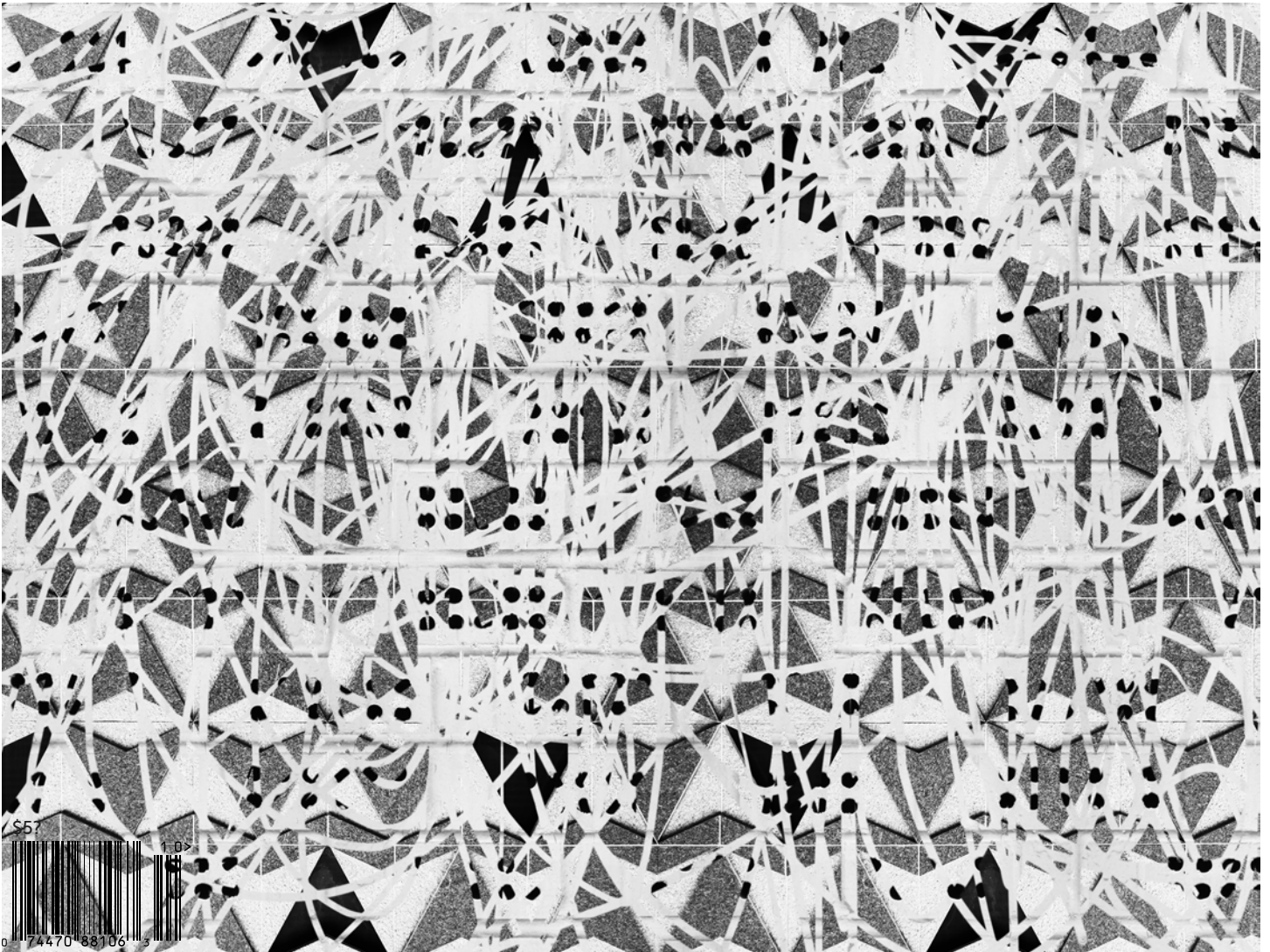


THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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APR/MAY 2011 #227

LETTERS POEM NATHANIEL MACKEY INTERVIEW CARLA HARRYMAN & LYN HEJINIAN TALK WITH CORINA COPP
CALENDAR PATRICK JAMES DUNAGAN REVIEWS CHAPBOOKS BY ARIEL GOLDBERG, JESSICA FIORINI, JIM CARROLL, ALLI
WARREN & NICHOLAS JAMES WHITTINGTON CATHERINE WAGNER REVIEWS ANDREA BRADY CACONRAD REVIEWS
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REVIEWS CAROLINE BERGVALL NICOLE TRIGG REVIEWS JULIANA LESLIE ERICA KAUFMAN REVIEWS KARINNE KEITHLEY



THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Contents

04 LETTERS

06 POEM

Song of the Andoumboulou 99½

NATHANIEL MACKEY

08 INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Carla Harryman & Lyn Hejinian

CORINA COPP

14 CALENDAR

16 BOOK REVIEWS

PATRICK JAMES DUNAGAN / CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

CATHERINE WAGNER / ANDREA BRADY

CACONRAD / SUSIE TIMMONS

FARRAH FIELD / PAUL LEGAULT

CARLEY MOORE / EILEEN MYLES

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LETTERS

1. from the director



Ron Padgett, *Public Access Poetry*, Episode 42, 1978.

Hi, everyone. One of the things I've been working on this season is coming to delightful fruition and I'm excited to tell you about it.

Even if you were watching the innovation called cable TV in 1977 and 1978, what are the chances that you saw a show titled *Public Access Poetry*? Produced by Poetry Project stalwarts Greg Masters, Gary Lenhart, David Herz, Didi Susan Dubelyew, Daniel Krakauer, Bob Rosenthal, and Rochelle Kraut, *PAP* programs featured half-hour readings by a wide range of poets and performers who could roughly be categorized as "downtown," or linked in one way or another with the Project. The television series lasted two seasons (one live, the other recorded for later airing) and was produced with little-to-no broadcasting experience by the *PAP* personnel.

More than 50 fragile, open-reel video tapes of these shows thankfully still exist and were donated to the Poetry Project by Greg Masters. Last year, a grant and subsequent anonymous support supported the preservation and digitization of 30 tapes. We decided to build our Spring fundraiser around a two-program screening series to take place at Anthology Film Archive; one that features *Public Access Poetry* highlights (April 28) and another that shows three full episodes (April 29). The Poetry Project is proud to partner with Anthology to present this historical footage of poets reading their work. Please see our calendar (April 28–30) for details on all the events that comprise our last fundraiser of the season.

Some of the gems you will see: rare recordings of Jackson Mac Low reading "phone", Alice Notley reading "January", Ted Berrigan reading poems from

"Easter Monday", and Peter Orlovsky playing banjo and yodeling with some glimpses of Arthur Russell on cello. Literary merit aside (and to paraphrase a line I heard Ann Lauterbach read the other night), everyone was pretty in the Seventies! Eventually, all of the transferred *PAP* material will be posted online via our website, but until then please come and be dazzled by these poets on the big screen.

Stacy Szymaszek

Funding to preserve Public Access Poetry was made possible through a Consulting Fund grant from the New York State Literary Presenters Technical Assistance Program (LitTAP). LitTAP is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), a State agency, and administered through Just Buffalo Literary Center. Additional funding was made possible through the generosity of two anonymous donors. All videos transferred by The Standby Program at MercerMedia with consulting support from Anthology Film Archives.

2. from the editor

Dear friends, communal lighting, Wiccans, fragments: It's my last issue as editor of the *Newsletter*, and there's not much room here for frivolous babbling about the surface, as I like to do! Leaving this post is unbearable in real life, and I can only hope that I've served the community and readership well. It's been, in all seriousness, so lovely to work with Stacy, Corrine, Arlo, and Nicole—not to mention my good fortune with reviewers, poets, essayists, and Vivien Leigh by Madame Yevonde, whose glossy eyes in cadmium scarlet inspire me from her post as poster above my working table (it is not in my eating room where she has her trances; OK, it is)—I won't suck my thumb for long, having had this opportunity. In this issue, you'll find work from Nathaniel Mackey, plus SUPER EXTRA REVIEWS, something I've long wanted to do, with so many newborns out...and an interview with a couple of my heroes. We met over berries and coffee on a winter morning a few months ago, and now here we are, Twiggy in Black and White. It's like the song says: "Fake it till you make it." Thank you all for your reading, support, and feedback, and for *being here*.

Fine horses,

Corina Copp

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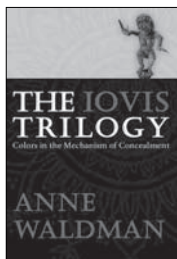
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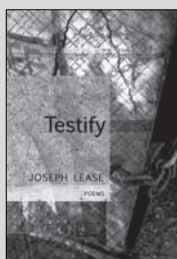
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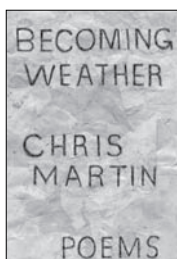
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INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Carla Harryman and Lyn Hejinian

about friendship, allegory, erotics, revision, pronouns, landscape, and more in their much-anticipated collaborative book, *The Wide Road*

CORINA COPP

Corina Copp: Firstly, just curious—what books did you two bring on the plane?

Carla Harryman: I brought books directly related to Warren Sonbert's influence on my writing.

[*Ed. Note: Warren Sonbert was an experimental filmmaker (1947–1995) whose work and life was celebrated in an evening at Light Industry/Issue Project Room on Dec. 15, 2010, with readings by Harryman, Charles Bernstein, and Corrine Fitzpatrick.*]

Lyn Hejinian: And I brought Walter Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, related to an essay that I'm trying to write; Guy de Maupassant's collected short stories, for pleasure; and a children's book called *The Kneebone Boy* that was given to me by my eleven-year-old granddaughter, who told me that I had to read it, that I'd really really really love it. It's very good.

CC: So how long have you been working on *The Wide Road*?

LH: Carla, you've got a better sense—

CH: I think we started in 1991.

LH: There were long gaps.

CH: This is actually a connection with Warren too: he died in May 1995, and we finished the first draft around that time. It might have been late 1990 that we started...and then we stopped. Then we kept talking about how to revise it. We also did readings of it, mostly in that period.

LH: Mostly in that period.

CH: Yeah. And then I moved to Detroit.

CC: You were in the Bay Area, right?

CH: In Berkeley. We lived about a mile from each other. We would send things back and forth in the mail.

LH: Or handing them. Meeting—

CH: On the street.

LH: On the street. Like, walking towards each other.

CC: Oh really? A handoff?

CH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

CC: The letters?

LH: No, just you know, Carla I've finished something from *The Wide Road*, I thought I'd walk down, you want to meet me partway.

CH: So we'd either snail-mail it or meet each other and hand it off.

LH: I mean we saw each other a lot, just because so much of our respective social lives were circulating around the poetry scene, and readings and so forth, so it was sort of easy to keep passing them back and forth. And I think that during the hiatus period, when you [*to Carla*] actually moved, and it was physically difficult to get together to revise, we did a lot of thinking about what it was we had written. Because the actual writing was kind of giddily fun, and purposive but it had so much its own pull, and we were exerting gravitational attraction to each other, through it, or with it or in it, and I at least needed some time afterward to think, like what is this book; because it's not—I mean I do try to never write the same books twice but, I mean this really was a departure, and I think it's the first major collaboration I had embarked on, like true collaboration as opposed to parallel play, that you really had to be responding to, and revising your ideas in terms of the other. So, questions of what kind of erotic text it was, what that meant, what it had to do with language. I was deeply involved in my Stein work at that time, and thinking about language, about the landscaping that is so much in Stein's consciousness, her sense of the compositional field, as we would say now, and so that kind of landscape. And then what the subjectivity was, this "we." Just what kind of glorious monster had we set loose.

CC: It is kind of a monster.

CH: Yeah. We refer to the persona as a creature and a monster quite often, actually.

CC: You had even written that it's "one head with two minds." Which is how I started envisioning it.

CH: That's how we had originally thought of it. I think I was less concerned about what the work was, although it was certainly an exploration of language, eros, and desire, which concerns some of my other writings as well, but the imagined space of eros shifts to something both more capacious and more restrained, with two writers. Aside from this focus, I thought that there were parts of it that seemed much more realized or developed than other parts. It was uneven as a work. And in really interesting ways, but also in ways I felt I needed a distance from to understand what, why does this section seem juicy, this section seem kind of flat.

CC: That's what's fascinating about the book, is that it runs the gamut. It doesn't have just that one creature inhabiting it at all times...for instance, with the letters section; it really is elucidating your project. What do you feel happens when your intentions are made so clear? Was that already in the first draft?

Had you already decided that you wanted the letters, or that you wanted to talk?

CH: We had discussed doing something epistolary, I think. But the gesture in writing the letters was fairly abrupt. It had seemed to me that our poetry and prose excursion required an interruption. The letters acknowledge, performatively, that we were at that time using the mails as a medium for the collaboration—even though we lived one mile from each other. For me the letters also express a wish to be writing letters, something that was difficult to make room for in the workaday world. Of course the content of the letters is continuous with the picaresque, but I don't yet have a fully formed view about the extent to which the letters elucidate the project or reflect on it, and to what degree they are simply a next event, one that puts what had preceded them on pause. As for the abrupt shift initiated within the collaboration, the connection between lived experience and time passing and time being marked in writing is something we both think about. I had assumed breaking the form wouldn't be too much of a surprise to Lyn.

CC: And then were the third and fourth sections actually completed after the letters? Or were they already being written?

CH: In a rough sense, the book appears exactly in the order that we wrote it.

CC: It feels that way. And it feels structurally so intact, actually—you talk about these bifurcations and this doubling and this need to split and the awareness of that, and then in the end that it really does that is really interesting. I kind of felt like this character, or this monster, has got to go mad at some point!

CH: (*laughing*) I love that idea—did the monster make you want to go crazy?

CC: (*laughing*) No, no! Because you kept it very—your voices as writers were always there to orient me. With the anecdotes: were these combined experience, actual anecdotes from your experience?

LH: Like when we meet the anchorman, or?

CC: Later in the book, you have this storybook pastiche, childhood recollections and things like that.

CH: Some of it is obviously drawn from experience, but the representation is fictional. Lyn would sometimes clue me into a source—an aunt that was like a character. It's all fictional except the letters, and not only that; we kept rewriting the text so that there was hardly—there's only a few sequences where the originally authored work by an individual is even intact anymore, because we've so radically—

LH: Gutted it.

CH: Rewrote it, so that if you think you know who wrote what...

CC: I was not able to figure it out. There were certain parts.

LH: I can no longer.

CC: So the revision was sort of a layering process, or how did that work?

CH: Well, it was revised in two different ways. Before the last three years when we totally revised it, we also revised it in readings. We would script out the readings, and as we did so, we would rearrange the text. This process of editing for readings contradicts the idea that things are in sequence, because sometimes we would move things around quite a bit.

LH: Just to make a good reading.

