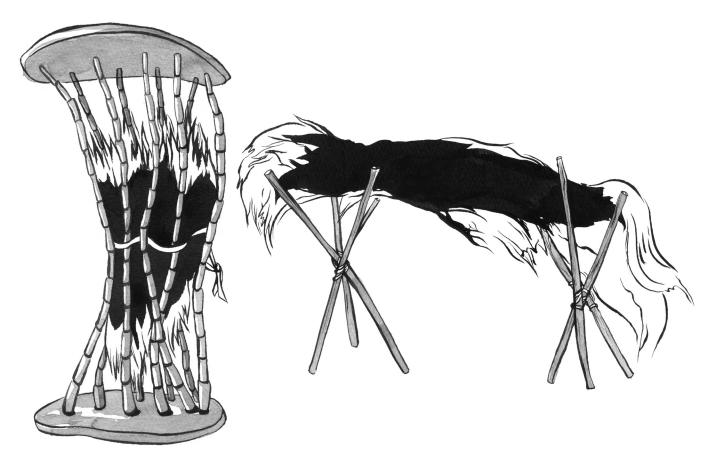
# THE POSTRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER WWW.poetryproject.org

# APR/MAY 10 #223

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS FEATURE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS KARINNE KEITHLEY & SARA JANE STONER REVIEW LEAR JAMES COPELAND REVIEWS A THOUGHT ABOUT RAYA BRENDA COULTAS REVIEWS RED NOIR KEN L. WALKER INTERVIEWS CECILIA VICUÑA POEMS DEANNA FERGUSON CALENDAR BRANDON BROWN REVIEWS AARON KUNIN, LAUREN RUSSELL, JOSEPH MASSEY & LAUREN LEVIN TIM PETERSON REVIEWS JENNIFER MOXLEY DAVID PERRY REVIEWS STEVE CAREY JULIAN BROLASKI REVIEWS NATHANAËL (NATHALIE) STEPHENS BILL MOHR REVIEWS ALAN BERNHEIMER DOUGLAS PICCINNINI REVIEWS GRAHAM FOUST ERICA KAUFMAN REVIEWS MAGDALENA ZURAWSKI MAXWELL HELLER REVIEWS THE KENNING ANTHOLOGY OF POETS THEATER ROBERT DEWHURST REVIEWS BRUCE BOONE





#### THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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ON THE COVER: "On Stilts" by Alison Kuo. Sumi ink on paper, 2009.

Alison Kuo is a sculptor, a drawer, and a Texan. Her website is www.kuospace.com.

#### LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### 1. from the director

Dear readers, welcome to the Spring issue of the Newsletter, the final issue of this season. I knew from the start I needed to buckle my seatbelt but we're almost through and I think I just have a bump on the head. Don't worry, our doctors have checked me out and I'm good for another year. However, there is going to be a significant amount of staff/artistic-support staff turnover so expect to see some new people on the masthead come September.

After five years at the Project, Corrine Fitzpatrick has decided it's time to do something different, like zigzagging the equator in a quest for eternal summer or getting a job at Starbuck's for health insurance. Seriously though, we've worked together for all of those five years so "the breakup of our camp" will be a big adjustment, but please join me in wishing her well post–Poetry Project.

I also want to report that after exhausting negotiations with St. Mark's, we have secured a lease. As we feared, the rent increase is high, and we've had to forfeit use of the Parish Hall on Saturdays. Our Saturday Writing Workshop will now be held in a rented room next door in the Rectory.

Robert Duncan said, "Responsibility is to keep the ability to respond." While being your host for the past three years has been the job's joie de vivre, I will need to take a hiatus from coordinating the Wednesday Night Reading Series next season in order to focus my energy on development and raising funds to meet these new obligations. I have appointed Joanna Fuhrman to the position at least through January of 2011. As many of you know, she is a terrific poet and an experienced curator.

On that note, we have three special events coming up in April for our annual Spring fundraising week. On April 28th, Alice Notley will give a solo reading in the Sanctuary, with a reception to follow. Her new book Reason and Other Women is just out from Chax Press. On the 30th we have a two-part event for the book We Saw the Light: Conversations Between the New American Cinema and Poetry, by Daniel Kane. Kane will moderate a talk with a group of poets and filmmakers, followed by a film screening. Finally, on May 1st, we'll have a performance of John Ashbery's Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror for Six Voices, arranged and directed by Jim Paul. Admission for each event will be \$10. You can find more information on the calendar and on our website. We'll also be sending out an email appeal that week offering people the chance to show their support through making an online donation. Thanks for checking in and I hope to see many of you here in the coming months.





#### Romey's Order

#### **Atsuro Riley**

"The best literature forces you out of your old eyes and that's what happens here. Atsuro Riley's *Romey's Order* is deep craft—brilliant and consuming and thoroughly strange. When you put this book down, American poetry will be different than when you picked it up."

