kind of men, men who had what we now call ‘family values.’ They had nice families, stout wives, healthy, happy children, dogs, cats, flowers in the yard. & they hated the ‘others,’ as they called them. They hated the ‘not them,’ those who had different religions, who spoke different languages, who had different skin. The Republicans of Cincinnati all speak like the public officials of the Germany of my youth. They sound righteous, but they embody a massive hate. It often seems to me as if God had abandoned all hope here & said, ‘Let’s see how low man can sink.’ I always pitied the poor souls who grew up in this slough of iniquity.

Whoa. Harsh right? But accurate I’m afraid, as it relates to the worst of the truth of this place. Wiebe’s story takes place in 1998, around the time I finally made the little move north across the river & roamed Eden Park, dreaming my reading would save me from a certain kind of solitude. So what can I say about Cincinnati now, 15 years on? I can say that it’s fucked. It’s fucked in all the ways Dallas Wiebe describes, fucked in the ways most American cities are fucked—it’s patrolled by a racist & militarized police force, managed by a popular discourse that carries more than a whiff of the fascism Wiebe addresses

& invested in remedial fantasies that view new boutiques & gourmet taco bars as forms of genuine civic repair. Soap scrubbing blood, the absolute substitution of the private for the public, a hatred for the frail & open world.

But what else can I say? I can say that it is beautiful, by way of its landscapes, seven plunging Roman hills, but mainly by way of its people. Sweet & rough-hewn. Brilliant. All the ardent activists,

That leads to a photograph that I love like a beacon, where those blurs that stood in for other people finally achieved a specific resolution. It's of Tyrone Williams & Norman Finkelstein in 1989 looking young & splendid, radiating a happiness that comes to meet my own, the happiness I've felt in having knowing them. The picture is taken on the campus of the little Jesuit college on the east side of town, Xavier University, where they teach. They're

This is like 2002, 2003 & things seemed to be picking up. My old longing for even a glancing encounter was soon replaced by an ever mounting calendar of readings, nights out for drinks, shared manuscripts & gossip, life-changing conversations in cars. I started hosting readings at Publico, this great collective gallery a few of us ran. I was terrified at first about people showing up, empty chair nightmares & all of that. But these great ramshackle audiences really did



"You can't expect to get back to normal."

great parties, exuberant music & theatre, young artists trying inspiring things, longtime local stars still producing awesome work. Yeah, a lot of people still leave the first chance they get because of the maladies described above & for the sake of their own excitations & adventures, but for us—the believers, the recalcitrants, the economically immobile, the tenured—I feel like we've really made something for ourselves, especially where poetry's concerned.

both transplants, Norman by way of New York & Tyrone from Detroit, but they'd both been around a long time when I finally got to know them. I'd been corresponding some with poets & they'd ask, "Do you know Ty? Do you know Norman?" I didn't, but immediately wanted to meet them. So we started hanging out, having been introduced to one another by people far away in San Francisco & Boston.

start coming through, as did poets from all over the country. Around this time I met Pat Clifford, whose poems were drawing powerful lines of connection with his work as an activist. Aryanil Mukherjee's poetry, written in Bengali & "transliterated" into English, started finding its way into the bloodstream of the place. He hosted some group readings down in his basement that now feel like legendary nights. Pat & Nil formed a bond & have written two

wonderful books together. You should really check them out.

Matt Hart & Eric Applebee's magazine, *Forklift, Ohio*, had long been in full swing by this point. Matt turns a lot of students on to poetry in his class at the Cincinnati Art Academy, & they started showing up in droves, bringing with them their own evolving poems & introducing their friends to the scene. Brett Price, who (sigh) we lost to New York. Patricia Murphy, who (thank god) stuck around. She's writing amazing new things right now. I wish you could have heard the reading she gave last summer. Avril Thurman who is doing brilliant work. But ok, let's see, deeper into the mid-00s, as things grow more involving. Robert & Elizabeth Murphy's Dos Madres Press started up. Kristi Maxwell & Michael Rerick moved to town with fresh intelligence & communitarian spirit in tow. They started a series, Bon/Motley, which gave the fledgling scene another site to calibrate & think & talk together. The after-parties for those readings were always so special, hours on the patio at Fries, where a lot of young friendships grew deeper. I was lucky enough to meet Micah Freeman there, whose energy & intelligence animated the scene for a number of years. He's moved on now, badly missed.

Through Norm & Tyrone I was introduced to Keith Tuma, 40 minutes up the road in Oxford, at Miami University. He'd been bringing in poets from all over the world for years. How was it that I'd never known?! He's an amazing scholar with his own brand of heady & lacerating verse, a special thing to hear when he reads (far too rarely). cris cheek has a job at Miami as well. He's brought with him a laboratory-circus of performance art & new media explorations, & his own extraordinary body of cross-genre work. Cathy Wagner got hired there. Her poems were already in the air for me when she arrived in Southern Ohio. Immediately she plunged into the local in her writing while continuing the rare lyrical experiment she's undertaken, writing some of my favorite poems by anyone these past few years. Through their efforts & those of Bill & Lisa Howe, S(W)OP (Southwest Ohio Poets) was formed, a loose collective that meets

to share work informally once or twice a year. They also hosted two glorious international poetry & performance festivals, Post-Moot (1 & 2), which were so rich & significant I can't even begin to write through them here. In those years a golden wire was cabled from Oxford down Route 27 to Cincinnati, buzzing with exchange & pulling the two places closer together.

Bill & Lisa followed that golden line down to Cincinnati after finishing their stint at the college. Now their Slack Buddha Press operates from the basement of the Ice Cream Factory in Brighton, & they hosted a great small press fair in that neighborhood last year. Mark Mendoza moved down that line too. He & Patricia, along with Megan Martin & Yvette Nepper & Megan Scharf, started the Important People series last year & they've put on a number of terrific events. Megan Martin's given some gorgeous readings. Her work moves searchingly all over the field—from fraught prose blocks to anecdotes to brilliant short plays in verse. Yvette's poems have been so important for me. She's one of the best readers I've ever heard. She's also a part of the stupendous Bitch's Brew collective, which puts on events at Greenwich, a thriving spot for poetry & music & performance in Walnut Hills. Also hugely important was Robby Wright's The Things that My Friends Say series, now defunct. Robby was determined to link up writers in the city who might not have heard one another before. The atmosphere of excitement & discovery those readings engendered hasn't quite been equaled since, but their spirit remains as model. When Thom Donovan was visiting last year he said Cincinnati was almost like Paris in the 20s! A loving exaggeration to be sure but the funny thing is I didn't even bat an eye. It takes my breath to think of my old hopeful void decorated by these baroque designs of sociality & writing, as ornate & enlivening as any you'll find.