CH: Yeah, and then we would realize that we were blending the writing more, and so we would actually recast the text.

CC: Did you transcribe it from those readings?

CH: Lyn would—

LH: Cut and paste. And then print out again, for inspection. And then the other way that we revised, which was really, really lovely, was we rented a cabin on the California coast for a week.

CH: This is thirteen years later.

LH: Yeah, and that's when the final version really got done. And we just wrote nonstop except for very late afternoon, early evening, long walks, and very late dinners. We would just work all day long, both with our computers, and I think we had a printer too.

CH: Yeah. Then we were really blending.

LH: Just both working on the same passage, and reading, and...well why don't we try this, and then well what about this, no, that's better, yeah but I like that last part of that, OK.

CH: We basically talked out almost every word of it. We re-read and discussed the work in eight- to fourteen-page segments; then we would rewrite them.

CC: Did you have a lot of conversation too? About how desire relates to the world now, and so on?

LH: Well our walks were—I mean we didn't go out and say, all right, the topics for the walk today are...although I'm fully capable of something like that if it really excited me. (*laughing*) ... But yeah inevitably we would start just thinking, and sometimes taking ideas way out away from anything that would stay in the book.

CH: But the walks also were incorporated—some of what would happen on the walks would get incorporated into the text.

LH: Like the mention of a herring or...

CC: Yeah I was wondering if the environment had affected the world [of the book].

CH: Oh absolutely. Which it had all the time—it's very much a northern California, San Francisco Bay Area—

LH: Even when we go to Rome—

CH: Rome...right right. California is the dominant geographic space.

CC: You had even mentioned this in the beginning, that it takes on a kind of genre, this travel diary; I had wondered if you had taken a trip together.

CH: Oh we've taken trips together.

CC: But it wasn't a singular trip?

LH: Going up to a cabin in this area was definitely taking a trip. Having a house, and driving up there, and packing the car...

CC: That kind of relates to my questions about friendship. It feels like friendship is something that really grounds the text...for instance, the letters are so agreeable. Was that sort of openness and agreeability something decided upon? I know that sounds cold—

CH: No. I mean we *are* very good friends.

CC: Of course. I wondered how friendship played into the interrogation of desire or subject position, or if it was this organic field where the language could ground itself.

CH: Are you asking for what we disagree about?

CC: Well, if there had been any contention when you're talking about power, and politics, and violence.

LH: I think that at work in the whole process and made explicit in the letters is sort of three strands: one is really loving each other and wanting to affirm that; second is wanting to understand each other because we're really different from each other and we think in different ways, and to some extent we think about different things; and the third is...I can't remember what the third is. But those two. To understand each other, and maybe to learn from each other? Like, or to get in a place—you know Carla's got way more of a capacity for...*[to Carla]* could challenge this) a sympathetic understanding of theoreticians or practitioners of extreme versions of eroticism than I do. Bataille and de Sade, for example. Which really freaked me out for a long time. And now I have enough theoretical sophistication that I understand a lot of what they were doing, or can be said to be doing, that I highly approve of, but it's still in many ways distasteful to me, whereas Carla I think can get into that territory in ways of playfulness and control, whereas I feel terrified. And abject. Is that—

CH: Yeah, I think that's accurate. And I think that's—it may not come off as a tension in the work, in any overt way, because it's true that we were having a conversation in writing and with each other where what we were interested in was the content, and each other, not drawing lines about our disagreement. I don't even think these differences are about

disagreement. I think they have to do with how the intellect maps onto life experience to facilitate useful and creative ways of thinking, you know about erotic experience, about violence, about power, about all of those things. We're different. In some ways we're generationally different, although I don't use that word—generational. (*laughing*)

LH: (*laughing*) We are very much opposed to this generational problem. Some of my best friends are eleven years old!

CH: We were born at different times, we have different class backgrounds, different family experiences... I think about, for instance, the relationship of eroticism to trauma. In Lyn's work (*My Life*) I read this in the beginning of the work. Her father is standing in a threshold, just returned from war. And there are like these thresholds in her texts—I mean they're syntactical, paratactical—

LH: Hmm.

CH: There are these moments—they're very affirming but they're also related to what can't be stated.

LH: This is fascinating.

CH: (*laughing*) She would never think this way. There's trauma in my family. Half of my family comes from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl. One might then wish to encounter and understand the valences of history and repression.

CC: Do you feel that was informing this as well?

CH: Well I think it informs how I think. Like I'm just not—I'm unabashedly able to engage with certain kinds of texts, that I think, as Lyn says, she finds distasteful; but it's because there's something more resonant, or closer, I think. What is the violent impulse, you know? I was really interested when I was younger in the violence in William Faulkner, very interested in Genet...

CC: What I really loved also is that...such impulses or logics, among others, ended up feeding into [what I read as] a flower fable. You give voice to and animate a lot of animals and other beings. There's a sentence to the whole text; was invoking Scheherazade in the beginning a structural intention? Because the book is an unfolding of fables, almost.

CH: I had been reading *The Arabian Nights*. And then later, Lyn wrote about Scheherazade. I actually had been asked to do a review of a work based on Scheherazade by a postmodernist novelist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and so I read Burton, and the postmodern novelist's book, and I ended up disliking his book decided I didn't have time to write the review. (*laughing*)

LH: I also had been reading *The Arabian Nights*, and really coming at it via Victorian travel literature... I'm interested in travel writing, and that feeds into part of my contribution to this. I had not thought of *The Arabian Nights* as being directly influencing this book—our initial, instigating other text is Bashō's *The Narrow Road to the Far North*, which is... *The Wide Road to the Far South*, as in, the genital area... (*laughing*)

CH: Lyn had it on her dining room table one day when I came over—that's what initiated—

LH: That's right. Let's go prose and poetry, and let's have it be a travel thing, let's have the whole landscape be sexy.

CC: That's how it started?

LH: Yeah. And so you're completely right that it was our hope that we would animate everything. Because the whole landscape should be sexy. You know, you see a knoll and you just want to do something with it. (*laughing*) Or on it.

CC: Why the project of erotics, exactly? How did it start?

CH: Well we tried to do something with travel writing, before. And I think Lyn was more of a travel-book reader, and I was more interested in hiking. We're both from California and we both have inclinations—

LH: To go hike.

CH: Lyn was very interested in that genre. I had done some research on travel writing in California for an art-book publisher, but the 19th-century genre was particularly significant to Lyn. So there were some initial efforts to do something in a kind of travel-writing mode, but it just didn't connect; and then the Bashō—because it's about the solitary male figure—

LH: In a non-narrative journey.

CH: We required sex and non-narrative.

LH: The simple answer to your question is I have no idea why there should be sex. (*laughs*)

CC: But it upended this reading of Bashō?

LH: Well the landscape is just so—

CH: Sensual, right?

LH: Sensual.

CH: But also because of the Bashō text, well if it's going to be us, and the road's going to be wide, then the wide is like this kind of—

LH: Female receptivity—erotic receptivity stereotype.

CH: There's two of us, so we need some elbow room....

CC: Do you feel like it affected your writing personally, to have done this project, as a plural?

LH: Yes. Me, yes. Oh as a plural, per se.

CC: As this "ourselves"?

LH: It certainly unleashed areas of—I suddenly felt myself writing in new ways really easily, as though some little door had been kicked in. And I was

just coming up with these weird little tale kinds of things, which were in a book that I was writing, starting around the same time that we started *The Wide Road*, come to think of it, something called *The Book of a Thousand Eyes*, which is going to come out early 2012. But suddenly I was just coming up with weird names of people, and a lot of stuff that was—like I had been reading Carla's work forever, but then suddenly because we were working together, something that I had been seeing in Carla's work went through its transmutations and came out of it in mine a little bit.

CH: There is a "we" narrator in *The Words After Carl Sandburg's Rootabaga Stories* and *Jean-Paul Sartre. Our "we" is a different "we."*

CC: It feels different.

CH: In *The Words* I had used this pronoun in respect to latency in childhood and the collective energy that springs from latency.

LH: It was an interesting—just to speak technically—pronouns, as you know, are really tricky. Especially in poetry. Because if there's a "you," you're constantly implicating your reader in something that they don't necessarily want to be implicated in. And traditionally of course, that's what you want to do, you want the reader to identify with the "I," and have your experience and feel all the better for it. But anything more sophisticated than that, it becomes this problem. And if you say "we," you know, just who do you think you're talking for, my dear; and if you say, "you," who are you—and all these things, or the royal "we." And it's really problematic. But with this "we," it's so hilarious, and out of control, and kind of reprehensible, and mad, and loving, and daring—that it doesn't enforce anybody in, or really exclude anybody.

CC: It's interesting I think—the reader doesn't necessarily know what she's dealing with, because this is a new creature; it does seem like that freedom is totally there. I also love how it allows for humor.

CH: I think that my interest in the first-person plural stems from writing—*The Words*...would be an example, but also Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, and then some of the writing from Juan Goytisolo, who uses "we" to represent an underrepresented collectivity; and I am also interested in the underrepresented notion of collective authorship. Authorship not only as writing, but authorizing of human activity. However, *The Wide Road* "we" is quite a distinct construction.

CC: Right. It's not representational.

CH: Yeah, exactly.

CC: It seemed to me that you were thinking about history too. Am I right? And how to rewrite [it] and rethink. I was interested in that collecting of this—whether it was fictional or not—again, this second-to-last section has a storybook feel. That remembering was history, for you, rather than describing events.

LH: There's also direct reference to events that could be described as historical events, like Schwarzkopf—

CH: And Haitian elections...

LH: Of course now there are Haitian elections again. We actually discussed taking that out, because it might seem that so far people wouldn't know what we were talking about; and now that it's come back again it's like, wow, how did you get Haitian elections in there?

CH: Lyn and I both incorporate events as they're unfolding historically. We often work those kinds of things into our work in various ways; and that's not a function of a purely reflective memory, that's a function of being aware of and attentive to and being engaged with what's happening within a contemporary-historical present as informed by historical past. I'm also interested in how you would codify remembering as historical.

CC: I did see those particular moments, irruptions in the text. I also realized that there was a mothering going on throughout the book. It felt like the mother was present in the text in myriad ways, you know: the mother as form of repetition, and vehicle for reproduction, and as the protector—the mother kill-deer—and you even said [*to Lyn*] in a letter that you do not want to be like your mother...I [perhaps too easily] saw the mother as an origin of sorts. There was a tension in the text between whether to reject it, or on the other hand, to see it as an authority.

CH: Culturally there's a huge anxiety around the maternal...I mean even to the extent that saying this will sound trite, and too obvious, and dismissible.

LH: If we're going to talk about this in the framework of history—mothers are typically excluded from official histories.

CH: And also from the erotic.

LH: And from the erotic. On the other hand, they are, in terms of biologic history, the *sine qua non*; you don't get anyone without mothers. Then in the course of historical events, famously, you get the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, you get the weeping mothers, you get the mothers that are the peace, you know, "don't take my sons," you get the mourning mothers who've lost their sons and daughters now, you get the protective mothers, the mean mothers, the vicious, you know all of it.

CH: But these are all symbolic mothers under the sign of patriarchal logics.

LH: Right.

CH: You know the mother who says, "don't take my son" is potentially a friend, a daughter, a sibling, a father, or an uncle.

CC: Ever-present.

CH: You know I think we were both very interested in the problem of the appropriation of the maternal; and I agree with you that that is a historical problem.

LH: And the equating of landscape to the feminine.

CC: Right.

LH: And then what do you do when mother nature—you've got mothers running around on mother nature. That just further complicates the paradigm and the implications of that paradigm.

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Art by Louise Hamlin. Writing by Cathy Park Hong, Breyten Breytenbach, David Kirby, Sharon Mesmer, Colin Greer, Stephen Lewandowski, Stuart Fiebert, Elizabeth Swados, Mark Pawlak, Joanna Fuhrman, Sarah White, Kiyomi Dong, John Jones, Michael Cirelli, and many more, including our regular section of wonderful high school writing. \$9.

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CC: And I what I like about this book is that you have this wilderness that you've obviously been in, and then created with language, but you're not feminizing it. And even this dual "we," it doesn't feel gendered.

CH: It paradoxically is and isn't gendered. It's also polymorphous. So that even though heterosexuality is strongly represented, there's not an exclusive presentation of heterosexual experience or imagination.

LH: There's the boat captain.

CH: Oh yeah. I still have a crush on the boat captain.

CC: I've also been meaning to ask: you mention allegory more than once. How do you feel it works in this text?

LH: The more I talk about allegory, the less I understand it. I have gotten myself way out on a limb as someone who is about to tell people about allegory. I was supposed to give a talk, and I called the talk "The Function of Allegory and the Production of Time"; that's my title. And I had some great ideas that have completely washed up.

CH: It sounds very...Russki-formalist. (laughing)

LH: It's Lefebvre—*The Production of Space*—and Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, says that—apparently this is true, in Athens, the

buses are called *metaphori*—to go someplace you take a metaphor. So I thought, well that's cute and clever, but what about, could you do time travel with allegories. Which is why I'm reading the Walter Benjamin book, because the whole second section is on allegory. And I don't think you can. But that was what sparked me. The allegorical function would be to do time travel. And I could argue it, and I probably will have to, but I'm not sure it really holds up. That doesn't answer your question.

CC: Well you had said in here [the book] that it could be an allegory for artists and art-making.

[CC looks it up.]

LH: I had this idea, Carla, and this comes out of [Walter Benjamin's] *The Arcades Project*, but—and this is not related to *The Wide Road*, this is just while Cori is looking for the passage. But: anything that you would take, and then name it, can become allegorical. For example, say we have this as a sculpture. [LH moves objects around on the table.] And then we name it, "After the Revolution." And what before was a pepper grinder or a jam jar becomes now this allegorical image. And then gets re-read. And it's the captioning that renders the thing allegorical. So like, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, you've got truth and, blah blah blah.

CH: I could go along with that, to some extent.

LH: I've been finding little drawings and then thinking about captions.

CH: I'm very skeptical of this sort of claim that all writing is allegorical. It wastes the meaning of—

LH: Right. But Jameson says it's horizontal. It's about mapping and scanning. It has nothing to do with verticality.

CC: It's changed over time.

CH: Yeah. But anyhow, I'm interested in what you're [to CC] querying. Where does it come up?

CC: It's in one of the letters from Lyn to you. And it just says: "To live in a disenchanted world is to live at a dead end. In *The Wide Road*, 'we' finds enchantments. The work may be an allegory about artists and the role of art-making."

LH: That seems problematic to me.

CH: That's something she was thinking at the moment, but I don't think the work is an allegory about art-making. Or, it is about art-making in respect to the collaborative process. The work is very much contingent on quite specific structures of relationships that also have the ability to change over time, but all of those structures of relationships—living in the same town, being in the same poetry community, having years of conversation that led up to the texts, being able to arrange to get together later and revisit it—I mean there's just so many material entailments to the work that have such specificity...