Kay Ryan, United States Poet Laureate, 2008–10

PAPER \$14.00



#### **Medicine Show**

#### Tom Yuill

"Medicine Show lives up to both halves of its title: a vivid, exhilarating imagination show that is also strong medicine. Tom Yuill examines the grief and desperation underlying postures and ruses of self-deception. The book's brilliant adaptations and imitations of Hikmet and Villon cast a raking, skeptical light on Texas versions of the quasi-Byronic hero."

Robert Pinsky, Former United States Poet Laureate PAPER \$14.00

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Stacy Szymaszek

#### LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### 2. from the editor

#### Ismael!

Dear Spring. I want to wear peach windowpane tights for you. I want to wear peach windowpanes for you and recite sonnets by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Dear Spring, what became of names like Edna St. Vincent Millay? Edna and Denton Welch used to play hide-and-goseek while I sat beneath an ungrafted tree drawing portraits of big aprons and "ghosts to-night, that tap and sigh / upon the glass and listen for reply"; but it's hard to draw the rain. This is how we knew we were ready for the city, partly how we love the city, let me count the ways. One, two...223. It's not true! It, whether or not I believe it, might be true. Much is changing, lots is touchstone. Ray DiPalma will read, that's sure thrilling. Where have names like Ray DiPalma gone? I have a yellow-and-red "Sign Here" sticker on page 159 of Numbers and Tempers. I must have been working at that finance job. Page reads: "HIS LIFE-TO THE ONE WHO REMEMBERED BUT IT / WAS AN IMPEDIMENT AND WHILE THEY WROTE / LOOKED AND REMEMBERED THE SUN WENT DOWN AND / THE MOON CAME UP AND THE RAIN BEGAN TO FALL / THE LOCKSMITH ARRIVED AND AFTER HIM A LYNCH / MOB AND AFTER THEM THE SAVAGE GOD". Rather bragroot, all caps, "sharp though infrequent." Around the same time, thanks to a certain New Dad, I discovered Deanna Ferguson (see p. 13 of this here embroidered biscuit [but pace yourself]). Poor thing amidst the staggering Olympics! Now they are gone. Sadly, for I didn't feel a faker while watching. I will miss New York if ever I depart or betray. Dollar guys don't jump out of chairs anywhere else, just ask Rosalind Russell. Speaking of leaving an entrance free, Julian Brolaski recalls Rosalind and Celia in the last line of her review (see p. 24 of this little gray stone), and it's right; and they gave their hands to the unkind daughters of Lear (see p. 09), heigh-ho?

Ipse dixit,

#### Corina Copp

#### CONGRATULATIONS

To Miles Champion and Rachel Szekely on their new tiny bundle, Vivian Rose! We really thought you'd go with Milesina.

#### WITH REGRET

We were sad to learn that our longtime friend David Nolan passed away on February 25th. The funeral was held at St. Mark's on March 3rd. Many of you knew David through the countless volunteer hours he spent at Project events, helping us with sound and guiding us through technical knots. He spent all of New Year's Day, this year and last, along with David Vogen, making sure each performer had everything needed for his or her performance, and ensuring that the Project always got the highest quality recording. It was clear that he got a lot of joy from the work he did for us as well as so many other organizations he was connected to. He loved being here and we loved him and will miss him dearly. Look for an extended obituary in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

We also regretfully note the passing of Lucille Clifton (1936-2010).

#### SAVE-THE-DATE

Readers of James Schuyler's poem "Dining Out with Doug and Frank" who want to know more about Schuyler's first lover, Bill Aalto ("five tumultuous / years found Bill chasing me around / the kitchen table—in Wystan Auden's / house in Forio d'Ischia—with / a kitchen knife... Oh well. Bill had his hour: he / was a hero, a major in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade...") are invited to attend a lecture by historian Helen Graham, Visiting Chair, King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, New York University, who is writing a study of Aalto.

The lecture is entitled, "Fighting the War, Breaking the Mould: Notes for a 'Life' of Bill Aalto," and is co-sponsored by the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.

Monday, April 19, 7:00 p.m. 53 Washington Square South (between Thompson and Sullivan Streets), Main Auditorium. The event is free and open to the public. Picture ID required at the door.

# New from LITMUS PRESS

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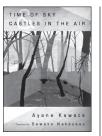
SPRING 2010



Time of Sky & Castles in the Air

Ayane Kawata Translated by Sawako Nakayasu

SPRING 2010



Portrait of Colon Dash Parenthesis Jeffrey Jullich

SPRING 2010



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#### **FEATURE**

## Performance Reviews

### A Thought About Raya

JAMES COPELAND

The Debate Society's A Thought About Raya. Created and performed by Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen. Directed by Oliver Butler. Based on the writings of Daniil Kharms. Originally produced in 2004. Performed at the Ontological-Hysteric Theater's Incubator as part of the Other Forces Festival, Jan. 7-15, 2010.