It's not perfect (duh), & my little survey is terribly partial. There is much I just don't have the space describe, & more importantly, tons I don't know. I would have loved to interview people like Ralph LaCharity, Pauletta Hansel, Richard Hauge, Kathy Wilson, Mike Hensen,

Steven Lansky: people who were on the scene long before I found it & could have thrown light on certain histories that remain mysterious to me. I would have liked talk about their writing as well, writing that's been central to the life in the city. There is the work of C. S. Giscombe, born & raised an hour north in Dayton, whose poetry deals explicitly with the geographic & social particulars of the place. I would have loved to explore that here as well. I'll admit I've had to write this on the fly. Then, there are so many other venues, publications, adjacent scenes & spaces I've not yet had a chance to explore. The limits described by the angle of my vantage, which I mean to expand into an ever-wider lens. Then there are the problems that belong to us all, of race & class, sexuality & gender inequity, of loneliness or alienation produced by occluded points of access, utopian hubris, but evacuated utopian longing too. Problems I know you're familiar with from your own life, as such problems are sadly coterminous with the world. So while any scene (anything?) may reproduce these gross facts we despise, it may also embody the life of our fondest desires in miraculous ways. I think these irreconciliations are aspects of the organs in such communal bodies, mangled chambers in a damaged, thriving heart.

Inside that heart I pick up on a certain local sweetness, the inverse of the ugly part that I described before. As it throbs with normal trouble there's a flow of sensitivity radiating out, nourishing what's emerged here with solidarity & warmth. The curse I once sensed was undone by these endearments, & perhaps I just mean that a certain destructive kind of pettiness feels muted here, as if everyone knows it would be too indulgent, that all this momentum & art could fall back to scattered longing. Perhaps I just mean care remains the prime form of resilience, & the poets that I know here live that truth.

Dana Ward is the author of This Can't Be Life (Edge, 2012). A new book, The Crisis of Infinite Worlds (Futurepoem), should be out soon.

EVENTS at THE POETRY PROJECT

FRIDAY 2/1, 10PM

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF AMERICAN CITIES

In the tradition of *Floating Bear*, *Try!*, *Rolling Stock* and other hyperactive journals before it, *The Death and Life of American Cities* is couched in the necessity of materializing writing's frequency in all its cantering grime. Please join us for a one-night procedural intervention in this circuit to parse the first 10 months of publication/gestation with readings by erica kaufman, Jennifer Nelson, Jamie Townsend, Andrew Durbin and Josef Kaplan.

MONDAY 2/4

OPEN READING

Sign-in at 7:45PM

WEDNESDAY 2/6

E. TRACY GRINNELL & P. INMAN

E. Tracy Grinnell is the author of *Helen: A Fugue* (Belladonna Elder Series #1, 2008), *Some Clear Souvenir* (O Books, 2006) and *Music or Forgetting* (O Books, 2001). She is the founding editor and director of Litmus Press. **P. Inman** grew up on Long Island. His publications include *Ocker* (Tuumba Press), *Red shift* (Roof Books), *vel* (O Books); *ad finitum* (if p then q), and, most recently, *per se* (Burning Deck). *written, 1976-2012* is forthcoming in late 2013 from if p then q.

MONDAY 2/11

THE ARCADIA PROJECT: NORTH AMERICAN POSTMODERN PASTORAL

Contributors to this anthology—Marcella Durand, Evelyn Reilly, Robert M. Fitterman, Eric Linsker, Matt Reeck, Paul Legault, Brenda Iijima, Amy King and Timothy Donnelly—read poems exploring radically affected contemporary terrain.

WEDNESDAY 2/13

AMIRI BARAKA & THOMAS SAYERS ELLIS

Amiri Baraka published his first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961. His book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* is still regarded as the seminal

work on African American music and culture. His reputation as a playwright was established with the production of *Dutchman* at the Cherry Lane Theatre in 1964. Poet and photographer

Thomas Sayers Ellis co-founded The Dark Room Collective in 1988. His first full collection, *The Maverick Room*, was published by Graywolf Press in 2005 and awarded the 2006 John C. Zacharis First Book Award. He is also the author of *The Good Junk* (Take Three #1, Graywolf Press, 1996). *Skin, Inc.: Identity Repair Poems* (Graywolf Press, 2010) is his recent collection of poems and photographs.

FRIDAY 2/15, 10PM

ANDREW DIECK & CHRISTINE KANOWNIK

Andrew Dieck's poetry has appeared in *The New Hunter's Review*, *Poems by Monday*, *The Death and Life of American Cities*, *The West Wind Review*, *Gerry Mulligan and The Bard Papers*. His first chapbook, *Thank You, I Know My Way Out*, is forthcoming this spring from Well Greased Press. He edits O'clock Press along with Kit Schluter and Allen Edwin Butt.

Christine Kanownik's poetry can be found in the past or upcoming issues of *Everyday Genius*, *Lungfull! Magazine*, *Glitterpony*, *Shampoo* and *H_NGM_N*. She has been in residence at the University of Chicago, The Congress Theater, and La Misión in Baja, California. Her first chapbook, *We Are Now Beginning to Act Wildly*, is forthcoming from Diez Press.

MONDAY 2/18

A TRIBUTE TO ALFRED STARR HAMILTON

This event celebrates the release of *A Dark Dreambox of Another Kind: The Selected Poems of Alfred Starr Hamilton* with editors Ben Estes and Alan Felsenthal as well as Peter Gizzi, Ben Gocker, Emily Hunt, Lucy Ives, Charles North, Elizabeth Robinson, Brian Teare and Ron Padgett.