CC: The work does change; even though it's dislocated and without specific time and place, it has



Gale Nelson: *This Is What Happens When Talk Ends*

8 sets of 8 poems. Each poem within a set follows the vowel pattern of a particular passage from Shakespeare. They could be called homovocalic translations though they ignore Shakespeare's content while trying to build toward their own coherence. The sets are not presented in linear succession. Instead, the poems are arranged in a chess pattern, the earliest surviving knight's circuit, attributed to al-Adli ar-Rumi of Baghdad and presumed to date from 840 AD.

Born in Los Angeles, Gale Nelson is Assistant Director of Literary Arts at Brown University. He is the author of *Ceteris Paribus* and *Stare Decisis* as well as of a number of chapbooks.

"*stare decisis* endeavors to explore the inner workings of poetic language, digging into the mechanisms that allow meaning, identity, and understanding to emerge."—Susan Smith Nash, *Lower Limit Speech*
Poetry, 104 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN13 978-1-936194-06-3 original pbk. \$14

Christina Mengert: *As We Are Sung*

This first book by a trained vocalist explores the transformation from "I am speaking" to "I am singing," and where exactly poetry fits between these two limits. It examines the subtle, the inaccessible, "the song that is sung between notes." The poems move restlessly, in abrupt (sometimes humorous) shifts and sometimes seem almost to disperse into a space as vast and as tolerant of indeterminacy as Barbara Guest's. There seeming emptiness can turn into a fullness of motion, potential, song.

Christina Mengert has crossed the country from her native Georgia to Denver, and East again to teach in Bard College's Prison Initiative Program. Her poems and reviews have appeared widely.

Poetry, 64 pages, offset, Smyth-sewn, ISBN13 978-1-936194-05-6 original pbk. \$14



David Lespiau: *Four Cut-Ups, or, the Case of the Restored Volume*

[Série d'écriture, No. 24; translated from the French by Keith Waldrop]

Real and fictional characters (Mrs. Lindbergh, Gertrude Stein, William Burroughs, Billy Budd or the Kid) circulate through the four parts of a kind of mobile whose movement constructs a form out of fragmented perceptions, ideas, stories, quotations. A form that gives a strangely uncanny sheen to the most realistic details.

David Lespiau lives in Marseille. Other recent books are *Ouija-Board* and *La poule est un oiseau autodidacte*.
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this kind of thoughtfulness which allows the reader to progress without clinging to what could be contingent. But the repetition caused me to wonder... if allegory is mentioned many times, if now you do look at it and perceive the work as allegorical.

CH: Not yet. I'm not sure that I would.

LH: No. And that line may come back to haunt us.

CC: Well no one's going to hang on to it like I do.

LH: Right. But I mean like you know the "journey-of-life" kind of allegory. I could imagine, like, what would really be a misreading. Although if it was really inventive, and creative and imaginative and fun, then why not. But I could imagine a bad reading of that would render it allegorical.

CC: What are you each working on now?

LH: I'm just starting what I think will be a book of connected essays on late capitalism, which includes some named characters. A few characters thus far from my last book, *Saga / Circus*, from the circus—Maggie Fornetti and Askari Nate Martin—have appeared. And I've written six paragraphs; they're each about three to five pages long. And they've appeared in a couple of those. I may change those names; they seem not to be there. And I love to make up names. So in the plane actually I came up with Sammy Christine Blake, Rafe Cohen Johnson, and Jilly Jane Rodgers. They're students about to take over a building. Because the essay I'm working on right now is about the allegorical function of activist direct action.

CH: I'm working on a CD with Jon Raskin. It's a series of experiments with language, and music-structured improvisation, and studio editing. It all began when when he read *Open Box* and decided he wanted to do a piece based on it.

CC: Are you reading from that text [on the recording]?

CH: The *Open Box* part of the CD is a highly processed work that does have my voice and Jon's voice as well as sax, drum, guitar, trumpet.

CC: Is this your first experiment with music? Outside of performance?

CH: No. Outside live performance? It's the first time that I've committed myself to being involved in a production of a full-length sound/text publication.

CC: So do you both do other collaborative projects?

CH: Oh yeah. *The Grand Piano*, volumes one through 10.

CC: *The Grand Piano*, yes! I was wondering if that would dissuade you from collaborating on other things, because it must take up so much of your time.

LH: It did, yeah.

CH: It's done.

CC: Is it done, done?

LH: Yeah, the tenth volume is out. Yeah, I've collaborated with the painter Emilie Clark on a couple of books, and a little set of postcards for kids. *Abe's Peanut*—you know that? Two women who have this postcard magazine? They have one for adults, and now there's one for kids. And it's really fun; I wrote a four-stage story, and Emilie did four watercolors that completely make the project. And then Jack Collom and I have been writing poems together forever. Which, it's much like, sheer for the fun of it, as, it's not like this [*The Wide Road*]—this is really a challenging....

CC: Yeah I meant with this sort of intensity?

CH: Well *The Grand Piano* was written with this kind of intensity, although it's an entirely different process and project.

LH: Outside readers think I won't know the degree to which input from others has affected many of the essays that are attributed to individual writers.

CH: It was an intense editorial collaboration, unusual in that sense as well as in respect to it being a memoir authored, over a significant duration, by ten people. And Poets Theater and other performance-based collaboration is obviously part of what I do. No...I don't hold collaboration in reserve.

LH: Or like a special project.

CH: A special project, no.

• • •

Corina Copp is the editor of The Poetry Project Newsletter.

Carla Harryman is a poet, essayist, and playwright. Recent books include *Adorno's Noise* (Essay Press, 2008), *Open Box* (Belladonna, 2007), *Baby* (2005), and *Gardener of Stars* (Atelos, 2001). She is co-contributor to *The Grand Piano*, a project that focuses on the emergence of Language Writing, art, politics, and culture of the San Francisco Bay area between 1975–1980. She lives in the Detroit Area and serves on the faculty of the Creative Writing Program at Eastern Michigan University.

Lyn Hejinian's most recent published book of her own poetry is *Saga / Circus* (Omnidawn, 2008). In addition to *The Wide Road*, Hejinian is the co-author, with Jack Collom, of *Situations/ Sings* (Adventures in Poetry, 2008) and, along with Carla Harryman, one of ten participants in the collaborative project, *The Grand Piano*; the tenth and final volume of *The Grand Piano* appeared in September, 2010 (*Mode A*). She teaches in the English Department at the University of California, Berkeley, and is the Chair of the UC-Berkeley Solidarity Alliance, an activist coalition of unions, workers, staff, students, and faculty fighting to maintain accessibility and affordability of public higher education in California.



Night Scales: A Fable for Klara K

Chris Tysh

NIGHT SCALES: A FABLE FOR KLARA K

CHRIS TYSH

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POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

4/4 MONDAY Open Reading

Sign-in at 7:45.

4/6 WEDNESDAY Noelle Kocot & Joseph Lease

Noelle Kocot is the author of five books of poetry, two from Four Way Books, and three from Wave Books, including *The Bigger World*, published in the spring of 2011. She is also the author of a discography, out from Wave in 2010. **Joseph Lease's** critically acclaimed books of poetry include *Testify* (Coffee House Press, 2011), *Broken World* (Coffee House Press, 2007), and *Human Rights* (Talisman House).

4/8 FRIDAY (10 PM) Bonnie Jones & Samita Sinha

Bonnie Jones is a Korean-American writer, improvising musician, and performer working primarily with electronic music and text. Bonnie has presented her work in the U.S., Europe and Asia, and collaborates frequently with writers and musicians including Ric Royer, Carla Harryman, Andy Hayleck, Joe Foster, Andrea Neumann, Liz Tonne, and Chris Cogburn. **Samita Sinha** is a vocal artist and composer based in New York. She has performed her solo and ensemble work at PS 1, Roulette, Carnegie Hall Neighborhood Concerts, Blue Note, The Stone, and Issue Project Room, at various universities, and abroad in India and the Middle East.

4/11 MONDAY Rachel B. Glaser & Amy Lawless

Rachel B. Glaser's collection of stories is called *Pee on Water* and was released by Publishing Genius Press. She has a poetry chapbook, *Heroes are so Long*, from Minutes Books. She lives in Northampton, MA, blogs at rachelbglaser.blogspot.com and paints the NBA. **Amy Lawless** grew up in Boston, but she lives in Brooklyn. Her first book *Noctis Licentia* was published by Black Maze Books in 2008. Sometimes she blogs for Best American Poetry or at amylawless.blogspot.com.

4/13 WEDNESDAY Elaine Equi & Ron Padgett

Elaine Equi is the author of many books, including *Ripple Effect: New & Selected Poems* and most recently, *Click and Clone*, from Coffee House Press. Her work has appeared in *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and several editions of *Best American Poetry*. Ken Tucker wrote in *Entertainment Weekly* that, "Equi is one cool dude." **Ron Padgett's** books include the poetry collections *How Long*, *How to Be Perfect*, *You Never Know*, *Great Balls of Fire*, and *New & Selected Poems*, as well as three memoirs, *Ted: A Personal Memoir of Ted Berrigan*; *Oklahoma Tough: My Father, King of the Tulsa Bootleggers*; and *Joe: A Memoir of Joe Brainard*. In 2008 he was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He also received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. For more information, go to www.ronpadgett.com.

4/15 FRIDAY (10 PM) The Phoneme Choir

The Phoneme Choir (conceived and directed by **Daria Fain** and **Robert Kocik**) will perform RE-ENGLISH. By means of choreoprosodia (the fusion of movement and prosody) the Phoneme Choir imbues English with heretofore unheard-of inferences. Movement amulets, phonemic emanation, hormonal hymns, phonic photonics and detox, the lost optative mood, prefixing prosody to psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology, outright blessings and bad English are all called upon to re-tune, atone, de-delude and opioidize.

4/25 MONDAY Amanda Nadelberg & Genya Turovskaya

Amanda Nadelberg is the author of *Bright Brave Phenomena* (forthcoming from Coffee House Press), *Isa the Truck Named Isadore* (Slope Editions, 2006) and a chapbook, *Building Castles in Spain*, *Getting Married* (The Song Cave, 2009). **Genya Turovskaya** is the author of the chapbooks *Calendar* (UDP, 2002), *The Tides* (Octopus Books, 2007), *New Year's Day* (Octopus Books, 2011) and *Dear Jenny* (Supermachine, 2011). Her poetry and translations of contemporary Russian poets have appeared in *Chicago Review*, *Conjunctions*, *A Public Space*, *Aufgabe*, and other publications.

4/27 WEDNESDAY Rimbaud's Illuminations

At last! John Ashbery's translation of French poet Arthur Rimbaud's final masterpiece before abandoning poetry at the age of 21, *Illuminations* (Norton, 2011) has been published. Ashbery's rendering of all forty-four poems powerfully evokes the kaleidoscopic beauty of the original and creates "a vision of postdiluvian freshness" out of "the chaos of ice floes and the polar night." This is a major literary event and we are going to celebrate it with poets and musicians **Edwin Torres**, **Anne Tardos**, **Nicole Peyrafitte**, **Franklin Bruno**, **David Shapiro**, **Bree Brenton**, **Julie Patton**, **Madeline Gins**, **Richard Hell**, **Evi Jundt**, **Anna Williams** and **Sharon Mesmer**.

MEAT IS MOVIE: THE POETRY PROJECT'S SPRING FUNDRAISER

(For a description of Public Access Poetry, please read the Letter from the Director on page 4.)

4/28 THURSDAY (7 PM) PART 1. BEST OF PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY

ca. 75 minutes, video. Edited by Ethan Mitchell and Stacy Szymaszek. (Note: this event takes place at *Anthology Film Archive*, 32 2nd Ave.)

This enticing sampler features moments, glimpses, and words from the wild and woolly PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY, a cable TV series produced and directed by Poetry Project stalwarts Gary Lenhart,

Greg Masters, David Herz and Daniel Krakauer with others, that ran in the late '70s, before anyone downtown had cable. Guaranteed to surprise and certain to bring a smile, BEST OF PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY includes appearances and readings from the likes of **Ted Berrigan**, **Jim Brodey**, **Tim Dlugos**, **Ted Greenwald**, **Bob Holman**, **Joanne Kyger**, **Jackson Mac Low**, **Bernadette Mayer**, **Eileen Myles**, **Alice Notley**, **Joel Oppenheimer**, **Peter Orlovsky**, **Maureen Owen**, **Ron Padgett**, **Rene Ricard**, **Tom Savage**, **Susie Timmons**, **Tony Towle**, **Lewis Warsh**, and others. *General Admission \$9.*

4/29 FRIDAY (7 PM) PART 2. PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY: THREE EPISODES

ca. 90 minutes, video. (Note: this event takes place at *Anthology Film Archive*, 32 2nd Ave.)

Get your groove on and get a feel for the savvy DIY special effects techniques of PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY by watching three consecutive episodes from 1978. 1. **Ron Padgett**. 2. **Bernadette Mayer & Lewis Warsh** and 3. **Peter Orlovsky** with **Steven Hall** and **Arthur Russell**. *General Admission \$9.*

PART 3. AFTER-PARTY (9 PM)

After the screening at *Anthology* walk up 2nd Ave. to the Parish Hall of St. Mark's and join us for the Public Access Poetry after-party: meet some of the featured poets and people who made PAP happen, have some drinks and snacks and dance to music spun by DJs **Cousin Cole** and **Pandamonium Jones**. Other surprises await you. You've never seen the Parish Hall like this! Save your *Anthology* ticket stub for free admission to the party. *Otherwise, general admission is \$8. Complete bios at www.poetryproject.org.*

4/30 SATURDAY (7 PM) PART 4. MEAT IS MOVIE: Neo-Benshi Mashup Narration Spectacular

Or call it what you will...it's the poets who are dragging cinema back to the gutter where it belongs. Watch LIVE in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's as performers **Eileen Myles**, **Bruce Andrews**, **Brandon Downing**, **Edwin Torres**, **Felix Bernstein**, the trio of **Michael Barron**, **James Copeland**, and **William Rahilly**, and others stage major interventions and subterfuge of the moving image.

5/2 MONDAY Open Reading Sign-in at 7:45.

5/4 WEDNESDAY Jen Benka & Laura Mullen

Jen Benka is the author of *Pinko* (Hanging Loose), *A Box of Longing With Fifty Drawers* (Soft Skull Press), the artist book *Preamble* (Booklyn), and with Carol Mirakove, *1,138* (Belladonna). She recently relocated to San Francisco, where she serves on the board of Small Press Traffic. **Laura Mullen** is the

author of three collections of poetry—*The Surface*, *After I Was Dead*, and *Subject*—and two hybrid texts, *The Tales of Horror* and *Murmur*. Her fourth collection of poetry is forthcoming from the University of California Press in 2011.