The Russian author Daniil Kharms was known to have walked around Leningrad in full English tweed, smoking a pipe, and sometimes stopping in the busy Nevsky Prospekt to lie down across the sidewalk. A crowd would gather, and then, just as spontaneously, he would stand up and continue down the street as if nothing had happened.

And indeed, nothing had happened. Or, at least, nothing of any meaning. It was an event without purpose and without consequence. It was a nothing event. The stories that Kharms is famous for-stark micro-fictions of vicious comedy, written mostly in the 1930s before his arrest under anti-Soviet charges—are driven by his fascination with exactly this kind of nothing event. (His stories are most recently collected in an edition translated by Matvei Yankelevich under the title, Today I Wrote Nothing.) In one story, a man passes another man on the street, and that's it. That's all that happens, told in no more than four lines. In another example, the narrator can't remember which comes first, seven or eight. No resolution is reached. In another, various women fall out of windows, and more continue to fall, but we don't hear about them because the narrator gets bored watching. Death is a nothing event, too.

The stories' power lies in good part in their strict economy. They've scarcely even begun before Kharms cuts them off, usually with a banal non sequitur or incident of bizarre violence. It would seem, then, to be challenging to adapt his stories for the stage, to make all that bold randomness into a full-length piece. In their play A Thought About Raya, the theater company The Debate Society has met the challenge beautifully.



PHOTO BY FRICKA HEIDRICK COURTESY OF THE DEBATE SOCIETY

There are two actors in the production: a man and a woman. The play opens with the man, Paul Thureen, sitting at a desk attempting to write, while the woman, Hannah Bos, mocks and interrupts him. He refers to himself as Daniil, and persists in his effort to devise a compelling story—a persistence that was constant in Kharms's life. She, with her sarcasm and abuse, is also a stand-in for Kharms—the side of him that felt an instinctive repulsion for traditional narrative. The tension between these two highly anxious characters builds, but, in Kharmsian fashion, does not climax. The action suddenly takes a sharp left turn and we're thrown into an entirely new vignette, with new characters being enacted, and a new set of ingenious props thrown into the mix to help keep the surprise-quotient high.

The play has jetted off on a breakneck tour of Kharms's collected works. Bos and Thureen narrate or enact the stories about the sevens and eights, the falling ladies, and the man passing another man on the street. They recreate the brilliantly silly bit about a butter thief (it's in his mouth). They even include the invective against old people, young people, and dead people that occasionally shows up in Kharms's work. When the show is done, the Kharms novice is a novice no longer, and The Debate Society's almost word-by-word faithfulness to the stories means that the audience has enjoyed not only exposure to Kharms's imagination, but also to his writing itself.

Of course, A Thought About Raya doesn't aim to be a survey on Kharms. It's a play of its own invention, and is driven by the more pressing need to have as much fun as possible. Bos and Thureen simply cannot be satisfied by merely communicating the stories. They must employ the full equipment of the theater: layers of sound and voiceover, rapid-fire lighting cues, turning costumes inside out, jogging in circles, playful props such as a large sculptural object in the corner (perhaps it's the machine that Kharms assembled in his house, which, whenever he was asked what it did, got the explanation: "Nothing, it's just a machine"—again, the appeal of nothing), as well as plastic sheets hanging in front of the stage (perhaps in homage to Richard Foreman, whose Ontological-Hysteric Theater the play was recently performed in), and many more tools and tricks to make Kharms as immediately enjoyable as possible.

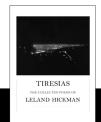
The opening scene depicting the conflicted Daniil is a nod to the stories' original authorship. It is well and sincerely done, and creates a context for what follows. But the play as a whole holds together in its own right by being a projection, through Kharms's words, of a new imagination, a new dramatic discipline, a new relish for the absurd nothing events of life. And after the show—the lovely spectacular that The Debate Society has presented with all their energy—it comes as an extra pleasure to think of Kharms, nearly 70 years since his death by starvation in an insane asylum and the suppression of his writing in the Soviet Union, as still able to amaze a packed room with his story of two men passing in the street.

James Copeland lives in Brooklyn, New York, and works at Ugly Duckling Presse.

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# **Nightboat**

**NEW & NOTABLE** 



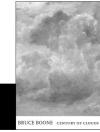
#### Leland Hickman

Tiresias: The Collected Poems



#### Edwin Torres

In The Function Of External Circumstances



#### Bruce Boone

Century of Clouds



#### Brenda lijima

The Eco Language Reader



Nightboat.org

Red Noir Brenda Coultas

Red Noir, by Anne Waldman. Directed by Judith Malina. Performed at The Living Theatre, December 10, 2009-February 27, 2010.