WEDNESDAY 2/20

MARTINE BELLEN & ANDREW LEVY

Martine Bellen is the author of *Ghosts!* (Spuyten Duyvil Press), *The Vulnerability of Order* (Copper Canyon

Press), *Tales of Murasaki and Other Stories* (Sun & Moon Press), and the novella *2X(Squared)*, among other works. Her poetry collection *The Wayback Machine* is forthcoming from Furniture Press Books. **Andrew Levy** is the author of *Don't Forget to Breathe* (Chax Press), *Nothing Is in Here* (EOAGH Books), *The Big Melt* (Factory School), *Paper Head Last Lyrics* (Roof Books), *Values Chauffeur You* (O Books) and nine other titles of poetry and prose. With Roberto Harrison, Andrew edited and published the poetry journal *Crayon* from 1997 to 2008.

MONDAY 2/25

TALK SERIES: WOLFMAN LIBRARIAN (FILIP MARINOVICH)

What are the origins of Wolfman Librarian? This pressing question of our age merits further stroboscopic analysis. The piano is grand and it is there and perhaps it will be played by a Seahorse. A Rabbit will also be there and if you're thinking "bestiary" you are perhaps right but hopefully, more importantly, young. How to improvise in a tough room? Are you soft enough to let it through while being the supple earth light gave you? Wolves and Bachelard in a unitard are fine for school but here in the church we get into it grooving with that. The Time-Being gave birth to a wolf, and if The Time-Being is also a river how does the wolf swim in the underwater Now? The quest and swerve sesh. **Filip Marinovich** is the author of *AND IF YOU DON'T GO CRAZY I'LL MEET YOU HERE TOMORROW* and *ZERO READERSHIP*, both from Ugly Duckling Presse. His latest epic, *WOLFMAN LIBRARIAN*, is coming soon to a den near you.

WEDNESDAY 2/27

ALLISON COBB & MAGDALENA ZURAWSKI

Allison Cobb is the author of *Born2* (Chax Press, 2004) an engagement with her hometown of Los Alamos, New Mexico, and *Green-Wood* (Factory School, 2010) an engagement with a 19th-century cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. She was a 2009 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow.

Magdalena Zurawski's novel *The Bruise* was published in 2008 by FC2/University of Alabama Press. It received both the 2008 Lambda Award for Lesbian Debut Fiction and the 2007 Ronald Sukenick-American Book Review Innovative Fiction Prize. She is the co-curator of the Minor American Poetry Reading Series in Durham, North Carolina.

FRIDAY 3/1, 10PM

BRETT PRICE & NICOLE WALLACE

Brett Price lives and writes in Brooklyn. With Ed Steck and Natalie Häusler, he created and edits the small press American Books. **Nicole Wallace** is the author of *White Flowers*, a loose-leaf multimedia chapbook in an envelope. She co-edits *Brawling Pigeon*, which appears occasionally, and her work has recently appeared in *Lungfull!* and *Solicitations*.

MONDAY 3/4

OPEN READING

Sign-in at 7:45PM

WEDNESDAY 3/6

LAURA ELRICK & CECILIA VICUÑA

Laura Elrick's *Propagation* is recently out from Kenning Editions. Previous works include two books, *Fantasies in Permeable Structures* (Factory School, 2005) and *sKincerity* (Krupskaya, 2003), and several experimental performance works: *Blocks Away* (2010), *Stalk* (2008) and *5 Audio Pieces for Doubled Voice* (2005). **Cecilia Vicuña**, the author of 20 poetry books, exhibits and performs widely in Europe, Latin America and the United States. Her most recent publications are *Spit Temple*, *Selected Oral Performances of Cecilia Vicuña*, edited and translated by Rosa Alcalá (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012), *Chanccani Quipu* (Granary Books, 2012), and *Sabor a Mí* (Chain Links, 2011).

MONDAY 3/11

JOHN KEENE & CHRIS VITIELLO

John Keene is the author of *Annotations* (New Directions) and, with artist Christopher Stackhouse,

Seismosis (1913 Press). His poetry, fiction, essays, translations and art projects have appeared widely. He teaches at Rutgers University–Newark.

Chris Vitiello's books include *Nouns Swarm a Verb* (Xurban, 1999), *Irresponsibility* (Ahsahta, 2008) and *Obedience* (Ahsahta, 2011).

WEDNESDAY 3/13

JEROME ROTHENBERG

& HERIBERTO YÉPEZ

Jerome Rothenberg has published over 80 books of poetry and 12 assemblages of traditional and avant-garde poetry such as *Technicians of the Sacred* and, with Pierre Joris and Jeffrey Robinson, *Poems for the Millennium, Volumes 1–3*. Recent books of poems include *Tryptych*, *Gematria Complete*, *Concealments & Caprichos* and *Retrievals: Uncollected & New Poems, 1955-2010*. **Heriberto Yépez** has published two dozen books of prose and poetry in Spanish. He is also a translator from English. He is currently co-editing and translating Ulises Carrion's work into Spanish. He is the author of *Wars*, *Threesomes*, *Drafts*, & *Mothers*. His most recent book is *The empire of neomemory*, published by Chain Links in 2013.

FRIDAY 3/15, 10PM

BOLAÑO FOR POETS

Roberto Bolaño garnered international attention for his novels and stories, and his influence on the world of fiction has been substantial and much discussed. But he was also a poet, and his work often deals with the lives of poets, including the infrarealist circle of his youth that included Bolaño's close friend Mario Santiago Papasquiaro. What does Bolaño's work as both novelist and poet mean for contemporary poetry? Readings and a panel discussion with Cole Heinowitz, Carmen Boullosa, Brandon Holmquest and others TBA.

MONDAY 3/18

A. L. NIELSEN & EVIE SHOCKLEY

A. L. Nielsen's latest book, *A Brand New Beggar*, is just out from Steerage Press. Previous poetry collections

include *Heat Strings*, *Evacuation Routes*, *Stepping Razor*, *VEXT*, *Mixage* and *Mantic Semantic*. His work has appeared in *Best American Poetry* and other anthologies, and he has won two Gertrude Stein Awards.