5/6 FRIDAY (10PM)

Gregg Bordowitz

Gregg Bordowitz (Born August 14, 1964, Brooklyn, NY) is a writer and artist. His most recent project is an opera conceived as a collaboration with the artist Paul Chan, titled *The History of Sexuality Volume One By Michel Foucault: An Opera*. Afterall Books published his most recent book, titled *Imagevirus* (2010). *Volition* (2009), published by Printed Matter, is a volume consisting entirely of questions. *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings 1986–2003* was published by MIT Press in the fall of 2004. His films, including *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993), *A Cloud In Trousers* (1995), *The Suicide* (1996) and *Habit* (2001) have been widely shown in festivals, museums, movie theaters and broadcast internationally.

5/9 MONDAY

Patrick James Dunagan & Daniel Nohejl

Patrick James Dunagan's first book, *GUSTONBOOK*, is a workman's notebook of sorts sketched out in response to years spent contemplating the work and life of painter Philip Guston in relation to the ongoing world. **Daniel Nohejl's** first pamphlet, *Live a Little Better*, was produced by The Physiocrats in 2009. He lives in Brooklyn and works as a crew leader at the Bronx Guild High School.

5/11 WEDNESDAY

A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos

Edited by poet David Trinidad and published by Nightboat Books, this volume establishes Tim Dlugos—the witty and innovative poet at the heart of the New York literary scene in the late 1970s and 1980s and seminal poet of the AIDS epidemic—as one of the most distinctive and energetic poets of our time. A host of Dlugos's friends, as well as his fans, will read from the book. Readers include **Anselm Berrigan, Tom Carey, CA Conrad, Jane DeLynn, Alex Dimitrov, Brad Gooch, Duncan Hannah, Patricia Spears Jones, Erica Kaufman, Michael Lally, Chip Livingston, Jaime Manrique, Stephen Motika, Eileen Myles, Ron Padgett, Aaron Smith, Stacy Szymaszek, Marvin Taylor, David Trinidad** and **Terence Winch**.

5/13 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Matt Hart & The Small Dance

Matt Hart is the author of two books of poems, *Who's Who Vivid* (Slope Editions, 2006) and *Wolf Face* (H_NGM_N BKS, 2010), as well as several chapbooks. A co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Forklift, Ohio: A Journal of Poetry, Cooking & Light Industrial Safety*, he lives in Cincinnati, where he teaches at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. **The Small Dance** is a collaborative translation from

text to movement. The text in question, "The Small Dance," by Chris Martin, is a long poem that takes its name from a choreographic technique by dance pioneer Steve Paxton and can be found in *Becoming Weather* (Coffee House Press 2011). For this performance, the translators are **Lydia Bell, Sarah White, Eric Conroe, Lisa Keskitalo, and Colleen Hooper**. Each translator was given a section of the poem, open access to dialogue with the author, and complete autonomy over their means of translation.

5/16 MONDAY TALK SERIES

Vahni Capildeo & Vivek Narayanan

Join us for an evening of conversation, analysis, readings, and provocations from two emerging writers, at least partially in discussion of recent forms of reception and receptivity. **Vahni Capildeo's** fourth book, *Dark & Unaccustomed Words*, is due out this year. She is a Lecturer at Kingston University (UK) and Contributing Editor for the Caribbean Review of Books. **Vivek Narayanan's** first book, *Universal Beach*, will be published this Spring by ingurimumusnoctetconsumimurigni; his second, *Mr. Subramanian*, is forthcoming. His work appears in *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poetry and Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond*. He lives in Delhi, India.

5/18 WEDNESDAY

Paula Cisewski & Ronaldo V. Wilson

Paula Cisewski's second collection, *Ghost Fargo*, was selected by Franz Wright for the Nightboat Poetry Prize and published in 2010. She is also the author of *Upon Arrival* (Black Ocean, 2006) and of three chapbooks: *How Birds Work* (Fuori Editions, 2002), *Or Else What Asked the Flame* (w/ Mathias Svalina, Scantly Clad e-chap, 2008), and *Two Museums* (MaCaHu Press 2009). **Ronaldo V. Wilson** is the author of *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* (University of Pittsburgh, 2008), winner of the 2007 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, and *Poems of the Black Object* (Futurepoem Books, 2009), winner of the Thom Gunn Award for Gay Poetry and the Asian American Literary Award in Poetry in 2010.

5/20 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Celebrating *The Recluse*

A reading to celebrate the launch of *The Recluse #7* (The Poetry Project's literary magazine). Readers TBA.

5/23 MONDAY

Curtis Jensen & Lynn Xu

Curtis Jensen's work has appeared in *Try!*, *The Sugar House Review*, *No, Dear*, *Precipitate* and *The Equalizer*. He has lived and worked in Utah, Wyoming, Ukraine and now Brooklyn. **Lynn Xu** was born in Shanghai. Her poems have appeared in *6x6*, *Best American Poetry 2008*, *Boston Review Poet's Sampler*, *Court Green*, *Octopus*, *Poetry Daily*, *Poor Claudia*, *Tinfish*, *The Walrus*, *Zoland*, and elsewhere. She is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

5/25 WEDNESDAY

Andrew Joron & Adeena Karasick

Andrew Joron is the author of *Trance Archive: New and Selected Poems* (City Lights, 2010). Joron's earlier poetry collections include *The Removes* (Hard Press, 1999), *Fathom* (Black Square Editions, 2003), and *The Sound Mirror* (Flood Editions, 2008). *The Cry at Zero*, a selection of his prose poems and critical essays, was published by Counterpath Press in 2007. **Adeena Karasick** is a poet, media artist, and author of seven books of poetry and poetic theory, most recently, *Amuse Bouche: Tasty Treats for the Mouth* (Talonbooks, 2009).

5/27 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Poets' Potluck

Come celebrate the end of another season at The Poetry Project! The Poets' Potluck is an opportunity for NYC's poetry community (-ies) to come together for an evening of readings, performances, and delicious food. An array of writers from The Poetry Project series as well as other local reading series will read/perform their work. Anyone interested in bringing a dish for the potluck will contribute to an amazing feast. If you're interested in bringing food, please email Brett Price at fridaynightseriesp@gmail.com.

6/1 WEDNESDAY

Drew Gardner & Mark Yakich

Drew Gardner's third book, *Chomp Away*, has just come out from Combo books. Since 1996 he has lived in New York City, conducting and experimenting in extensive poetomusical collaborations with his Poetics Orchestra. He is a member of the Flarf Collective. His other books include *Sugar Pill* (Krupskaya, 2003) and *Petroleum Hat* (Roof, 2005). **Mark Yakich** is the author of the poetry collections *Unrelated Individuals Forming a Group Waiting to Cross* (National Poetry Series, Penguin 2004); *The Making of Collateral Beauty* (Snowbound Chapbook Award, Tupelo 2006); and *The Importance of Peeling Potatoes in Ukraine* (Penguin, 2008). For more, visit markyakich.com.

6/6 MONDAY

Christopher Salerno & Matthew Yeager

Christopher Salerno's books of poems include *Minimum Heroic*, winner of the 2010 Mississippi Review Poetry Series Award, and *Whirligig* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2006). A chapbook, *ATM*, is now available from Horse Less Press. Recent poems can be found in journals such as *Denver Quarterly*, *Boston Review*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Black Warrior Review*, and elsewhere. **Matthew Yeager's** poems have appeared most recently in *Bat City Review*, *Supermachine*, *Agriculture Reader*, *NY Quarterly*, *Gulf Coast* and *Best American Poetry* (2005 and 2010). He is the co-founder of Chicken Truck Productions and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

6/8 WEDNESDAY

Spring Workshop Reading

Students in the Spring workshops at The Poetry Project read their work. The Spring workshops are led by **Brenda Coultas, Filip Marinovich, Kristen Prevallet**, and **Ronaldo V. Wilson**.

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8 PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. ADMISSION \$8 / STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7 / MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE
THE POETRY PROJECT IS LOCATED IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER OF 2ND AVENUE & 10TH STREET IN MANHATTAN.
CALL 212 674 0910 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE. SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

BOOK REVIEWS

CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY PATRICK JAMES DUNAGAN

01. *Picture Cameras*
(NoNo Press, 2010) &
The Photographer Without a Camera
(Trafficker, 2011)
Ariel Goldberg

02. *Light Suite*
Jessica Fiorini
(Pudding House, 2010)

03. *Bolinas Poems*
Jim Carroll
(Blue Press, 2010)

04. *acting out*
Alli Warren
(Louis Wain Editions, 2010)

05. *Slough*
Nicholas James Whittington
(Bird & Beckett, 2010)

Ariel Goldberg's *Picture Cameras* asks the viewer to do just that: "picture cameras" when you handle this text. Created from "repurposed materials", namely old Shutterbug magazines by Lara Durback and Goldberg herself, it is more art object than poetry chapbook, although the text is the best and most compelling aspect of the handling experience. "Is that it? / That's it, / right there." These lines and others appear in bold print across newsprint pages of ads and columns all concerned with photography. A must-have accompaniment is Goldberg's *The Photographer Without a Camera*, this is true poetry cinéma vérité if there ever has been. *Picture Cameras* too often reads incomplete* without it ("the text has the feel of being captions for images or other text not present). In the opening pages of "this press conference", *The Photographer Without a Camera* lists suspicious characters who then author and/or appear in the poems, assuming responsibility for the results, such as, "PHOTOGRAPHER WHO WONDERS WHERE ALL THE PICTURES ARE GOING" and "THIS PHOTOGRAPHER WE

KNOW." They serve as our guides, making such ambient requests as "Consider the traditional lure of the photograph, the magic, the power to bring you back to the feeling of a place, to the weather, the excitement, the boredom." The mood is one of reflection that refuses to back away from declaration: "in a way the live performance of the poetry about photographs speaks to the frozen nature of the photograph." This is enjoyable yes/no entanglement of words on the making of images as art. Goldberg doesn't waste her ideas and Trafficker is making top-notch chapbooks—the effort and care given is clear. Poetry deserves this press.

Light Suite by Jessica Fiorini reads with a breeze and makes for good company over a drink or slice of pizza on the go. The familiar poetry from the islands of New York (Manhattan and Brooklyn) shines through with sparkling delight. "Where the hell is my Pepsi / it's the only thing I can count on / not sheep sans wolf tooth / stuck in sunken sternum" can't help but jump Ted Berrigan to mind (the ultimate lifelong free advertiser for Pepsi) but then pops in a fresh perspective: "I've never seen stone blush before / probably because the view up my skirt / Ya Bastal!" while keeping a count all its own: "again those dogs / again those bells" ("Belles Artes"). Fiorini delivers charm in her lines that are constantly at play: "How can I write around in trains" ("Holiday Schedule") or: "my camino begins with a '63 cadillac el dorado and perhaps / a single datsun worshipping el sol" of the sort which enraptures with an amusing verbosity: "once I was a shiny silver blue beetle / now I wear earth tones and make fast money in real estate" ("Engine Work"). It's all rather whirling, fast fun of the sort which leaves that residue of city living spun about through your thoughts, not exactly comfortable but entirely pleasant in that jarring manner we've come to love and expect from New York. Sadly, however, having a "Publisher's Position Statement" that attests to the chapbook in hand being a piece of "limited edition fine art," you'd think Pudding House would put more effort into producing a finer-looking product. It's all very wonderful that special collections of various libraries are adding these chapbooks to their collections, but they are not for the sensuous bibliophile.

The recent loss of Jim Carroll in 2009 was a surprise—though not a shock—for the poetry community, and it continues to reverberate.

Carroll's poems remain as evidence of his eminence for those readers who have yet to come upon them. The writing has that laid-back elegance which is comparable only to lost afternoons wandering city streets or drinking wine all day, dreaming of Li Po, times that are never recaptured despite a lifetime's desire. *Bolinas Poems* is a must for any Carroll enthusiast. Collected from issues of small zines from the seventies (*Big Sky*, *Little Caesar*, and *Hearsay News Supplement*), and containing one poem previously unpublished, there are no wasted pages. The verber is physically rocking off a line such as "Do Bison stomp snowmobile" and, yes, there's no doubting that somewhere are "finely clipped poodles dreaming in penthouse/ amphitheatres across mother's molding furs" ("Wingless"). The "love" and "magic" of "being Irish" celebrated by Robert Creeley's "Theresa's Friends" is given fine company by "For Edmund Joseph Berrigan", where "Lovely tones of mist sweep / off the channels of England / and the Irish sea ring / with the strength of a home" for "Edmund Joseph Berrigan / born today across the cool Atlantic." This "Villon of the hard-courts" (as he was noted in *The Bolinas Hearsay News*) serves up poems eternally steeped in cosmic wit: "hands vibrate to memories / of trapped elevators like epileptic hummingbirds ... / ah yes ... epileptic hummingbirds ..." ("I'm Living Inside Again"). Whichever version of Carroll's life you choose to embrace, these poems will stand you up over and over; he practiced poetry with an easy amusement embedded within a vanishing awareness that there's no faking.

San Francisco is a poet's town. Kenneth Rexroth and Jack Spicer, two colossal meat-choppers of the local poetry scene of a bygone generation, would be hard put not to admire recent chaps by Alli Warren and Nicholas James Whittington. Each of these young poets delivers work which holds an unambiguous position, staking out clear ground it is intent on holding. Whittington's *Slough* is more or less self-published and its apparent unwillingness to be "announced" online, have a price attached to its covers, or really be otherwise made available other than by the hand of the poet himself would immediately win over Spicer. Whittington runs Bird and Beckett books in San Francisco with his father while also editing *Amerarcana* (which does have an online presence). Warren's *acting out*, on the other hand, comes sliding out

BOOK REVIEWS

from Editions Louis Wain in Boston and is clean ephemera—which is not to be discounted. “All the gold in all the world / in a woman’s ass This poem / an object between persons” (“I Need Help with This”). The lightness of production to this chap balances out the heave-ho contained by the poems, where “Your logo satellites your diaphragm / and saturates your body / Your desire is elemental and abundant / You mutually dissolve and engender your love / thus your mass” (“Acting Out”). In turn, the finely sculpted weight of Whittington’s poems, “searching / in dark of mouths / w/ tongue blades // shaving serifs / like scales off / fish emerging // sound of selves / green echoes / mossy immanence” (“Lavage”) requires a heft to the hand which is likewise met by the sturdy quality of its production. There’s nothing but an exquisite clarity of purpose to both poets. The earnest throbbing of Whittington: “we sail on / till blood vessels rust / assume degrees / a dozen still / spiting lungs / much as lips” is matched by the irreverence displayed by Warren. This is indeed a poet’s town.

Patrick James Dunagan is the author of “There Are People Who Say that Painters Shouldn’t Talk”: A GUSTONBOOK (*Post-Apollo*, 2011).

Wildfire: A Verse Essay on Obscurity and Illumination

Andrea Brady
(Krupskaya, 2010)

REVIEW BY CATHERINE WAGNER

In Andrea Brady’s brilliant and game-changing project *Wildfire*, references to history, science, and current events are knotted into poetic language that serves as a cross-referencing tool, correlating thousands of years of bomb recipes, legends, government reports, alchemical formulae, news. Brady’s subject is fire, especially the incendiary devices used in war. Her hope is that out of an investigation of fire’s transformations and exchanges might resolve a possibility for resistance to the bad uses we make of our tools. *Wildfire* examines the explosive reactions that can occur when human desire, information, and substances mix.