PHOTO BY WWW.KENNEDYYANKOART.COM

"I am personally interested in extending the written word off the page into a ritual vocalization and event, so that 'I' is no longer a personal 'I.' I enter into the field of the poem with my voice and body. The poem in turn manifests out of my voice and body. There is a reciprocity of energy involved. Sometimes as I create the poem, I dance it. It moves through me. Then it takes a shape on the page, which is at first somewhat chaotic. I try to catch the shape as it flies—the text appears as graph, script, sometimes resembling hypnogogic writing. It often rushes on as energy pulse. It might come as an empathetic experience with a particular time, place, or being. The making of the poem, the form it takes both on the page and in its ritual enactment, is an open system involved in a continual exchange of energy with the environment."

-Anne Waldman, Vow to Poetry, 2001.

**Red Noir** is an exchange of those famous energies, an open system between poet/playwright Anne Waldman, and the legendary director of The Living Theater, Judith Malina, along with the cast and audience. *Red Noir* is, of course, a fully embodied extension of Waldman's multivoiced poetics and performance. The tone is urgent and the time is now. Like Waldman's poetry, the play is an archive composed of threatened languages, genres, and histories. "Evidence," she writes in the program, "that would let any consciousness left in the future know that some of the  $20^{th}/21^{st}$ - century ones were not just slaughtering one another in 'eternal war' scenarios."

The opening of *Red Noir* evokes the spirit of Emma Goldman and sets us firmly on the Lower East Side. Video of Clinton street and live action plays on the walls. The noir of the title toys with hard-boiled talk and double crosses, and draws upon *Kiss Me Deadly*, a 1955 Mike Hammer cold-war drama, for parody and paranoia.

The calm center of this storm is a living room where a grandmother, the marvelous Vinie Burrows, reads the autobiography of Frederick Douglass to her granddaughter Lucy (Camilla de Araujo). In another thread, Sheila Dabney is the femme fatale Ruby, with a booming voice and riveting as the woman in red. There is Bolt, a running man (Eno Edet), and Crystal (Judi Rymer), an eco-warrior behind bars, representing perhaps shades of the activists Rachel Corrie or Brad Will.

Equally important is the chorus of young actors, sensual in black, who echo the action on the runaround platform while circling the audience. They chant: "Do no Harm," "Reach out to the Middle East," "Reach out to Haiti," "Neutrinos," "Anarchy," and "got to be jelly cuz jam don't shake."

As the play unfolds, the chorus enacts the Living Theater tradition of a free flow between the chorus and the audience. The play culminates in a communal dance as the chorus takes away the seats and takes each audience member by the hand. The result is joy, the pleasure of being and belonging in the moment.

Many reviewers of *Red Noir* note the pairing of Waldman and Malina as elders, as keepers of a utopian and downtown bohemian flame. Malina, who co-founded the Living Theater with Julian Beck in 1947, is still making it new, and continues to lead the avant-garde in theater. Without sentimentality, she incorporates the traditions of the Living Theater with the politics of the moment. With the collaboration of Malina and company, Waldman's archive of the now is brought to the stage, enriched by the exchange of energies from a young and hopeful cast who are aware of the ticking of the clock.

Red Noir is not for passive audiences nor for those looking for a time capsule of downtown politics circa the sixties. In fact, the program warns that audiences participate at their own risk. This dangerous collaboration between two forces of art is a gift, especially to younger audiences and actors. It is with generosity that Waldman and Malina have reclaimed a space, the charnel ground, from the real-estate worms of the Lower East Side.

Note: Red Noir: And Other Pieces for Performance was published by Farfalla Press in 2008.

**Brenda Coultas** is the author of The Marvelous Bones of Time and A Handmade Museum, both from Coffee House Press.

#### I FAR

#### KARINNE KEITHLEY $oldsymbol{\delta}$ SARA JANE STONER

"I pray you father, being weak, seem so."

-Young Jean Lee's LEAR

LEAR, written and directed by Young Jean Lee. Soho Rep. January 7-February 14, 2010.

he feeling contained by Shakespeare is capacious enough to register Lee's *LEAR*. Lee locates herself in this expanse as if by crawling into a tent made out of the hide of the original play, and inhabiting it until she could summon and meet its canceling violence. The inescapable relation to the original is met along heretofore unnamed channels of adaptation. Sounding Shakespeare's play as one might sound a bell, Lee recuperates a frequency of negation emitted from the play's sons and daughters.