Evie Shockley's most recent book of poetry, *the new black* (Wesleyan), won the 2012 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in Poetry. She is also the author of a *half-red sea* (Carolina Wren Press), two chapbooks and a critical study, *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry* (Iowa University Press).

WEDNESDAY 3/20

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE

& MARK PAWLAK

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's

five books are *Dog Road Woman*, *Off-Season City Pipe*, *Blood Run*, *The Year of the Rat* and *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer*. She is of Oendat, French Canadian, Portuguese, Tsalagi, Irish, Scot, English, Metis and Creek descent and came of age cropping tobacco and working in fields, waters and factories.

Mark Pawlak is the author of seven poetry collections and the editor of six anthologies. His latest books are *Go to the Pine: Quoddy Journals, 2005-2010* (Plein Air Editions/Bootstrap Press, 2012) and *Jefferson's New Image Salon: Mashups and Matchups* (Cervena Barva Press, 2010).

MONDAY 3/25, 6-9PM

15TH ANNUAL URBAN WORD NYC TEEN POETRY SLAM PRELIMS \$5 for Teens, \$7 for Adults, FREE for Performers.

New York's hottest teen poets compete for a chance to represent their city at the Brave New Voices National Teen Poetry Slam in Chicago. Support the voices of the next generation as they take the stage and speak their mind. To enter, poets must be 13–19 years old and sign up at www.urbanwordnyc.org or show up. First come first serve. Audience members are encouraged to come early as seating is limited.

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.

UPCOMING POETRY PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Every Waking Minute

Lewis Warsh

Fridays / 7–9PM / Begins February 1

10 Sessions

There's something in front of our eyes every waking minute. All the tiny little threads and patterns, all the atoms and dust particles in the air, all the mirror images, the lights on the highway. This will be a workshop in the translation of the ephemeral into some other kind of language. Mostly, it will be an attempt to find a form for all types of experience, including the *dialogue interieur* that never stops. We'll look at the Objectivists as a first stop, and move on to works by Lyn Hejinian, Bernadette Mayer, Renee Gladman, Robert Creeley, Wang Ping and Horacio Castellanos Moya, among others. Mostly we will dwell on the nature of the aphoristic, all the action that takes place on the periphery, the way the center of attention fades into the background, swerving toward and away from the light, and how everything adds up to something in the end.

Lewis Warsh is the author of over 30 books of poetry, fiction and autobiography. He is editor and publisher of United Artists Books and director of the MFA program in Creative Writing at Long Island University–Brooklyn.

Cathexis/Catharsis:

Writing to/through Illness and Suffering

Sharon Mesmer

Tuesdays / 7–9PM / Begins February 5

10 Sessions

Illness and suffering are usually imaged as sites of trauma, feared as obstacles, rejected by a youth-obsessed culture. But what if these forsaken places could be re-imaged and understood, with the help of poetry, as talismans, thresholds, gateways? In this form-based workshop we will look at how poets encode and stabilize ideas about illness and suffering into traditional and novel poetic architectures, enabling readers to find new meanings in these witnessed experiences. We will begin by looking at Jennifer Nix's essay, "Finding Poetry In Illness," then move on to poems by Anne Sexton, Aracelis Girmay, Joanne Kyger, Robert Lowell, Laynie Browne, Bob Kaufman, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Wordsworth, Jane Kenyon, Rainer Maria Rilke and Thomas Hardy. Each week we will examine and discuss a poem that utilizes a form and then flow and encode our own experiences into the stabilizing mechanism of that form. Guest speakers will include Kristin Prevallet and Laynie Browne. **Sharon Mesmer** is the author of the poetry collections *Annoying Diabetic Bitch*, *The Virgin Formica* and *Half Angel*, *Half Lunch* as well as several fiction collections. A Fulbright Specialist and two-time New York Foundation for the Arts fellow in poetry, she teaches creative writing at New York University and the New School.

Writing Impossible Subjects

E. Tracy Grinnell

Saturdays / 2–4PM / Begins March 16

5 Sessions

Writing the invisible, inaudible, illegible, even unintelligible body demands a willingness to hybridize, interweave, translate and invent. In this workshop we will develop new forms that enable us to write into the fragmented, the omitted, the elusive and the radical positions of our individual and collective realities. Using formal experimentation as a mode of reckoning with the real, in order to alter and open, we will write with the knowledge that at every moment we are capable of change and effecting change. Experimenting with modes of translation/transliteration/transformation, we will draw from musical and visual sources while considering the formally explorative works of poets Leslie Scalapino, Haryette Mullen, M. Mara Ann, M. NourbeSe Philip, kari edwards, Rosmarie Waldrop and others. **E. Tracy Grinnell** is the author of *Helen, A Fugue*, *Some Clear Souvenir* and *Music or Forgetting*. She has taught creative writing at Pratt Institute, Brown University and Naropa's Summer Writing Program and is the founding editor of Litmus Press.

The Constraint, the Cookbook and the Anecdote:

The Filmed Version

Tan Lin

Tuesdays / 7–9PM / Begins April 30

5 Sessions

This will be a filmed workshop in constraint-driven exercises, prison escape schemes of writing, text corpora, box and fugue variations, generic descriptions, the anecdote and ambient, environmental language works. Some attention to plants, perfumes, short-form communications platforms, and cookbooks as cross-references. Occasional recourse to music and the non-rock music associated with growing up. Works conducted in various scales, from the tiny to the extra large. The course will explore knowledge transmission/writing in paratextual arenas, footnotes, indexes, captions, page ranking systems, wikis, bibliographies and the like. There is no "free" writing in this class. Various sections of the class will be filmed and used as writing material. **Tan Lin** is the author of *7 Controlled Vocabularies* and *Obituary 2004 The Joy of Cooking* and *Insomnia and the Aunt*. He is the recipient of a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award, a Getty Distinguished Scholar Grant and a Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital Arts Writing Grant to complete a book on the writings of Andy Warhol.