Like Pound’s *Cantos* (though very different in its politics), *Wildfire* is a “poem including history,” dauntingly allusive, its references pulled together

across syntactical compressions. But *Wildfire* frames itself as essay, not epic; it is an argument that grew out of research and is necessarily dependent on the evidence it deploys. Ambitious in its humility, it dares to try to understand “the ancient complexity of the desire to burn” without sucking its sources into “mythopoetic spectacle.” (These last two phrases are drawn from Brady’s clarion “Note on the Text,” which appears at the end of the volume.)

Wildfire’s argument has at least three layers. Its subject matter, formal strategies, and presentation all explore or figure the impossibility of locating the boundary of the human subject and what might seem, falsely, to be exterior to it. *Wildfire*’s subject is the human nature of fire. Its formal features include end-quotes that never appear (so that the boundaries of quoted material are blurred) and competing assertions that pivot on syntax. And its presentation leashes the printed book of poems to a rich online batch of quotes from Brady’s source materials. The project’s intertextualities figure our relationship to history. They rhyme with the argument made explicitly in Brady’s “Note on the Text,” where she reminds us that we and our thinking, our science, our war-making, exist on fire: we are part of fire and it is part of us.

Brady launches this passage in the book’s first section, “Pyrotechne,” with a quote from Plutarch:

All things are an equal exchange
for fire and fire for all things,
as goods are for gold and gold for goods
If that is true, if money is sterile
and blood in exchange carries congenital defect,
all life on fire going out
and rekindling in a circuit:
then destruction the rule of measure in change
for moderns to circumvent
the law though a change of terms

The moderns’ “change of terms” (a nod toward hopes for the radical potential of linguistic experiment?) might blow air through the eternal bloody law that correlates destruction and creation, might even circumvent it; but such changes are also understandable as a recurrence of the same law. The ambiguous relationships put in play by the series of prepositions at the end of this passage develop an argument that simultaneously asserts itself and unravels. The poem’s syntax, like its incorporation of

quotations, affirms the critical stance it takes on its own argument.

Like its formal strategies, *Wildfire*’s supplementary materials demonstrate and encourage an active, critical and participatory relationship to information. The version of the poem on the Krupskaya website [www.krupskayabooks.com/abrady.htm] links to dozens of pages quoting and paraphrasing Plutarch, Theophrastus, Robert Boyle, Ed Dorn, books on phosphorus, alchemy, chemistry, military tactics, news stories on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more. I confess it took me some time to decide to read the supplementary texts, to commit to the magnitude of the project. Though the poem’s pleasurable muscular language kept pointing away from itself as I read, raising questions, prodding me to examine what might have sparked the provocative associations it made, I resisted turning to the source materials, which, printed out, might double the book’s length (lazy sigh). It turns out that the notes make great reading, and I found the poems’ distillations even more resonant and convincing when read next to their sources. *Wildfire* floats upon its sources and is composed of them. It insists that we notice the union between source and product, substance and made thing, where the made thing sheds new light on the substance. As Sean Bonney notes in a recent interview, poems “shouldn’t want to stand alone...The poem is always part of the world, is part of a constellation of energies making up a particular reality.” *Wildfire*’s foregrounding of its source material means I cannot forget that its argument depends on a particular filtration system—Brady’s—and I am reminded to try to blow the dust off my own. The poem coaches us to read skeptically: “Remember I am / on fire / cannot be trusted.” It’s worth noting that an earlier version of *Wildfire*, sponsored by the art collective dispatx, was published as part of an online “Improvvised Maps” project [www.dispatx.com/show/item.php?item=2062]. The interactive aspect of the work’s presentation is important, because it encourages us to hack its source material into our own conceptual formations.

Here is an exemplary passage from the section “Alchemistry,” the notes for which take us through the various stop-start developments of fiery substances intended (usually) for war:

For the aetiology of phosphorescence
substitute bone. For lightness substitute ash.
Bone, or human water, or all organic matter

BOOK REVIEWS

lain in a great heat can shine on in the dark
or bring tactical darkness to conflict.

Like many other passages in the book, this one meshes the dangers of incendiary tools with our history and our bodies. As Brady explains elsewhere, the phosphorus that once disfigured match-girls with "phossey face" also ignited napalm and fire-bombed ancient Greece, Dresden, and Fallujah. The same substance contributes, in phosphate form, to the petroleum fertilizers that have supported a human population explosion, meanwhile triggering algal blooms that suck up oxygen, creating deathlakes in the sea. Phosphorus can be derived from human bone and urine, and it was human matter that provided the material for its discovery.

The concept of fire, traced by Brady through millennia of texts, serves as an excavatory drill that connects our history, our thinking, and our bodies to the damage they wreak and the future they call into being. The fire made from our bodies can "bring tactical darkness to conflict." That is, a darkness gridded with intentionality—with intent to war—can be lit up, informed, by hot light that also serves as a weapon.¹ A passage late in the book explains that phosphorus "must... be wrapped and tanked under water,² / water-boarded but treated with dignity." Brady's irony sears: it's obviously essential to show healthy respect for the explosive potential of materials to be used for war; yet the U.S. has treated prisoners at Guantanamo and elsewhere with less dignity, though the results of torturing them may be no less explosive in the long run. There is enough of the combustible element phosphorus in your body to make 2,200 matches. And "it is only ever found in combination."

Catherine Wagner inserts her CV here.

1 White phosphorus is used in battle to create smoke that disguises operations or confuses the enemy; it is also used to light up targets. It is not classified as a chemical weapon under international law because it is assumed that it will be used as an incendiary device, not as a weapon. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/16/AR2005111600374.html> on its use as a weapon in Fallujah and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/13/falluja-cancer-children-birth-defects> for one account of its delayed effects.
2 To prevent accidental explosions.

The New Old Paint Susie Timmons (Faux Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY CACONRAD

Twenty years after her award-winning collection *Locked from the Outside* (Yellow Press: Ted Berrigan Award), comes this much-anticipated second title from Susie Timmons. As it turns out, her long hiatus was NEVER from poetry, just some time away from the poetry scene. WHAT A RELIEF! And because she never actually left poetry, these new poems contain all the skills of precision and jolting epiphanies her earlier work mesmerized us with. How rare is it to read a book of poems and get wowed at every turn of the page? RARE! I say rare!

distance is the same as time, emptiness is a kind
of speed
moving
slowly with extreme consciousness. the distance
belongs to somebody else, secondary concern
was dictated
to the weaver, intact but invisible

("FULCRUM OF DISASTER")

Have you ever been grateful to a poet you admire when they introduce you to the work of another poet? A few years ago, I asked Eileen Myles to please expose me to a poet's work she respects but whose books are out of print or hard to find. She emphatically answered, "Susie! Always Susie!" When poetry changes our lives, it's how the dirty lens through which we see our

world gets a little cleaner. There are many ways to achieve clarity; poetry is one of them, and with enough Susie Timmons you can see right through the fucking walls! She is Poetry X-Ray!

The silver phone rings. I will answer. Thank you!

A gift.
The mystic shape of an antique tongue
Beats my eyes with the grapes of doom.

("SONG FROM THE ESPERANTO")

At times these poems cut you entirely out of the room where you're reading them. Distorted lines you fall with, down into a sharp awareness of reconstruction, both intellectual and spiritual. *The New Old Paint* is a triumph! A genius unto itself! "My love is qualified as a rising complaint", she writes, and: "bonding honking, freight elevator bells / and unidentified clacking // chance concentrated in a ring" ("YOU LOSE").

This book will only leave your shelf for the used bookstore after you die, and only then, when someone who doesn't read or doesn't care to know the possibilities of poetry puts it in a box, then in the car, then on the counter. The clerk pricing books at the shop will crack the spine and join the transformed. Who would give this up? Not me. Not you, and not the clerks of the used bookstores after we die. The will to proceed provokes these pages, anticipating our challenged lives.

CACONRAD has a forthcoming collection of (Soma)t^{ic} Poetry Exercises & Poems from *WAVE Books*, and his most recent book is *The Book of Frank* (WAVE Books, 2010).



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

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Madeleine Poems
Paul Legault
(Omnidawn, 2010)

REVIEW BY FARRAH FIELD

You don't have to sit Paul Legault down—does the man sit down? I once met him on a dance floor—in order to hear about which books he's been reading and who his influences are. His debut collection of poems, *The Madeleine Poems*, is a celebration of readership, molding together past literary conventions and a present-day vivacious swagger into a beautiful and lyrical dialogue.

As the title suggests, Legault evokes Proust's madeleine, a textual and textured construct signifying femininity and introspection, with its ritual of prolonged dipping and sipping that confronts involuntary memory, with whatever recollection, or bit of one, that reveals itself. Legault's Madeleine, however, now capitalized, isn't merely a literary cookie. As his titles show, his book takes and re-takes a constantly metamorphosing Madeleine through an unforgettable repertoire of film, music, and of course books. Some of my favorite titles are: "Madeleine as Pornographer," "Madeleine as Ode of a Nightingale," and "Madeleine as James Dean and the Whale." The poems embrace both involuntary as well as voluntary memory—the act of being a reader and the act of living a life. One shouldn't cancel out the other, as in, "of an old thing, a new / thing of an old thing made // anew..." As conjured by Legault, Madeleine becomes animated, not only triggering memories, but creating them as muse and avatar.

The utmost act of making a memory, in *The Madeleine Poems*, is reading. After all, what readers do when they read is to remember, voluntarily and spontaneously, new experiences snuggling against former experiences, one on top of the other, like a kind of flirting. What we are able to recall of what we've read, essentially, that who we are is what we remember about ourselves, is the great wisdom of this book. Step by step, you can follow Legault's thinking as though the poem were a path to walk upon, especially in "Madeleine as the Homosexuals":

My grandmother's name is a field where men stop
their bicycles
on the premise that there will be a luncheon—

Madeleine—

—and get sucked off for the first time
romantically in the fields.

In that word *luncheon*, so formal and of a time, you can hear Legault turning pages back into the belle époque, with shades of George Eliot and Andre Gide. Keep going toward the invocation of Madeleine, almost whispered yet sweated out and guttural, balancing on place and name and names that place. Then seamlessly stroll onto *get sucked off* in the contemporary sense, dirty as what it is, deposited, heightened, to the point, what we all ride our bikes out to luncheons for, the physicality of physical contact. But relax! It's all done *romantically*, you see, this blend of existential outreach—eyebrows up, book open, pants where they are or have fallen. Legault's is a fearless authorship, encompassed and encompassing.

Sensuous and to the point, *The Madeleine Poems* find inside a coquettish nature the authority to speak in a world where everything has a name. Wrestling with nomenclature is tricky as there has to be a hint of trustfulness or belief that things are what they are. Legault fights against the staid quality that names suggest. "We had no name for it. / The trouble's mine. / Arthur." Are we just to name things and then die? Well, no. Well, yes. This is this and that's that: for example, "not the engine but of / the engine." Fine-tuning the line between metonymy and metaphor, the part becomes the whole; evoking the thing is the thing. There is an inherent limited limitlessness residing in the struggle of names. Legault honors words and their value, all the while inviting confusion with bedroom eyes, clear as clear blurred boundaries. If a thing is named, is that it? Well how about that, says this book. Madeleine is Madeleine and just knowing so is a turn-on. "In the next room, the chifforobe is to be called 'the chifforobe.'"

Indeed, naming the name is where Legault's sexual peppering is so keenly placed. Anyone who has been called a slut or has invoked the nature of what one thinks of as a slut—on Halloween for instance—knows that the act of being called a slut means that you provoked fear in someone else. There is a power in being

unabashed and full, the epitome of the raw. What is said outright is that the slut is not afraid and the slut is not a saint, and yet the slut is pure. "You bright slut" begins "Madeleine as Portrait of Walt Whitman as Gertrude Stein as a Stripper," a poem of taking in and running with, of letting oneself go. "Who never aspired / to be a word that meant / secretly Maverick...?" It's not the importance of crafting names, but the craftiness within them that counts.

By chance, in the midst of reading *The Madeleine Poems*, I attended a performance of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. During the play, I couldn't help but think of Legault's line, "Sometimes a buffalo stands in the open, wanting his good buffalo." A thing wants what it is, its better self. Through reading one learns to be the good buffalo and work this rich takes every reader inside. "Audobon, what we had was always a danger." These are my memories now, too. Paul Legault's voice is not one of expectations, but one that is unique to the point of divinity, relaxed, and topped off with incredible wit and valor.

Farrah Field is the author of *Rising (Four Way Books 2009)* and *Parents (Immaculate Disciples Press 2011)*, and is co-owner of *Berl's Brooklyn Poetry Shop*.

Inferno (a poet's novel)
Eileen Myles
(O/R Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY CARLEY MOORE

Eileen Myles's *Inferno (a poet's novel)* begins in the classroom with a hot teacher and a really good assignment. The protagonist, Leena, tells us that her professor—Eva Nelson—had a beautiful ass that was "perfect and full as she stood at the board writing some important word." When the class starts reading Dante's *Inferno*, Eva asks them to write their own infernos. This assignment becomes the occasion for Leena's first successful poem, and begins a book that has at its center classes, teachers, and tests. These tests are not conventional ones, but rather moments in the life of Eileen, who may or may not be Eileen Myles, in which she has to decide how to go about being a poet. Is she gay or straight? Is she a prostitute or a writer? Does she work at a bar or write

BOOK REVIEWS

poetry? How does a poet make money? How does one act around other poets? What, finally, is the job of the poet who lives and works in New York? Myles circles these puzzles in a form that, like its namesake, seems to invent a genre as it goes.

Myles divides the book into roughly three sections. The first chronicles the character Eileen Myles as she goes to college in Boston and eventually makes her way to New York. The second is a fictionalized grant proposal called "Drops," in which, as Myles writes in the "Abstract" to this section, "the young female narrator in becoming a poet [also becomes] human." In the final section, "Heaven," Myles takes a class with Alice Notley, becomes a lesbian, and considers the nature of a poem. Myles's prose—whether it's fiction, essays, or blog posts—is much like her poetry. The style is conversational, full of asides, qualifications, underlining, and cross-outs. Reading *Inferno* makes me feel like I'm having a breathless, breakneck talk in a bar with Myles. It's the same sensation I have when I hear her read her work out loud.