Abandoning filial faithfulness to the lines of motive and causation that describe the original plot, and refusing to orbit the original by

glossing Shakespeare from the poverty of belatedness. Lee gives us instead the time of the play as a series first of almost causeless energetic escalations, and then as a sequence of calm, unguarded pools. Loneliness of the mind supplants all motive, a loneliness which generates the most artful, nonsensical argument. which will spare nothing and no one and stop at nothing, refuse no scheme or new-age fad in its effort to justify its existence. This loneliness expands blob-like, in mock celebration of love and death, simultaneously devouring and canceling. Her language turns seduction into a gross despoilment that delivers the current language of courtly flattery in all its engaging ugliness. She doesn't work to be poetic, as if that was some mark of seriousness. Speech is thin and gaudy and of the present. "I am a bad person" / "Everyone looks fat to me." Refusing to acquiesce to an idea of depth, the surface of her play becomes cluttered with bare, uncoded language, and if Lee is a poet of discomfort then this bareness and its startling, unpredictable efflorescence is one line of operation. Lee's Lear is a pressure chamber where matter is collapsed into something tight and small, and in the extremity of its pressure turns out to

be nothing at all; like Shakespeare's Lear, it is nothingness that most terrifies, and most occupies, this daughter's effort to both compress and accelerate matter and plain language and junk stuck to the shoe of heightened language and violence until we are actually in the storm. Play as Hadron Collider.

There are two basic actions of this play: acceleration and unraveling. What David Cote calls the play's "abstract dramaturgy" is its sense for the entropy of feeling, sense, and meaning involved in moving toward mourning as the living die, as the self makes pleasure or confession or violence in the observation of its own unpredictably gradual or sharp end. The first half of the play does this characterologically, and so in some small way might comfort people who think they know what a play is and what a play does. Something ordering is falling away

from all of these children (this is a Lear of only children) as they come closer to feeling what it is to mourn their own acts of violence. Against its own grain, this entropic gallop takes the play to a chaotic pitch, from where Lee suddenly breaks the play, stops it, and we seem to go floating, following some other kind of matter. A normal play would call this pitch of violence a climax, and slowly coast down the curve on the other side of the mountain, finding some kind of ending. What Lee does instead is abruptly reconsider the coordinates of the plane we are moving across, taking up an unlicensed metric and following the de-escalation of order and energy through pools and hollows that mark an unknown distance from the room filled by character.



PHOTO BY BLAINE DAVIS. COURTESY OF YOUNG JEAN LEE'S THEATER COMPANY

Paul Lazar stops (no longer Edgar) and addresses the audience, invites us to leave, asks us what we're doing there. It's embarrassing, because before it was clever and baffling and badly behaved, and now it is something else. The effect of this invitation to leave is to suggest to us instead that we are willing to go forward. Those without willingness (see NYT) will be confused and lost; what follows requires both your sincerity and your mindfulness if it is to be heard in all its seriousness.

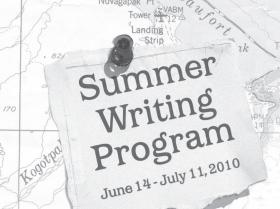
Then, a pitch-perfect recreation of Sesame Street. On this newly discovered path across the mountain, we find children trying to understand death. It's like a Shangri-La on the other side of the play. Possibly the frequency it plays is like one of those tones beyond certain hearing, audible only to the children of Sesame Street.

Lee removes another layer, addresses herself in a punishing, self-critical light.

Loneliness of a perceived unfaithfulness. A strobe light moment out of the genre of the haunted house while I play music loud in my room. This is the nightmare of my petty enjoyment in the face of my father's demise, like four shots fast at the bar. Filial duty is finally distilled into the simplest possible statement. "I'll miss you." So much self-consuming matter has left us with nothing to clothe the idea in, so it comes out straight. "I'll miss you." The play bluntly drops its credential, relinquishing authority or mystery to speak elementally.

**Karinne Keithley** does too many things and loves them all. For one, she is the publisher of 53rd State Press (www.53rdstatepress.com).

Sara Jane Stoner is working on becoming a writer, teacher, and PhD student in English at CUNY's Graduate Center.



# The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

Co-founded by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman

Weekly Workshops June 14-July 11 in Boulder, Colorado

#### Week One, June 14-20

Charles Alexander, Junior Burke, Julie Carr, Linh Dinh, Thalia Field, Ross Gay, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Laird Hunt, Stephen Graham Jones, Bhanu Kapil, Joanne Kyger, Jaime Manrique, Jennifer Moxley, Jennifer Scappettone, David Trinidad and others.

#### Week Two, June 21-27

Jane Augustine, Caroline Bergvall, Jack Collom, Samuel R. Delany, Alan Gilbert, Michael Heller, Brenda Hillman, Helen Howe Braider, Lisa Jarnot, Tracie Morris, Daniel Pinchbeck, Evelyn Reilly, Elizabeth Robinson, James Stevens, Mary Tasillo and others.