Workshop Memberships are now available for \$375 and include a one-year Individual Membership (\$50 level) as well as tuition for any and all spring and fall classes. If you wish to enroll in a single workshop only, tuition for one 10-session workshop is \$250 and tuition for one 5-session workshop is \$125 for the 2012–13 season. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Caps on class sizes, if in effect, will be determined by workshop leaders. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call (212) 674-0910.

New Omnidawn Poetry



2012 Chapbook Prize

The Middle by Angela Hume

Available April 44 pages 978-1-890650-83-4 \$11.95

The next Poetry Chapbook Contest will run from Feb 1-Apr 22—Judge: Gillian Conoley

Spring Poetry from Omnidawn

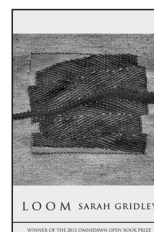


Sarah Gridley *Loom*

2011 Omnidawn Open Book Prize

88 pages 978-1-890650-78-0 \$17.95

"a pastoral meditation and a postmodern allegory, a profound retelling of a Victorian ballad's rendering of a medieval tale."—L.S. Asekoff

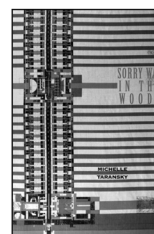


Michelle Taransky

Sorry Was In The Woods

88 pages 978-1-890650-81-0 \$17.95

"Her willingness to go further than most dare—formally, conceptually—marks hers as a voice to listen for in the wilderness."—Susan Howe



Brian Teare *Companion Grasses*

112 pages 978-1-890650-79-7 \$17.95

"one of the most beautiful books that I've read. Full of seriousness. Full of tradition. And full of care."—Juliana Spahr



Lynn Xu *Debts & Lessons*

96 pages 978-1-890650-80-3 \$17.95

"a poetry of theodicy and, as she traces the features of her own face in the faces of the past, striking originality."—Susan Stewart



For contests, sample poems, reviews, & more visit www.omnidawn.com
Available from Ingram, Baker & Taylor, and most other wholesalers



Book Reviews

Western Practice

Stephen Motika

(Alice James Books, 2012)

Review by Carmen Giménez Smith

Western Practice, Stephen Motika's first collection of poetry, explores how place is a force in memory and in art. Many poets use place to contextualize biographies and give them dimension, but instead of relying on more traditional notions of the lyric, Motika writes about his particular experience of California art in poems that are atomized and impressionistic meditations where landscape is woven into body, ardor, and flux.

Many poems in the collection speak ekphrastically to other artists with the same sensibility. In the long poem "Delusion's Enclosure: On Harry Partch (1901-1974)," he writes:

*August beach, ocean breath
Mount Diablo
sinking beneath the horizon
stay & move
to pass peak
with men
food and fops and 'well-made chaps'
yes yes
all this
brazen talk
by creeks and woodsheds and more along side the highway*

The poem, an ode to the experimental California composer, mimics the affect of Partch's work, especially the ways in which Partch's music enacts dissonance and accrual of memory. Motika also uses the poem's occasion to describe the history of contemporary art in Southern California. This poem reifies the book's seeming ambition: to sound and feel like the snatches of voices one might hear floating in the hot Santa Ana winds.

The poems are occasionally opaque, but that opacity seems to be an effect of the Partch-influenced musical aesthetic to which Motika refers, one in which subjectivity is subsumed by the outside world. Like Partch, Motika locates sublimity within the artifact itself, effacing (or concealing) a subjectivity that might disturb it. In the poem "Tea Palinode (18TH and Sanchez)," a speaker sits "in parallel time, scratching the Velcro clasp of revealing / and not revealing." This poem, like many others, speaks to the "practice" Motika refers to in the title, the attempt to isolate and reveal what is singular about time and place and to then replicate its sound.

The book echoes the argot-driven style of Ginsberg and the arid complexities of poets like David Antin and Michael Palmer. Epigraphs by two other California poets, Leslie Scalapino and Lyn Hejinian, frame the book's sections, as well, so the book also reads as homage to poets who, like Partch, like Motika, built poetics from inside the Edenic site of American manifest destiny.

The Los Angeles visual artist Ed Ruscha once said, "When I began painting, all my paintings were of words which were guttural utterances like 'smash,' 'boss,' 'eat.' Those words were like flowers in a vase." Like Ruscha, Motika captures the amber suspension of "the land of no there there" in *Western Practice*. This collection is a gorgeous almanac of Motika's West Coast aesthetic subjectivity drawn finely in and through poems that suggest rather than inform. If we begin with the premise that all poems are about desire, then this book is loose with it, makes it a careful geographic study "all in a violet frame."

Carmen Giménez Smith, author of The City She Was and Goodbye, Flicker, lives and teaches in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Material Girl

Laura Jaramillo

(Subpress, 2012)

Review by Dustin Williamson

I first came across Laura Jaramillo's work in the chapbook *The Reactionary Poems* (put out by olywapress), the poems of which comprise the first of three parts that make up her first full-length collection, *Material Girl*. One of the pleasures of a book comprised of discrete sections is discovering the way those sections inform and speak to each other. While I am loath to call it a "voice," there is typically a core poetic tone that travels from one series to the next. And even if you pick up on something you assume would be universal throughout a poet's work, and it is not present in the next series, the poems play out across its absence, a work superimposed over the poetic equivalent of an afterimage. In either respect, the presence or lack, a collection that includes more than one series of poems gives the reader the opportunity to experience how a poet's tone fills a variety of form—whether dictated by self-imposed conditions or experience (is there a difference?). Although this is necessarily the case for any collection of poems, what separates a collection that is a hodgepodge of poems from one that hangs together (either satisfyingly or not—and those are not aesthetic judgments, since there is obviously something to be gained from deep dissatisfaction) is whether the poems in one series both work as their own unit and provide perspective for the others.