The first section finds Myles as an undergraduate commuting from Arlington to Boston, and then as a graduate student in Queens, selling subway slugs and working as a bouncer at a bar on West End Avenue. Mostly though, she's broke and often she's propositioned to do something compromising like have some couple's baby, sleep with an Italian handbag salesman for money, or become a masseuse who gives hand jobs. Simultaneously, she's getting to know the scene—reading her work at St. Mark's and Chumley's, watching and meeting other poets (Bill Knott, Ron Padgett, Patti Smith, John Swan, and Anne Waldman), and writing. What's great about this section is that Myles walks away from the surrogacy and the masseuse job, but ends up sleeping with the handbag salesman. There's no moralizing here, only the quick understanding that, while there's lots of things a poet will do for money, sex doesn't turn out to be one of them. She leaves the Italian in his hotel room, smiling with a "little pirate grin." She decides not to ask, "What am I worth." This moment feels like a reckoning, the female body of the narrator remains her own. She grows a poet's body, a body that has no price, and can't quite ever be commodified.

If the first section is about getting out of all of the wrong businesses, the second section is about getting *into* the poetry business. The conceit of the fake grant proposal allows Myles

to muse on several themes—collaboration with other writers and artists, wealthy patrons, and the poet's often vexed relationship to institutions. Myles, in this section, is learning how to read and perform, how to fuck and love women, and how to sell herself.

The third section, "Heaven," returns to sex and teaching. Myles begins to take a class with Alice Notley, who makes "speeches about what poets need to do" and treats the class members like artists. While taking this amazing class, Myles starts to come out. She meets Rose, from Chicago, and falls for her. Myles admits, "It seemed like being gay changed the thing of you. I started reading Sappho and I saw what everyone was talking about when they told you to take the words out of your poem." The end of the book is a kind of reordering—the moment when the right teacher and the first lover combine to make the poet a whole and complete being. The becoming is redemptive because, as Myles writes in the last two sentences of *Inferno*, "You can actually learn to have grace. And that's heaven."

Like all of Myles' work, *Inferno* feels distinctly and radically feminist because it asks us to consider the woman's journey into art-making as having its own set of complications. She writes, "Women might actually be a little more medieval than men. We don't start off being 'human.' I mean that's been my experience." The women who populate the pages of *Inferno* are students, teachers, poets, and lovers. One lover, Rose, had "fairly light hair on a warm young mound." Of Marge Piercy, one of the first poets Myles meets, she writes, "I thought she was ugly. A woman could be such a mess, so dark. But it was great." Her teacher, Alice, is "beautiful. Another dark haired girl, but she was a woman, 32, and she had a couple of kids, plus Ted." We sense that there's something to love in each of these women—Rose's body, Piercy's mess, and Alice's ability to manage her writing, her teaching, her kids, and her famous poet husband. But love isn't the point, exactly.

It's something more ethereal, something divine, but human. Something like grace makes the poet who she is. This one comes out of the underworld set for paradise, and we get to ride along.

Carley Moore's poetry has appeared in *Coconut, Conduit, Fence, La Petite Zine, LIT, and Painted Bride Quarterly*.

Event Factory

Renee Gladman

(Dorothy, a Publishing Project, 2010)

REVIEW BY ERIK ANDERSON

In the children's game "Simon Says," whoever's "it" utters a series of commands: "Simon says jump twice," "Simon says write a novel." Commands that begin with "Simon Says" are to be obeyed, commands that stand alone are not. Anyone who breaks either of these two rules is out, and when everyone is out the game is over. Among other things, the game teaches that communication often depends on such meaningless markers, the gestures and cues that dominate conversation.

The first pages of Renee Gladman's *Event Factory* thrust us into such gestural territory—through an exchange, not coincidentally, with a character named Simon. The narrator has just arrived in the invented city of Ravicka from points unknown, and when her cab deposits her in the hotel, a man named Simon is there at the desk to greet her: "'Hello,' I said. 'Hello,' he returned then added, 'My name is Simon.' 'Simon, are you the one with whom I am speaking?'" The conversations that follow largely run along the same lines. Characters say hello to one another (in English or Ravic) but little else. The questions they pose are subtly disorienting. They are equally the symptoms of a contradiction whereby one longs to be social ("I wanted to talk to someone, urgently") and realizes that, in language, one already is ("And I was already in a conversation").

The narrator of *Event Factory* finds herself in such a pickle: for most of the book, she both *is* and *isn't* communicating in Ravic. She's out of place among the Ravickians, even as she speaks their language and walks their streets. By the end she has not mastered their form of silence, which is resolutely that of the gesture. At issue is the conflict between her need to communicate through language and the unwillingness of the Ravickians to do so. Of Simon, for instance, she says, "His gestures were extravagant. Watching him swing his arms, I expected things to fall over, but there was a prevailing silence around him." Simon says little but moves a lot, and as a result the narrator has trouble, at least at first, navigating the intimacy of her conversations with him. This is true of her exchanges with other characters as well, as when after dinner one night she follows a waiter out of the dining room and into a smaller, more private space:

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BOOK REVIEWS

I bent to sit and he bent; our timing was impeccable. Then something dawned on me. I stood up and extended my hand. "Hello," I said trying to find my sexy voice, in case it was also time to fuck. Who could tell with everything being so gestural? "Oh. Please sit," he repeated. "I have collar greens."

Only with her lover, Dar, is the narrator able to achieve intimacy immediately. A kiss "against the dark lines of my neck" is delivered before the narrator has even learned her name. It's telling that Dar is a foreigner: the narrator isn't ready for whatever strange rituals courtship with a Ravickian would entail.

Life in Ravicka, as elsewhere, is governed by a great number of unspoken customs and internalized mores, and moving successfully through society means calibrating one's actions in response to the messages one receives. Outside of Ravicka, human interactions may be no less awkward than inside of it, but Gladman has her narrator perform this awkwardness. In *Event Factory*, the processes of interpretation,

integration, and response take on the characteristics of an elaborate pantomime:

But there was a gesture I was to make upon entering a place that was already peopled, something between "hello," "sorry," and "congratulations, I'm here"...there it was: you folded your body as though you were taking a bow with your legs spread far apart, and then, after holding that posture for several seconds (depending on your age) you brought your legs together quickly. I stepped inside the door; the patrons turned toward me; I performed and was right.

Gladman's sensitivity to the way the body speaks—which she telegraphs via an allusion to a similarly sensitive writer, Bhanu Kapil—is matched by her sensitivity to the dimensions of narrative in a profoundly, increasingly, and troublingly literal world. The underlying crisis that is driving citizens from Ravicka is connected to the distance between the narrator, who needs words to communicate, and the inhabitants of Old Ravicka (a city within, or rather beneath, the city), who speak "in gaps and air"—an even

more gestural language than spoken by the inhabitants of Ravicka proper.

It is the possibility of such a language that motivates Gladman's writing, both here and elsewhere. Her narratives are either gestural, or attempts at creating such a gestural literature: "You taste the strangeness; you try to make the sound with your mouth. That is speech. Now, how do you do this in writing?" *Event Factory* is a testament to the way a writer can sometimes create, out of necessity, her own Ravicka—when the descriptions commonly thought to apply to the world do not align with the texture of that world as experienced by the individual moving through it. It's an encouraging gesture, one that invites the reader to become her own version of Gladman's "linguist traveler," issuing and responding to commands—as in a game of "Simon Says"—in language that tastes its own strangeness.

Erik Anderson's *The Poetics of Trespass* was published in 2010 by Otis Books/Seismicity Editions.

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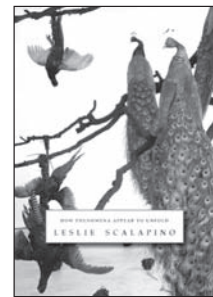
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BOOK REVIEWS

Delinquent
Mina Pam Dick
(Futurepoem, 2009)

REVIEW BY DAVID BRAZIL

I. "Is there another possible speech balloon?"

Everybody has how many names? And where exactly do these names live? In a cell? Or do they wander, according to the magnetism of the stroll, like Walsler or Thoreau?

What does philosophy without the aid of voice, "like an orphan with no father to protect it," look like? Direct statement? Florentine renaissance? Snapshots? Mere figment? An idea, clear and distinct? If you know, please tell me; I'm not pretending not to know just in order to drag out of you the fact that you're not knowing either; I'm no practitioner of that maieutic art.

"Temps" in French is weather, also time. In search of lost weather is a translation that's possible. Socrates in his trial was accused of inquiring into *TA METEORA*, the things above. Today we have meteorology, and it's no big deal. (Or is it?)

If we doubt the name, on what foundation can we then build language we can trust? Or where are we when we are in the space in which we have no choice but just to doubt the name? "Every speculative monitor who conscientiously signals the important trends in modern philosophy, every assistant professor, tutor, and student, every rural outsider and tenant incumbent in philosophy is unwilling to stop with doubting everything but goes further." (Kierkegaard)

"I mean, I'm a real practical person, and you know these "iffy questions," as President Roosevelt used to say. You know, if your aunt had balls she'd be your uncle, but ..." (Jack Spicer)

II. "Milk existed."

We drink up all sorts of prejudices in the milk of the vernacular, Dante called it. All sorts of absences also. An absence is a sort of prejudice that we don't know we have, but just the same.

Socrates believed that children knew things they didn't know they knew.

Iffy. Like Iphigenia. (Homer doesn't even tell this story, we have to wait for Stesichorus, Aeschylus, Euripides.)

In one version, Iphigenia betrayed becomes Hecate. (Watch out!)

If Clara can't appear, "clear and distinct," within these matrices?

Socrates. "...the life of catamites...?"

Kallicles. "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to lead the discussion into such topics?" (Gorgias 494E)

Or, what is the role of shame in selecting the topics fit for philosophy, for the love of wisdom? Have we rights to appear?

What, after all, is really shameful?

"Delinquent," from the present participle of the Latin *delinquere*, to fail or to be wanting in one's duty. Participle means, to be failing. (In English we do it with the gerund: continuous action in present time.) The delinquent is failing and stalling its actions from the site of that failing, its inadequacy to the "clear and distinct" qualities that give it rights within a certain order.

(Or, then again, if its place within a certain order is on the altar...)

III. "The lone afterlife is a new name."

Names befall us, but if we learn of the gap between them and what they purport to denote, we're already inside philosophy, and other sorts of kinds of writings too. Then multiply Elizas, Claras, Minas, Minnas, Hildegards, Gretas.

Being an orphan, it was logical for her to love God the father.

Being an orphan, she entailed His non-existence.

Comparative philology yields the Indo-European root *orbh, which shows up in English as "orphan" by way of Greek "orphanos." The meaning has been reconstructed as "one who changes his [or her] allegiance."

No, Jephthah's daughter is like Ishmael.

"O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!" says Hamlet.

In the story of the Akedah, or binding of Isaac, which forms the kernel of exegesis from which Kierkegaard made *Fear and Trembling* (though the allusion of the title is Pauline), God at the last minute sends a ram to replace Isaac, who was slated to get offed. (It's in Genesis.) Compare with Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:30), and Iphigenia aforementioned.

Agnes was in the early 1970s, he went like Jephthah.

The ballad of Jephthah and his daughter was a cautionary example in the Homily (from the *Book of Homilies*) preached against swearing and perjuring.

If we fail in our vow, or oath. Or if we are uncertain, doubtful. If we stutter. If we lie. If we live in the possibility that language can go either way. That a name can be a name or a mask, and the difference between the two choices lies not in the essence of the object but rather in our own realization that this possibility, these possibilities, abide in it.

There was a man who had two sons, the younger and favorite was a daughter.

There was a man who had two sons, the younger was a restless daughter.

68. I am a bastard, that is true. Officially, I am no son of anybody. Dub me Ishmael.

"Philosophy, nothing but philosophy.' Of a bastard line," write Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

"And me, the purest of bastards, leaving bastards of all kinds just about everywhere," writes Derrida, in *The Post Card*.

109. Then she became Ismael, i.e. the truth did.

Mia wrote Ismael because she rebelled even against proper spelling.

Greta is a name whose meaning is fixed, but Greta's meaning isn't. Therefore names are stunt doubles, sometimes they perish. Or necessary lies.

[Passages in italics are quoted from *Delinquent*.]

David Brazil's most recent publication is Yo! Eos! (*Berkeley Neo-Baroque*, 2011).

BOOK REVIEWS

A Place in the Sun Lewis Warsh (Spuyten Duyvil, 2010)

REVIEW BY STEPHANIE DICKINSON

*"Caress the detail, the divine detail."
—Vladimir Nabokov*

Lewis Warsh's elegant *A Place in the Sun* offers up the treats of postmodernism, with its blurring of fiction/reality, its multiple and shifting points of view, and its divine detail of Nabokov and rich characterization and clarity of Tolstoy. The progression is nonlinear, the writing crystalline, each sentence and scene immediately understandable yet sensuous, so that the effect feels phantasmagoric. The writing is water that flows (seemingly) effortlessly. Call it noir or fin de siècle with its connotations of decadence and sensationalism, or post-post modern: the author seems attracted to the ménage à trois and all the complications of the eternal triangle.

Like the 1951 movie *A Place in the Sun* the novel takes its name from, starring Montgomery Cliff and Elizabeth Taylor, or Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, the most naturalistic and chronological of books on which the movie is based, sex underlies the whole. Warsh's novel opens in a film noir moment. "The two Russian women were in the kitchen of their apartment when Eddie Perez came in through the window with a gun." He ties Marina to a chair and takes Irene into the bedroom where he rapes and murders her. We don't see what happens on the other side of the door. Eddie is killed by the police. The cop in charge is Harry Cray, who rescues Marina and later becomes her lover. From this primal scene we are flooded with a kaleidoscope of the recent past. "It was Marina, of course, after it was over, who filled in the blanks." Marina, newly immigrated to New York City, settles in a basement apartment owned by her uncle, who expects sexual favors. Ivan, a small-time Russian thug, then rescues her from the uncle. Marina seems to tolerate him best after he is sent to prison. Her doomed lover Irene finally joins her; the more sexually experienced Irene is poignant with a past: her dead baby Sasha is the fruit of her secret relationship with an older disabled lover, "the man with scars." We shift into first person; the "I" is a non-Russian woman and a friend of Marina's, "invited to a

million parties, introduced to a million men." The "I" also has the name of Harry Cray in her address book.

The stories pool out. They are served up obliquely, surprisingly, with new eyes and mouths. The book is divided into six sections, and while there is a formality of separation, they wash into each other. Russian mobsters segue into the tabloid world of Montgomery Cliff and Elizabeth Taylor, to whom Warsh dedicates the novel. These riveting chapters explore the inner and outer, the person and persona, the virtual and actual. Often the cinematic identity seems the more real. Montgomery Cliff is voted by the Barbizon Models of 1948 as the most eligible bachelor, the same year he's arrested for picking up boys in Times Square. He's at parties swallowing pills by the handful. The well-read Monty cruises, trolling the night. The elixir of fame all want to drink turns out to be the great poison. Those so exalted become alcoholics, drug addicts—simultaneously tormented and tormenting. Elizabeth Taylor is a whining, accident-prone cheat. "She is pornographic," her husband Eddie Fisher says. "Being Elizabeth Taylor's lover is a full time job."