#### Week Three, June 28-July 4

Sinan Antoon, Sherwin Bitsui, Xi Chuan, Dolores Dorantes, Jack Hirschman, Jen Hofer, Anselm Hollo, Bob Holman, Semezdin Mehmedinovic, Murat Nemet-Nejat, Akilah Oliver, Margaret Randall, Damion Searls, Julia Seko and others.

#### Week Four, July 5-11

Penny Arcade, Amiri Baraka, Laynie Browne, Ambrose Bye, Douglas Dunn, Danielle Dutton, Brian Evenson, Colin Frazer, Joanna Howard, Allan Kornblum, Rachel Levitsky, Julie Patton, Selah Saterstrom, Patricia Smith, Steven Taylor, Anne Waldman and others.

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Assembrages



#### **INTERVIEW**

# 10 Questions for Cecilia Vicuña

KEN L. WALKER

- **01.** Please tell me at least five of your favorite films (documentary or otherwise).
- CV: Metrópolis, Seven Samurai, The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, Teorema, and Solaris.
- **02.** You are so engaged in the sonics of poetry (from what I've seen in your own work as well as what you collect in the book [*The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry, Oxford Univ., 2009*]'s introduction). In that case, it would be interesting to know at least five of your favorite musicians/bands/recording artists?
- CV: Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Caetano Veloso, Susana Baca, Gerónima Sequeida, and Violeta Parra.
- **03.** Aretha is one of my favorites too. You've taken a surefire stance in your introduction and in many of the poems chosen for the anthology (for example: rather than a Neruda sonnet, we get "Walking Around" and we get Cardenal's "Death of Thomas Merton"). Was that on purpose, this stance of "a Poetics of Resistance"? Was it premeditated? Anthologies usually shoot for neutrality, but not this one.
- CV: Yes, of course it was a conscious choice. No illusion of neutrality here. But not a premeditation either. When you read the vast production of Latin American poets, common threads emerge. I think we were listening for what connected the poems, as much as for what allowed their diversity to shine. A quest for self-knowledge, a resistance to imposed definitions was a constant. Poets participate in the creation of the world with each choice of sound, word and phrase, and we, as readers, chose to listen. Don Honorio Quila, a great oral poet of Chile (not included in the anthology) once said to his audience: "May you hear with wisdom."
- **04.** Speaking of non-illusions, I am very interested in Enrique Dussel's socio-historical philosophy. How did you come to learn of Dussel's ideas and work?
- CV: Reading the works of another Argentinean thinker, Walter D. Mignolo.
- **05.** Have you also read Antonio Gramsci's work? I think his writings (though not his life, of course) parallel that of Dussel's.

- CV: Yes, in the sixties, young Latin Americans read passionately Gramsci, Franz Fanon, Bertolt Brecht, Grotowski and other authors we considered formadores. I can't quite translate it—I mean authors who formed our worldview.
- **06.** I also have to ask, personally, how you feel about the native (Mestizaje, Spanish, Portugese, Guarani, etc...) language being, in a way, sidestepped and circumvented to a prose-block backslash version while the English is seemingly held in higher regard. What I mean is that, obviously, this is an Oxford book, a book in English, but the native languages seem disrespected. Please explain that process. Who made that decision?
- CV: Yes, it saddens me to see the original languages compressed in that way. I am sure it was an economic issue. Oxford took that decision even before we signed the contract. We had no say in it. I guess selling a book of Latin American Poetry in the U.S. is risky business. Our tradition is not well known, it has no standing. As a result, we had many constraints of that order, such as the number of pages. It should have been double the size. But given these conditions we decided to make the most of it. The choice was not to make an anthology of poets, where a handful of authors are represented by many poems, but the reverse, a very tight selection of poems by many authors that moved the tradition forward in new ways.
- **07.** Why did you leave Roberto Bolaño out of the book, especially considering his garnering popularity?
- CV: Because Roberto's work made his mark in prose, not in poetry.
- **08.** In a kind-of similar way, Antonio Machado and Fernando Pessoa, two poets fairly published in English yet still not so well-known, are not in the anthology. Is that because they're not seen as Latin American? But, both these poets are not in any way oppressive or conservative, so they fit the bill.
- CV: Machado is Spanish, from Spain, and Pessoa is Portuguese, from Portugal. The current definition of Latin American poetry does not include Europeans. But these definitions and categories are absurd from the point of view of writing and reading. In truth, the Latin root of all the romance languages of Europe that were transferred to the Americas through conquest (Spanish, French and Portuguese) creates a common tradition, but national and political interests do

not perceive it as such. Many great Latin American writers are also European—Lautréamont, Jules Laforgue, Eugen Gomringer, to name a few. I would have liked to include them. From my perspective borders are nonexistent in poetry and/or in human culture, but our system continues to reinforce them.