One of the things that first struck me when I read *The Reactionary Poems* is that, although poems in the section appear to be exploring the use of deep sarcasm and corrosive irony in small-ish lyric, they do so in a way in which the only irony may be that those tools are employed to create poems that are exceedingly direct. Many shorter poems play a sleight of hand with the reader, approaching "the thing itself," only to veer off at the last possible moment, or landing some glancing blow, making a vague gesture toward the impossibility of truly describing the world. *The Reactionary Poems*, on the other hand, approach this catastrophe head-on, expressing a profound frustration and anger with the power of official, imperialistic uses of language, but underlined, not with a hopefulness of wresting control of the means of expression, but the ultimate futility of doing so. For instance in the twin

poems, “Post Heroic Drag” and “Post Heroic Drag, pt. 2,” Jaramillo first moves further and further away from the word “post-heroic”—“imported / not from advertising / but from the theories / invented to sell / *concepts* in the *field* / of advertising,” then zooms back in in the second poem on a single woman, describing her after a day of work, as in a George Oppen poem, tired despite the information from the previous poem. Or, perhaps most directly, the entirety of Jaramillo’s poem, “Epic Minimalism” reads “I, on the other hand, am / miniaturizing so my anger / doesn’t lose its scale.”

The first section serves as a place setting for the observational lyrics in the other two sections of the book. While the poems in the other sections (“Civilian Nest” and “Material Girl”) are less highwire taut than “The Reactionary Poems,” they are as informed by the violence wrought by language—both official uses and a lack of communicability generally, even within poetry (“As if poetic diction / as if that supremely / impersonal avant-garde could pave over, even express / our peasant suffering”). In “Civilian Nest,” Jaramillo’s poems move from a direct address to poems that are in communication with people and geography, both the places in the poems, the places that travelers and immigrants drag along with them, and the drag of language as it informs identity—an imperfect “translation” of a life on the fringe of the center of global capitalism. If there is a hopeful note, *Material Girl* seems to find some comfort in a world constructed through words—a belief in it in fact, that the naming of a thing makes it in some profound sense real, both as a man conjured in the poem walking “naked in the morning / down Market huge dick flopping / against his thigh,” and the concomitant sense of the vulnerability of male public nudity. Even in this, however, it is clear that naming is not without its drawbacks—for if blue did not exist before we had a word for it, perhaps all of the detritus that follows us through our lives would not either. Even that is probably not the case, since the contents of the sea of garbage has already been named for us. In *Material Girl*, it appears, the best we can hope for is to create our own little world with an admittedly circumscribed language, informed as much by its content as by its lack.

Dustin Williamson is the author of *Obstructed View (Salacious Banter)*, *Exhausted Grunts (Cannibal)* and *Gorilla Dust (Open 24 Hours)*.

Nilling: Prose **Lisa Robertson** **(BookThug, 2012)** **Review by Krystal Languell**

Lisa Robertson’s latest work, *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, the Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias*, is a collection of six occasional essays linked by the universal concept of pleasure, located in experiences that bridge or subvert familiar binaries. Reading against thinking, willing against nilling, sound against silence—Robertson points up a third way that accounts for contradictory desires.

The first two essays in the book are concerned with the acts of reading and thinking, which are for Robertson simultaneous pleasures: “I make this unproblematic segue from thinking to reading because, for me, the two activities are completely implicated, folded into one another. I am only certain that I think insofar as I read.”

In the first essay, “Time in the Codex,” Robertson describes how reading enables her to leave behind her “assigned identity” and live in her imagination for as long as she remains focused on a text. The way Robertson reads, marrying reading and thinking, rejects “the habitual reification of ‘the social’ and ‘the personal’ in a binary system.” The distinction between social and personal mirrors that of public and private, another binary but one whose boundaries we have seen destabilized. She wants to inhabit an indeterminate identity while reading, to exist both in the social with the text and in the personal alone with her thoughts. “The inchoate state I crave...isn’t knowledge at all,” Robertson writes. Knowledge comes only later. The unpredictability of a new book satisfies: “I’ll be lost then, if reading is dark. In the forest, in the hotel or wherever.” The result of this attitude is a meditative state of mind that allows a reader to get lost in thought. Being lost but safe is a pleasure, and can only occur outside of received binaries.

Robertson is most comfortable in uncharted space. The next essay, “Lastingness: Réage, Lucrèce, Arendt,” connects the relation between reading and thinking to pleasure and intimacy. A narrative of reading three texts at about the same time, the essay is sexually charged from the start as Robertson, researching Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* at the British Museum, discovers a mildly obscene doodle in a 9th-century manuscript. A hole in the original vellum had been decorated

with labial marginalia: “the tiny absence was animated.” The invisible was made visible. Pauline Réage’s novel, *Histoire d’O*, a narrative of a woman who consents to increasingly degrading sex acts, “reconfigures thinking and reading as open forms of sustained erotic anarchy.” Robertson is also reading Hannah Arendt’s *The Life of the Mind*, which characterizes all thought as invisible; therefore, thought “cannot be conveniently mapped” and exists in opposition to society’s more common drive for action and results. Robertson characterizes Arendt’s argument as dissident thinking, analogous to “the complicities, erotics and discontinuities of friendship,” which also functions privately. Relationships are only understood by the participating individuals, akin to the intimacy between a reader and a book. Reading undoes a text, and the undoing of a text animates its absences; likewise, a relationship can animate the secret life of an individual. Thus, reading becomes a transformative and erotic act; the “willed reception” of reading is the desire “to be inhabited by this alterity.” Arendt calls this aporia or contradiction the split into willing and nilling. In her reading of Arendt, Robertson realizes:

My own readerly will was observably split; I slipped into reverie, I obediently pursued a concept, I made my corresponding marks, I resisted, I was lazy, I looped back, I sometimes skipped forward without immediately noticing. Far from seeming problematic, this nilling split introduced a complicated duration into pleasure.

The paradoxical position of both willing oneself to read and permitting the nilling split in order to receive the thoughts of the text, gives Robertson pleasure. It’s reassuring to see that she is capable of being distracted. Moreover, the split continues to mirror human interaction: a give-and-take relationship.