Theodore Dreiser presses his face against a restaurant's window glass, full of self-contempt. "Couples mainly: the man lifts his glass and proposes a toast while the woman (twenty years younger, at least) tosses her hair out and raises her bare shoulders like a swan, a statue of a swan, as inert and dumb as any statue might be." Dreiser fantasizes about the swan woman and compares her to his frigid fiancé Sara, who he calls "Jug." Woven in are gems of knowledge, that Bertolt Brecht's lovers wrote major portions of his plays and "instead of loving them more, he jilted them."

In an age where sexuality has become commodity, packaged between the force-feed of pornography (credit cards at the ready) and magazines haranguing readers with insipid tips for better sex, the danger in writing about copulation is that you may bore the reader with a de-sexed sex, un-erotic, sterile poppycock. Warsh writes sex on the edge of death. He writes pleasure; he smacks characters against each other who shiver and spark. This power, both destructive and creative, unites much of the text.

Novels as sophisticated as this one usually make reading them feel a bit like work. A book only the literati could love. Not this one. It is a

page-turner, a smooth compulsive read. The writer/poet caresses the detail and the writer/novelist seduces us with narratives. *A Place in the Sun* is not for the likes of Warsh's characters, those self-destructive, impulsive, physically attractive people, or in the case of Elizabeth Taylor, "the most beautiful woman in the world." A place in the dark better suits them.

Stephanie Dickinson is the author of *Half Girl*, a novel, as well as the collection of stories, *Road of Five Churches*.

69

MLB (Miłosz Biedrzycki) Translated by Frank L. Vigoda (Zephyr Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY MATT LONGABUCCO

At a reading the other night, Ariana Reines told the audience she was going to read one of the last few poems she'd written before "giving up the East Village style." If that was meant as a provocation, it worked as one, because people like the East Village style (and it's fun to refuse people what they like). I take her use of the term to refer to that kind of poem whose form is based on the experience of walking down the street *on something*. The resulting poem being part walker, part street, part the something (the something is always language, in the end). Loose, fizzy, interruptible, attitudinal stuff, though refreshingly not self-aggrandizing because it's too drenched in a native New Yorker's sense of scale: you're never going to be Lou Reed, even if he's walked the same streets.

Funny to think that in this style the East Village has found its very own export. Polish poet MLB (Miłosz Biedrzycki) brings it back to us alive and fresh, though transformed in telling ways: still urbane but somehow earthier, dingier but more wry. Early in this volume a persona brags, "I was the first one in Poland / to write like O'Hara." And MLB does seem to bounce around Krakow in ways that the great city poet might recognize:

Krakow, 1/29/91, hey! what's
new, nothing much here but maybe
something's new with you

And in a poem entitled "Virtual Reality":

I walk & marvel at how realistic it is
I feel the pressure on my shoe exactly
where the sole of my foot meets the sidewalk

BOOK REVIEWS

tilt my head slightly and I see a little different fragment of the picture.

“Kielce Wells” begins:

keeping myself fairly busy, getting haircuts
hoping the barber says something interesting
during the cut; just popped in for a sec
to wait out the snow. it went on and on

This kind of poem is often steeped in local reference, as here we find ourselves on Wielicka Street or Debnicki Bridge—which is not so bewildering, after all, since anywhere you go you’re likely to see someone “bent over the stove / eating leftover pasta from the pot.” And no matter where you are it’s good to know about “the glue with the Latvian label” that “was the only one that worked on Lego.”

MLB isn’t always on the run, except from combinations and processes too well-formed or else undercooked. As he puts it, “if I stop / ine, ysis, ois and ation will jump on my back / and gobble me up.” He looks back to lament, at the end of another poem, a failure to imagine better verbs: “great, three sentences, four haves.” Of his work, he reflects:

I sprinkle rhymeless poems around
like a wet dog. rhyme-less poems,
plan-less life, sentence-less periods.
a problem for printers, a pain for office
princesses, a bad example for children.
out of step, out of step and difficult.
even if I am refined and on the side
of simple people. it pains me when they don’t
understand.

I believe him about the last part. But it’s a necessity for this sometimes difficult poet, however “refined,” to be “out of step.” He may be a “wet dog,” but after all, they usually get wet while making mischief and having fun.

The volume contains selections from four of MLB’s books in Polish, along with new work, for a total of sixty-nine (69) poems. Still, the title makes it look like you’re reading a sex book on the train. Or it would, if not for the sweetness of the author photo. We discover, in translator Frank L. Vigoda’s satisfying introduction, that MLB is the nephew of Tomaz Šalamun, that other great citizen of that vast East Village of the soul. Vigoda tells us, too, that MLB has worked as a geophysical engineer, a fact that manifests to great effect in a poem like “On the Preeminence of the Working Class,” in which it

is revealed that all those men going down into the shafts do so not to dig for coal but rather to trudge westward through special tunnels, in order to turn the earth itself, as in a giant hamster wheel. The metaphor MLB gleans from his other occupation is not one of plumbing the depths; if anything, going underground only makes the strangeness of the lines drawn on the earth all the more visible. In “A Simple Story,” he remembers:

you walked over to Austria on a long bridge
under the watchful eyes of guards with submachine
guns in watchtowers
a Czechoslovakian customs officer discovered in
my mining notebook
a mine diagram among the poems which then
I regarded much more important than shafts
and ramps
Czechoslovakian customs officers were obsessed
with paper, printed or handwritten
and so was this fellow
he started digging deeper and deeper, even I was
surprised
with what he was bringing to the surface
life seemed indivisible to me
I carried the same bag everywhere
things fell to the bottom like diatom shells
sedimented, compacted etc.

The officer eventually unearths a political leaflet and tries to make a fuss, but the times are changing fast—“in less than three weeks the aliteration / Havel to the Hrad would become a reality”—and the incident is simply dismissed. What you find out, if you go down into the earth, is that it’s a nicely mixed bag: work, art, and politics all smooshed together. I guess this makes MLB a miner poet. In other words, he’s sent us a book of multilayered pleasures, rich with gems and fuel for thought.

Matt Longabucco’s poems have appeared in With+Stand, Conduit, Pleiades, and Washington Square.

Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms
Paul Foster Johnson
(Portable Press@Yo-Yo Labs, 2011)

REVIEW BY JAMIE TOWNSEND

In a fugue of well-tuned claustrophobia and historical vertigo, Paul Foster Johnson’s new book *Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms* captures traces of feeling, projects specters onto bare

walls, and maps connections between politicized spaces and larger cultural conditions that create them. Looking at both the “pavilion” and the “safe room” as congruent models for unchecked political power and limitless paranoia, Johnson’s sonically rich, mutating syntax draws out various potentialities from within different architectures. Here, rooms become emotional placeholders where forms and characters begin to condense, decorative and deadly, shape-shifting *medusozoa*. In the midst of these hybrid physical/conceptual sites, Johnson’s poetry teases out senses of scope, plotting each room of each page and their corresponding limits: “I would rather make my own ether / than have to explain again / that I don’t work with images” (“Study in Pavilions”).

This creation of a space to work with(in)—a delineated universe of associations, echoes not images—allows the reader to enter the text in a more receptive, instinctual way. Inquiries concerning identity, position, and meaning abound: “If I bear resemblance / to a succession of drones / or the mysterious black boxes / replacing trashcans on subway platforms” (“Study in Pavilions”). Throughout these discrete but thematically interwoven pieces, Johnson explores terrains similar to those of contemporary avant-garde composers by focusing close attention to tonal elements and spatialization, noting the varied correspondence between sound, source, and environment.

One such auditory companion for *Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms* is Alvin Lucier’s recording “I Am Sitting in a Room.” Lucier’s repetition of a spoken text, combined with the specific “natural resonant frequencies” of the room where the recording was made, incrementally alters each word beyond recognition. By the end of the recording, the listener is left with a purely tonal impression of the studio space itself. Like Lucier, Johnson’s narrators become explorers of the unseen but felt elements of our surroundings—casting auditory lines out into sensitized space to draw a charge of social resonance.

In translating these tonal impressions to the page, Johnson also specifically addresses the plastic yet hyper-sensualized atmosphere of new-age music. One panic room “is reinforced with 500 overlaid vocal tracks / and paintings of the moon” and, in an attempt to find balance

BOOK REVIEWS

between music's idealized emotional impact and the need for something soluble, the speaker worries that atmospherics "is the direction I am headed / like I'm in a cloud chamber / meandering with some stray things flaring" ("Enya's Panic Room").

Throughout the course of the book, Johnson's poetry consistently tests these perceived environmental dimensions on both ends of the spectrum, and finds similarities. The concentrated political spectacle in the open, common area of a pavilion, where soldiers "...enforce distance / as they allow the décor // to wash over them" ("The Spiral Theatre") resonates with certain stifling aesthetics of the writing avant-garde. In "Bowery Safe Room," an audience arrives to "sweat the technique of the bad poem" unaware "they were being groomed for oblivion". Here the use of "safe room" plays with the connection between enclosure and expanse, as the poetry performance space, an assumed haven for free expression, also reveals its restrictive and intellectually isolating dimensions. What is "safe," and indeed closed-off, in a community increasingly geared toward an experimental elitism? What can be sounded here that is fresh, inviting, progressive?

As an answer, Johnson's prosodic stutter comes into play—a strikingly unique poetical device that appears consistently throughout the book, actively linking a voice to its immediate environment. These triply repeated words assume a sound and its source feed back into each other, or echo insistently, unmoored (a Max Headroom—esque momentum of lyric broken by natural imperfections; the spatial, embodied, emotional, and technological exposing a collective lack): "...a dolmen that does not not / not need need need an equal" ("The House of Good Taste"). Instead of allowing spatial elements to flatten out this stutter (as Lucier does on his recording—"as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have"), Johnson plays with and draws attention to these repeated words, both sounding them across lacunae and in the center of lines; a rhythmic reinforcement of negation and need that cuts into the poems' melodies, pulling the *body* into the center of the prosody.

Confronting the distances and limits of a persona or culture meaningfully bound to its constructed spaces, *Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms* makes room for language in a multiplicity of shifting tones—elegiac, bizarre, candid, humorous, biting—to fill, resound against, or root

into emptiness. These are poems about what is possible in a time of diminishing returns, elegantly rising above the *locked-in*, the ubiquitous cloud of fear that blankets everything: "And here you say that someone somewhere / has just now shut herself in to freak out for weeks / and this does not not not only occur in literature" ("Sermons from Science").

Jamie Townsend lives in Philadelphia, where he curates the *c/c reading series*, co-runs *con/crescent press*, and is active in the *NPP community*.

Meddle English Caroline Bergvall (Nightboat Books, 2011)

REVIEW BY ABRAHAM AVNISAN

Even before you open it, *Meddle English* quietly announces itself. Its sleek matte cover is understated, but its sharp, punning title promises playful mischief while, in the same breath, asserting itself in the imperative. On the book's front cover is a 1489 image, "the roundness of the world explained"—on the back, a facsimile of Robert Smithson's textured, handwritten phrase, "A heap of Language," taken from his artwork of the same name. The two images neatly frame the breadth of Bergvall's project, situating the new and selected texts of *Meddle English* at the intersection of literature and the visual arts. Her practice is rooted in both linguistic and literary research and site-specific installation and performance. Bergvall is uncompromising—and herein lies the importance of this book as it reflects her intervention in the field—in her insistence on the possibilities of writing/speaking/making within liminal spaces. Her project traverses not only disciplines but genres, languages, international borders, genders, bodies and histories. In the best sense of the term, the work is experimental: its success hinges as much on the questions it asks as on its outcomes, which can never be fully anticipated.

The book's neat, understated exterior delivers on its promise of mischief and the result is sometimes messy—in a good way. If language is material accreted over time, writing is an archaeological project. Our world is a heap of language, the book's exterior suggests. Dig in! demands Bergvall, meddle English! "Let us cut a cross-section into building stacks of language", she writes, "what gets revealed is history and ground...Temporariness and excavation. Volatility, weathering and renewal." Bergvall's

archaeological project works in two stages, though these often occur simultaneously. First, an uncovering of what has worn away (think Anne Carson's use of brackets in her translation of Sappho to indicate missing text or, perhaps more appropriately, those brackets refigured as the performance piece *Bracko*.) Here, writing serves as a record of "fundamental ruptures, discontinuities, far more than it delivers stability." Its source language is historical: in "Shorter Chaucer Tales," Bergvall plumbs Middle English, an unstandardized "maelstrom of influences and confluences...a mashup on the rise." The second stage is a "renewal," reworking, reimagining—a filling-in of the places where language has worn away. Its source language is also a "mashup," but an acutely contemporary one—vernacular, digitized, pressurized, degraded, transformed, transported, sung, accented, heard; the "anglo-mixed, anglo-phonic, anglo-foamic languages practiced around the world today."

The texts of *Meddle English* employ a wide range of linguistic strategies. In "Shorter Chaucer Tales," Bergvall's seamless superimposition of txt-speak over Chaucer, of 21st-century European stories over medieval ones, is thrilling. "Fried Tale (London Zoo)" tells the exploits of two bankers, "2 suits, a mega pair of Smith, Blupils no dout, / viddyng how they trading outa goodness welth stuporifik / ... jus 4 kreaming the topping, o my brother".

The previously published *Goan Atom*, selections of which are reprinted here, is a concrete, formally experimental sequence which, among other things, figures language as the body of a doll, which is then stretched, reconfigured, disfigured:

Sgot
a wides lit
down the lily
sgot avide slot
donne a lolly to a head
less cin
dy slots in
to lic

The layered, polyglot and performative "Cropper" employs musical repetition and variation to meditate on linguistic and bodily boundaries and their transgression:

Some never had a body to call their own before
it was taken away
som aldri hadde en kropp de kunne kale sin
egen før den ble revet bort
ceux dont le corps d'émblée leur est arraché

BOOK REVIEWS

And a handful of lyric prose essays developing Bergvall's notions of language and writing provides a counterpoint to "non-prose" texts whose insistence on the materiality of their words, letters and sounds can sometimes be challenging or opaque.

To the reader of formalist sensibilities, *Meddle English* might feel too loosely crafted; to the rigorous conceptualist, the rules governing Bergvall's decisions on the micro-level of the line might seem too difficult to track. But Bergvall is not a "poet's poet," and she isn't trying to be: the texts of *Meddle English* weren't written for the page alone and the Modern formalist rubric might not really apply. Formally speaking, "Shorter Chaucer Tales" is the most tightly wrought of the book's non-prose texts, and the one that, along with *Goan Atom*, reads most comfortably as text written for the page. But parts of the "Chaucer Tales" were included in Bergvall's 2010 exhibition/installation "Middling English" as both audio recordings and broadsides, a reminder of the fundamental importance of performance and performativity to Bergvall's work. Bergvall's practice is opposed to the modernist notion of a definitive, singular, "final" work, and to ask this of *Meddle English* would be to do it a disservice. Especially since much of Bergvall's work is freely available online to be heard, seen and interacted with. Language isn't only polyvocal, it's multidimensional, and another imperative of *Meddle English*, it seems to me, is to apprehend its texts in their multiplicity: to read them simultaneously as poems, essays, scores for performance, gallery wall texts, and exhibition catalog plates.