**09.** True, though Darío meshed elements of European poetry (the Parnassians and the Symbolists) in order to create *modernismo*. Almost every Latin American, Mestizo, etc. language is an openmouthed language, in the sense that when the word ends, the utterer's mouth is open (even a term like verdad: the speaker holds his or her mouth open, though the word ends with the letter D); this opposes English where most of our words end with closed consonants. Do you think this bleeds into the culture's practices?

CV: Yes, of course. You can make endless jokes about it. Maybe it is windy and cold in the Northern Hemisphere, so you close your mouth. The southern Mediterranean openness may be related to warmth and a constant seeking of fun and pleasure. Stereotypes make for good jokes. Maybe English is fast, pragmatic and to the point. Maybe Latin sounds linger and play. But all this is nonsense. The deeper reasons for cultural choice in sound are as mysterious as dreams.

**10.** What do you think the missing link is for non-Latino, non-Mestizo folks (especially white eurocentrics) when it comes to poetry's general participation in aspects of life, social and otherwise? You touch on it briefly in the introduction.

CV: Well, in the introduction I say there is a clash of worldviews. It is hard to condense it in a few lines. The dominant worldview today, the ethos generated by the conquering cultures of Europe is one of separation, a view where poetry and life do not mix. As a result,

poetry becomes the isolated practice of a few individuals. Metaphors and sound are not perceived as forms of energy, as condensations of meaning and intent with the power to engage the life force. But the eurocentric view has dominated the world for only a few centuries. Indigenous and mestizo cultures the world over still resist it because they have retained the memory of a totally different worldview, one that connects all forms of energy and sees them interacting in a continuous reciprocal exchange. Today, quantum physics demonstrates that this is how the cosmos works. And yet, the dominant culture continues to despise and obliterate the old oral cultures of this earth, whose wisdom goes back to the ancient roots of human culture, maybe a million years ago. Oral cultures and mestizo poets never stopped perceiving words and sounds, poetry and song as energy condensed, as a language that participates in all aspects of life, in all dimensions. Maybe the missing link for others is a conscious choice, looking at your own worldview, seeing where it comes from, what it intends.

In Cecilia Vicuña's work, the limits between art and poetry, the ancestral and the avant-garde are erased. A precursor of conceptual art in Latin America, and an early practitioner of the improvisatory oral performance, her multimedia works have been widely exhibited in Europe, Latin America and the U.S. She is the author of 18 books of poetry, most recently V, an anthology of her poetry published in Lima, Peru, 2009. She is the co-editor of The Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry, 2009. Her new film, Kon Kon, a documentary poem, will be released in 2010. More information at www.ceciliavicuna.org.

**Ken L. Walker** still has a Kentucky driver's license and would rather be working to shut down the revolving door of the American prison system. You can find a thread for his work at http://transsugar.blogspot.com.



## **POEMS**

#### **DEANNA FERGUSON**

#### In Case of Voice of Fire

pull it down it makes a sound the sound is of alarm

pull my leg the farmer said I'll paint it on my barn

#### Come To The Movies With Me

more than half less than full misses drop in a steep paper with thought of a message done and another on the moon repairing mail belts fit wind in delete

names held there possible to reach the use work used usually laden & caught still, bella, so brief

see another week worries blind out and could answer now to sun through bridge in a sleep

hours at day rate halved voices so sure wear since that's how reassurance and clambering assistance rings not a field of curve

rhythms blank little blown cold type posts small rockets of scent in an air sneak up the future slowing

damp radiates another winter so dark chant held things together blown vein for bust blood rest a reason for last drops catch up dot and second decimal dot like class acting at assembly

## Tit for Tat (Knees Rejerkinging)

if voting changed anything it would be illegal

if poetry, crack, malice changed anything it would be illegal

if I've made myself clear, you have misunderstood me

if there's notice on a front door legality has been misunderstood

now I think that poetry changes only the poet

if only a poet clearly misunderstands illegality of the change



**Deanna Ferguson**'s work has appeared in magazines and anthologies in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. Two collections of her poems, The Relative Minor and Rough Bush and Other Poems, can be found on the /ubu editions website (www.ubu.com/ubu). She lives in Vancouver, B.C.

# POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

# 4/5 MONDAY OPEN READING Sign-in at 7:45pm

#### **4/7** WEDNESDAY The Kenning Anthology of Poets Theater

This reading will celebrate the release of *The Kenning Anthology of Poets Theater 1945–1985*, a superb documentation of the emergence, growth, and varied fortunes of the form over decades of American literary history. The largest and most comprehensive anthology of its kind yet assembled, the volume collects classics of poets theater as well as rarities long out of print and texts from unpublished manuscripts and archives. Editors **David Brazil** and **Kevin Killian** will be joined by some of the contributors who will read or perform their work. With **Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Nada Gordon, Ted Greenwald, Sonia Sanchez** and **Fiona Templeton**.