“Disquiet” is the penultimate essay of the book, and is the most sensorially pleasurable piece. In seven episodes, Robertson visits the sites of Eugène Atget’s Paris street photos to take sound recordings, reflecting on the nature of noise, sound and silence. (Robertson previously wrote about Atget in *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*.) The 30-second sound samples are hosted at www.BookThug.ca and are intended to be played while reading each section. The act of listening in a loop to these sounds of adults, children, cars in the rain, and music reminds the reader/listener

The work of *Nilling* is to reconceptualize intellectual activity as a peripatetic pleasure. Robertson reminds us of the many worlds of thought we are free to wander, and draws our attention to the potential for discovery by more fully inhabiting the imagination. She confirms by example that another world is possible, demonstrating how her mind “moves in the thickness of what has been banished from identity: it moves in noise.”

Thunderbird is a great shape-shifting bird, a vessel, a female form and foretelling as its wings clap with thunder in the echo of the the “violence that we put upon women.” In a cryptid poetic animal body, too, because to be is to be human; its odd anthropomorphic state inevitably possesses humanity. Thunderbird fears nothing and so acts as a great agent or importuner and heroine in the attack on the gods or the universe at large—infused with its vast swooping mythos—regarding all that is and contending with the absolute crushing loss of her father.

Several pantoum-like poems appear throughout the collection, seeming in their repetition to reify the poet’s description of this Thunderbird world around us and serving to write Herself into the mythos of the everyday. She rides as a small bird in the belly of the beast of the larger bird, thus births Herself. All that she is not, alongside all that she is, which, contradicting Herself in an intensely playful way. In “Who to Tell,” “I care for monsters / only because I am one...I am a monster / I eat life.”

This book is a book about living as much as it is about grief and coming to terms with death, dying and the supreme loss of her father in what is a wildly beautiful tribute of affection, harrowing in that feeling of utter abandonment that only death gives. Lyric fuses with confession about being in the world at large, in the present, living in the now. Dreamlike poems wrestle some of the more commonplace scenic poems. A somatic poetics alongside hypnagogic sequences. Clean and deceiving, her seemingly simplistic lines struggle with embracing humanity in her continuing ontological search. Lasky simultaneously defines being and then defiles it, takes it back and rejects it—not what it is or what it isn’t, but the Thunderbird or Rangda itself.

A negotiation of beauty alongside a world of cruelty and fear. What is so breathtakingly beautiful is also absolutely painful. In the first line of the long poem “Ugly Feelings,” the poet asks, “Why are people so cruel?”:

*Beautiful and ugly feelings
Gorgeous and horrific feelings
Feeling in the mouth of the cave
Feelings on the underbelly of the sun
Feelings that are hot and terrible
Listen, I am asking you
Why can people be so cruel*

What is ugly is beautiful, what is horrific can also be transformative. The fire plays against the cave wall, and only in this primitive space may we as viewers find and redefine its meaning by way of investigation. Poet becomes as supernatural as Thunderbird Herself and other iconic supernatural creatures—not just a monster, but as *beauty*, as dawn.

Susana Gardner is the author of (lapsed insel weary) (The Tangent, 2008), HERSO (Black Radish Books, 2011) and the forthcoming CADDISH (Xexoxial, 2013). She lives in Zürich, Switzerland.

Flowering Mall **Brandon Brown** **(Roof Books, 2012)** **Review by Jamie Townsend**

Selections from The Arcades Search Engine

Baader-Meinhoff: anarchist punk ref. (archaic usage); primarily concerned with Germany’s active cultural reconciliation; theoretical language with its boots firmly planted on the ground (*Urban Dictionary*: “Baader-Meinhof is the phenomenon where one happens upon some obscure piece of information—often an unfamiliar word or name—and soon afterward encounters the same subject again, often repeatedly. ‘*what the hell i just heard that yesterday this is that baader-meinhof shit.*’”)

bats, vampire: (See “chiroptophobia.”) “Building on the fear of bats, vampires in stories and films are often portrayed as being able to transform into bats for locomotion. In *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* the titular character is revealed to have chiroptophobia despite his otherwise strong affinity for animals.”

Baudelaire: aka “Assy Ascot.” Precursor to the synthesizer and asymmetrical swoop. Most common related searches include “Arthur Rimbaud,” “Paul Verlaine,” “Stéphane Mallarmé,” “Edgar Allen Poe,” “poems,” “quotes,” “painter of modern life,” “flowers of evil.”

Bay Area, the: Alli Warren, Lauren Levin, Camille Roy, Evan Kennedy, Stacy Doris, Rob Halpern, Robert Glück, Bruce Boone, Dodie Bellamy, Kevin Killian, Cynthia Sailers, Lauren Sufran, Stephanie Young, Sara Larson, David

Brazil, Leslie Scalapino, Laura Moriarty, Lindsay Boldt, Steve Orth, Michael Nicoloff, Taylor Brady, Jocelyn Saidenberg, Brent Cunningham, Samantha Giles, Jackqueline Frost, Joshua Clover, Michael Cross, Robin Tremblay-McGaw, Suzanne Stein, Erica Staiti, Monica Peck, Stephen Ratcliffe, John Sakkis, Catherine Meng, Dan Thomas-Glass, and on...

Bieber, Justin: an epic quaff, particularly one that supersedes any other claim for superior metaphysical meaning. Orphic goad. (Addendum: As of October 29, 2012, Bieber may have shaved part of his head.)

Benjamin, Walter: “...if I what I really need to see in order to write what I’m dying to write is the thing the poems so pathetically illuminate, then I think I’d rather see the light go out” (Rob Halpern). “Non est ad astra mollis e terris via” (Seneca). “In the middle of the night / When I’m in this dream / It’s like a million little stars / Spelling out your name” (Taylor Swift).

Bifo: In his introduction to *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Franco “Bifo” Berardi comments on the contemporary European crisis as being one that stretches beyond economic turmoil, to a deep “crisis of the social imagination.” He suggests that salvation only exists in the “poetic revitalization of language,” a reintegration of the intellect with a physical and social body now increasingly rendered dumb meat by financial supremacy.

Black, Rebecca: Desire reveals itself as a constellation of collapsed stars halting the linear at the point of total horizon. A temporal cut of limitless depth tracing the shape of a food court kiosk. A mall on the blackest of Black Fridays.