Abraham Avnisan is a poet, visual artist, and would-be psychoanalyst living and working in Brooklyn, NY.

More Radiant Signal

Juliana Leslie

(Letter Machine Editions, 2011)

REVIEW BY NICOLE TRIGG

In her first book, *More Radiant Signal*, Juliana Leslie shows real affection and energy for her medium, loving (and demonstrating loving) what words do. The collection revels in definition, suggestion, substitution, multiplication, and affirmation, among other functions, and the outcome is playful, abundant, and fast-paced. *More Radiant Signal* names the work perfectly, definitively, where Leslie celebrates the word as both signification and radiance, asks for more of what she desires and adores, then creates it.

"Have you seen the green ray? / One possibility is to apprehend the immediate and material darkness / Another is to walk a little further." The lines that conclude the poem "From the Interior of All Other Knowledge" read as an *ars poetica* peculiar to the project. Leslie has seen and sees, and writes in pursuit of "the green ray" (other words for "radiant signal"), which is holographic, elusive, and infinite in one direction, says geometry. That direction is of course forward, where Leslie goes unhesitatingly. Along the way she pauses here and there "to apprehend the immediate." If the collection has any weakness, it is a reluctance to stay, to resist perpetual motion and linger in darkness. (Two poems that are *not* reluctant, and are immensely successful for it, are, "Several Always Before the One," and "The Little Sound in the Middle of Simone." These poems, in which Leslie sustains a kind of strained embodiment in the one, and in the other, creates a sonic volume of s-sounds to house romantic fixation, make me wish for more like them. Then again, their contrast to the pattern is part of their success.) Both options—to stay and to go—are of course necessary to perceive the green ray! Yet a preference is implied in the order of the lines: motion, over stasis, has the last word.

The appetite for more, for extension and also variation or exchange, yields lines that bleed together over breaks while also operating discretely. Some poems call to mind rolling credits, or refreshing a web browser in repetition, where lines read as equivalent or interchangeable, displacing each other. Leslie alludes directly to this function in the second section of the poem, "Paul Klee":

Replace doubt with live color and the affirmation
of color or substitute affirmation with actual texture
substitute when a human body disappears
with wavelength or fold of blanket
substitute and/or replace wind
with bees

Alternately, Leslie enacts substitution (versus telling it) in various poems, including "Articulation," where anaphora underscores the effect:

Someone is born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
Someone is a marriage of cells to a house
I think this is what it means:
To be speechless in front of a mirror
To hire geraniums
To be had as much as to have

A linguistic mode of substitution translates to immateriality and lightness, which Leslie references when she writes, "Why don't you carry

a cardboard cutout / of what you believe" ("Beginner's Mind"), and with the lines, "In the future time will be construction paper orange / the heavens and all the spheres / will be construction paper orange" ("Illumination of the Earth for a Photo"). The flattening of spheres is a major concern, but not a threat—rather, it's an opportunity to make things, and therefore liberating. Leslie works to exaggerate the linear; moreover, using crispy templates of math, theory, logic, etc., to frame parts of poems (contrasting with non-sequitur content), and drawing attention to the literal lines that shape letters (e.g., "L is for a lexicon of possible appearances. The visual form of how roads end," from "The Importance of Rising Motion..."). At the same time, Leslie acknowledges the need for dimensionality, which she achieves beautifully in several places—here and there opting to "apprehend the immediate"—so anchoring a flammable, flappable (as in airborne) text.

"The Painter of Modern Life" is an interesting composite of the two modes, motion and stasis. The poem begins in the former, multiple and hyperactive ("he tries to pile two lemons on top of one / he pulls paper over his mouth / plays a new game every hour"), then devolves into exhaustion, imprecision, semi-blindness ("grapples with water whistles / notes in many tones / focuses here and there / on sunspots"), to end in the latter mode ("forced to walk slowly / and recollect your inner life"). As the poem downshifts, so does the speaker, seeming drunken or dumbstruck, stating, "A ride on a train is very exciting / My photo includes balloons". The final lines of the poem, "become a cow a moving pendulum / the sun" enact gathering weight and roundness sonically (*cow* and *pendulum*) and hold us there in the unpunctuated, radiant last sound, *sun*.

The full title of the title poem has an important extra word, which speaks to this issue of sustained attention and embodiment: "softer". "Softer More Radiant Signal" is an impressive, risky poem in which Leslie literally asks to go where she is uncomfortable, to stay in the dark body. It begins, "Tell me more about..." and ends as follows:

More of that feeling
that accompanies an unsettled
state of being
More of the condition of being
naturally disposed to several
different feelings
tell me more about these words
turbulent, euphoria, indiscrete

BOOK REVIEWS

The difference is between a matted tangle and a single thread picked from the knot. In this first collection, Juliana Leslie plays in that space—between palimpsest and list, volume and line—with ingenuity and vulnerability.

Nicole Trigg is a poet, bookbinder, and co-curator of the CROWD reading series. She lives in Brooklyn.

Montgomery Park, or Opulence Karinne Keithley (53rd State Press, 2009)

REVIEW BY ERICA KAUFMAN

Montgomery Park, or Opulence is at once archive, image, window, play, novella, poem, portrait, museum, ballad, and more. And, in considering Keithley's work, in book form as well as in its live production at The Incubator Arts Project in November, one can't help but marvel at the sheer number of things it manages

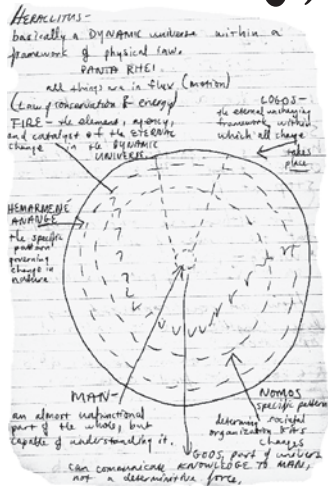
to do and enact at once. I want to refer to *Montgomery Park* as a composition—in the musical scoring sense, but also in the way that Gertrude Stein spins over through and around the term in "Composition as Explanation." Stein writes, "The composition is the thing seen by every one living in the living they are doing, they are the composing of the composition that at the time they are living in the composition of the time in which they are living." This connection between time and composition, living and recursivity, visual as verbal, is investigated through Keithley's lexical constructions of space and place, and saluted in the subtitle, "an essay in the form of a building."

But, what is *Montgomery Park*? A quick search indicates that it is many places, none of which are nearly as interesting as the one Keithley builds—a space of "opulence," but not in the typical rich, monetary connotations of the word. This *Montgomery Park* is a work that allows readers and viewers to luxuriate in what Keithley


describes as "the idea of a room and making events in a room." And, these rooms are overflowing with content—left alone with this book one hears a wall speak, bears witness to the transmission of a number of oral histories, partakes in the cataloguing of event, memory, art, and enters into a film. She writes, "maybe we could clarify the environment with a theme song" (10). Keithley creates a new kind of interdisciplinarity—an all-encompassing architecture that elegantly houses this plethora of works. She writes, "Measuring use is difficult especially working across species" (7).

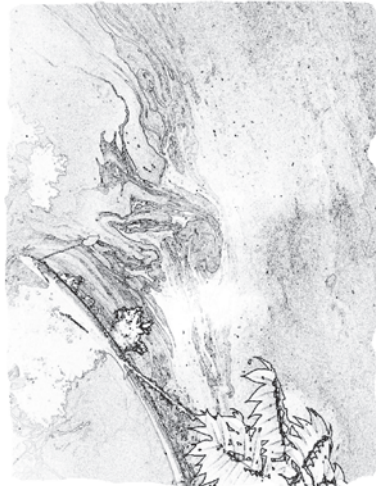
The first chunk of the book consists of a speech from a "goldfinch wall," an invitation to partake in a "welcoming dance," a "card catalog," "song," and then "three histories," followed by a "case study," a "guide" and the introduction of a doctor. The text is full of active nouns, spanning centuries, geographies, posthuman. I'm reminded of Joan Retallack's essay, "Essay

alcalay, marinovich, brolaski



HERACLITUS - basically a DYNAMIC universe within a framework of physical laws. PARADOX RHEI all things are in flux (motion) (Law of conservation of energy) FIRE - the abstract, essence, and constant in the STEADY change of DYNAMIC UNIVERSES. HEMEROCOME ANAPHOR the specific problem presenting change in nature. MAN - an almost unfunctional part of the whole; but capable of understanding it. NOMOS specific pattern determine societal organization. BUTS changes. LOGOS part of universe can communicate KNOWLEDGE TO MAN, not a deterministic force.






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as Wager," in which she writes, "the most vital meaning has always come out of a dicey collaboration of intellect and imagination." I think that part of Keithley's work's great accomplishment is the way she straddles the hypothetically fictional with a cloak of mastery—mastery of multiple genres, of composition itself in all its amorphousness, and a William Jamesian attention to the "constituents of the Self." What does it mean to build such a prolific archive for a place that perhaps doesn't exist? What does it mean to be "accounted for"? And, what does this imply about the function of the archive, the art, the body? To return to Stein, perhaps "nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition."

In "Its Solution" (the second segment of "Case Study C"), Keithley writes, "one day I found words so accurate it seemed to energize the emptiness against me...I ran to the walls of the room to prove to myself that at least this outward container was still there" (39). The sentiment here is that of a body enveloped by air, by space, by negative capability. Yet, it is the "accuracy" that is striking—the accuracy of Keithley's diction, her attention to words as units, sentences as Steinian syntactical units at play. There is always an "outward container," but this narrator makes the "poethical" connection

to the strange "intermediate zone between self and world, in the distancing act of play" (Retallack). In "Guide," we are "invited to take a look around, and if you have any questions about the walls please feel free to ask" (42). Particularly resonant in live performance/installation, this is the moment when audience/reader walks through the text alone, at his/her own pace, engaging with these articulate walls. Retallack unpacks her notion of "poethics" as "what we make of events as we use language in the present, how we continuously create an ethos of the way in which events are understood." An invitation to speak to a wall, to inquire about a room's contents, brings the reader/viewer into a kind of continuous present/presence. Keithley achieves (consistently) this kind of "poethical" moment where constructions of memory, the politics of nostalgia, and a place we might not know all come into dialogue, speak and swerve in the most productive ways, like Epicurus' *clinamen*.

The text then moves into a "fire story," a "film," "Spinozan callisthenics," "post script," and "appendix." We meet Adam Gordon Griswold, and learn the story of this *Montgomery Park's* fire. We see an acknowledgement of progress, of the details that populate this space, and the voices that surface in letter and diary. Keithley writes, "she had been put away in one of those

regions we send for in our imagined rehabilitation" (51) and later, "the rush of all pronouns away from anything corporeal" (53). These are people speaking, walls speaking, bodies de-gendered, "the building, to which she had lost her own identity" (53). We hear Doctor Montgomery interrogated, remarking, "you are a photograph!" (75). Gregory Pardlo comments that Keithley's writing is "a lesson in the varieties of awareness the human animal can achieve," and this awareness enables one to navigate through a burning building rebuilt, a photograph never taken, and finally, "hand drawn message essay to who and on what?" (90)

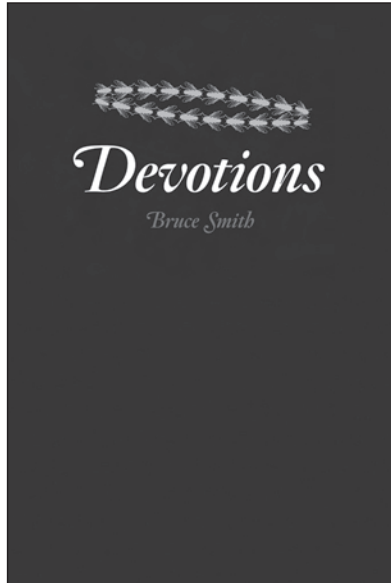
The term "essay" comes from the French word, "essayer," which means "to try." And, what Keithley valiantly and dynamically achieves is a foray into architecture—one that is inscribed with memory, mind body. The text concludes, "I put my arm out into white space inhabit my archive in waiting" (90).

Erica Kaufman is the author of *Censory Impulse (Factory School, 2010)*.

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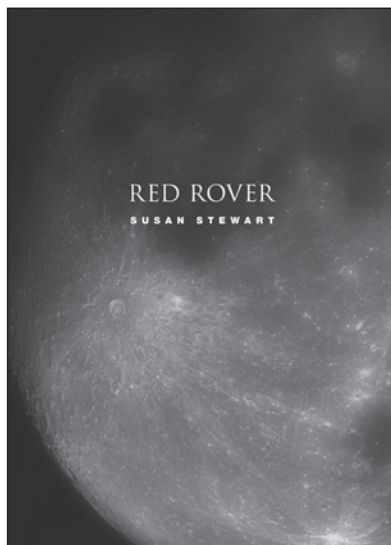
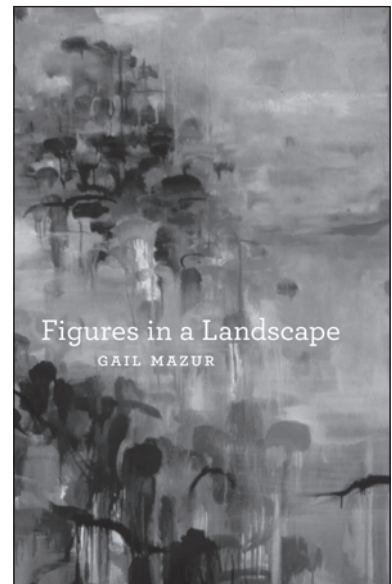
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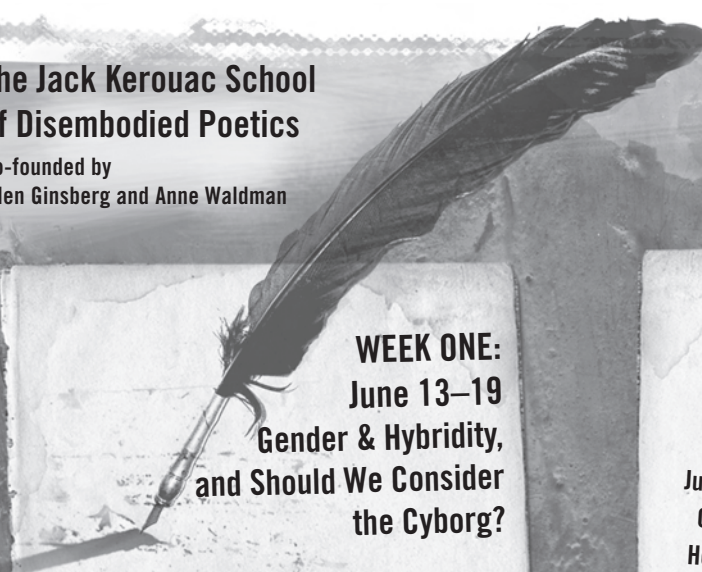
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