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Blob, The: Chuck Russell's 1988 remake of *The Blob* considers the limitless potential of the teenage romp by gauging a range of awkward libidinous energy, which is eventually consumed by an alien agent of ceaseless hunger. Broken down to its base materials, the body is a semi-solid magenta gel. A pulsing acid. Herein the poem becomes a limb pulled off during consumption: the bad faith of undoing a blouse after too much trunk punch. Translation attends to this.

blood: unclear (*Urban Dictionary*: "See 'jungle juice.' A heavenly concoction composed of liberal amounts of Everclear, vodka or other available liquors and Kool-Aid. Known as 'jungle juice' because it sends the drinker into a state of animal behavior. 'We were all completely wasted after finishing that trashcan full of jungle juice.'")

bod: Primary shape of *jouissance*. (See *Bod Man Deodorant commercial*: "I want your BOD!")

boredom: The mark of the beast. "The only horrible thing in the world is ennui...That is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness" (Oscar Wilde).

Botox: Lisa Rinna's lips, Kim Kardashian's chin, Meg Ryan's cheeks, Mickey Rourke's mouth. "I have always been willing to put myself at great personal risk for the sake of entertainment. And I've always been willing to put *you* at great personal risk for the same reason" (George Carlin).

bourgeois: Muse, target or correspondent. Where art begins. "The bourgeois have nothing to do but behave themselves, I am going to sneeze subversive couplets at them" (Victor Hugo).

Bridesmaids: Consider the label or fixed role as a method of simplifying the infinite complexity of the social; friends as the oft referenced "useful thorn[s] to have in one's side" (Frank O'Hara). (See "friendship." Annie Walker: "This is the first time I've seen you look ugly, and that makes me happy!")

Brown, Brandon: "A video production company that specializes in 30-second commercial ads, infomercials, weddings, special events, sports videography, sports highlight films, corporate videos, event consultation, production training, DVD duplication services and more."

Buffy The Vampire Slayer: (See "Inca Mummy Girl." Buffy: "I can translate American salivating boy talk. He says you're beautiful.")

Jamie Townsend is the managing editor of Aufgabe and the co-founder of con/crescent, a periodic hub of creative mumbo-jumbo.



Astrological Advice from Dorothea Lasky



Aries (March 21 – April 19)

You have been working toward a goal for several years. You will achieve this goal more easily than you might have expected. So much so you may no longer want it. I mean, what's the fun in that? If you want a challenge this month, volunteer at the agency you think needs your help. Wear chartreuse every day. It looks good on you.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

You have very strong arms. Instead of using them to carry things, try to do more hugging. You will be surprised how much better you feel. You work too much, but many people don't realize it. Don't tell them directly, or else you will seem like a braggart. Instead, look people deep in the eyes and think to yourself, "I am better than this person." Wear orange every day. Your true love likes it.



Gemini (May 21 – June 20)

Freedom is always the name of the game for you, but you don't see it like that. If you can't own every second of your existence, you'd rather not have it. You should think instead of the free mindscape where the small birds perch and wait. The late winter contains more of these birds. So, that's something to wait for, to revel in. Buy a lottery ticket this month. You may be surprised. Also, wear red.



Cancer (June 21 – July 22)

You of all people know the expanse of love that is possible. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't just be happy with the one you are with. There is someone who has died who waits for you. You can find them in the corner of the room. This month is not a good time to ask for a new job or promotion. The color for you to wear this month is—what else—lilac.



Leo (July 23 – August 22)

The people who understand you best just happen to be cats. This is confusing if you aren't a cat person. Don't worry about the tiny ones. You need help from your spiritual parents, so go to the zoo and commune with who counts. This month is not the time for you to travel. Stay inside and finish that book. Wear lots of polka dots, especially with hot pink in the mix. Those sorts of patterns look really nice with your beautiful eyes.



Virgo (August 23 – September 22)

This month is the time to reach out to those in need. There are so many people around you who don't have it together. I'd start first by talking to each one about how they can make the best use of you. This month is the time for travel and job prospects. But on planes, make sure you are not in the window seat. On buses, it's ok if you sit in the back of bus. On trains, just don't go in the quiet car. Oh, wear green.



Libra (September 23 – October 22)

Friends think of you as someone who is good at giving advice. But it's true you do give too much of it. Every fifth time you have the urge to, write it down amongst a stack of cards to be sent off to specific audiences next year. You have a few best friends, but an acquaintance will be a new one. Now is a good time to visit family.



Scorpio (October 23 – November 21)

You are very funny and your true calling is comedy. Go to an improv show and let yourself laugh and laugh. If your profession requires you to speak, try to incorporate a one-liner or two. More than anyone, the animals among us need you. Show them you care with treats you baked with a friend from up north over the holidays. Wear black all this month. I mean, why stop now?



Sagittarius (November 22 – December 21)

You have a new favorite person. Your instinct will be for you to tell him or her how much they mean to you. Now is not really the time to do this; wait a while and make sure you won't feel anything differently later. Your career is going very well, part and parcel of your careful planning and strategic friendships. Also, because you are magical. Wear baby blue this month and lots of stripes.



Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

In many ways, you are the best sign of the zodiac. A good part of this has to do with your loyalty. Keep being a wonderful friend and I guarantee good things will happen to you. You will do something in the next six months that will really make your name. Wear flashy colors all month, especially silver and leopard.



Aquarius (January 20 – February 18)

Beep beep, you are circling circling around your town. Beep beep, use the moon to get down, get centered. You will finish a very big project in the next two months, which could include building something. Love, let's face it, is hot and heavy for you or it's nothing at all. What you must realize is that your true soulmate is the cold air. Write a poem to it. Also, wear deep reddish brown, a pinkish haze, and grow out your hair.



Pisces (February 19 – March 21)

Dear friend, they couldn't get you to give up if they tried. So don't. What you'll never realize is that you have very nice elbows. Well, because most of the time you are looking backwards. If you ever thought about leaving the country this year, now is a good time to. Wear red, wear red, wear red.

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