#### 4/9 FRIDAY (10 PM) Joey Yearous-Algozin & Divya Victor

Joey Yearous-Algozin is the author of Kensington Notebook and BOSTON STREET/TREES. He is currently a PhD student in Poetics at SUNY-Buffalo. Divya Victor has lived and learned in India, Singapore, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Seattle. She has an MA from Temple University and is currently working towards her PhD at the University at Buffalo. She is the author of a chapbook, SUTURES.

#### 4/12 MONDAY Brett Evans & Mike Hauser

Brett Evans' recent books include Slosh Models and (with Frank Sherlock) Ready-to-Eat Individual. He is currently looking for a kind publisher to release a special 20-year collector's edition of Horse Pills. He is one of the founding members of New Orleans' only carnival microkrewe, 'tit Rex. Mike Hauser lives in Milwaukee. His books include crets crets crets and Psychic Headset. He is editing an issue of the Milwaukee magazine Burdock, which is published by Keith Gaustad. He co-curates a reading series called Salacious Banter with Karl Saffran.

# 4/14 WEDNESDAY Miles Champion & Jennifer Moxley

Miles Champion's books include Compositional Bonbons Placate, Sore Models, Three Bell Zero and How to Laugh (forthcoming). Providence, an artist's book in collaboration with Jane South, was published by Sienese Shredder Editions in 2008. His recent writing appears in American Book Review, Critical Quarterly, Mimeo Mimeo, PN Review and The Poetry Project Newsletter. He lives in Brooklyn. Jennifer Moxley is the author of five books of poetry. Clampdown, The Line, Often Capital, The Sense Record and Imagination Verses. Her memoir The Middle Room was published by Subpress in 2007. She has translated two books by the French

poet Jacqueline Risset, *The Translation Begins* and *Sleep's Powers*. She is poetry editor of *The Baffler*, and contributing editor of *The Poker*. She works as an Associate Professor at the University of Maine.

#### 4/16 FRIDAY (10 PM) Hillary Juster & Gregory Laynor

Hillary Juster will soon hold a BA in interdisciplinary studies from NYU. As a complement to reading poetry, she likes to engage members of the audience with sculpture, lighting, photography, and touching. She edits *The Minetta Review* and has work forthcoming in *The Physical Poets Home Library*. Gregory Laynor has been teaching and studying a Temple University. His reading of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* appears on UbuWeb. He does a blog at academicpoetry.com and is co-editing for Chax Press the collected writings of Gil Ott.

#### **4/19** MONDAY A Night of Polish Poetry: Reading for *Aufgabe* #9

Join us as we celebrate the launch of Aufgabe #9, which features a selection, guest-edited by Mark Tardi, that presents Poland's rich tradition of experimental and language-oriented poetries, with a special focus on the poet Miron Bialoszewski. With Polish poets Andrzej Sosnowski and Ewa Chrusciel, and American poets Peter Gizzi and Lisa Jarnot. This event is co-sponsored by the Polish Cultural Institute.

#### **4/21** WEDNESDAY Other Flowers: A Celebration of James Schuyler

Other Flowers: Uncollected Poems, edited by Simon Pettet and James Meetze, brings together 165 unseen poems from Schuyler, spanning from the early 1950s until his death in 1991. Featuring both editors with Anselm Berrigan, Tom Carey, John Coletti, Bill Corbett, Elaine Equi, Jonathan Galassi, Vincent Katz, Eileen Myles, Charles North, Arlo Quint, Stacy Szymaszek, Susie Timmons, Geoffrey Young and Anne Waldman.

#### 4/23 FRIDAY (10 PM) Still Talking: New Film & Poetry

In conjunction with We Saw The Light: Conversations Between New American Cinema & Poetry (4/30), tonight's event features readings, screenings and performance from five innovative, young and Brooklyn-based poets and filmmakers: Jessica Fiorini, Derek Kroessler, Andrew Lampert, Dani Leventhal and Fern Silva. Please visit www.poetryproject.org for artist bios.

## **4/26** MONDAY Catherine Meng & Aaron Tieger

Catherine Meng is the author of the poetry collection Tonight's the Night and three chapbooks, 15 Poems in Sets of 5, Dokument, and Lost Notebook w/ Letters to Deer. Along with Lauren Levin and Jared Stanley, she co-edits the poetry journal Mrs. Maybe. Aaron Tieger is most recently the author of Secret Donut. His many chapbooks include Recently Clouds (with Jess Mynes), The Collected Typos of Aaron Tieger, Necco Face (with Jess Mynes and Michael Carr), and Anxiety Chant. He is the publisher of Petrichord Books. He lives in Cambridge, MA.

#### 4/28 WEDNESDAY Alice Notley

We are thrilled to present this evening with Alice Notley to kick off our Spring Fundraising Week. Notley has published over thirty books of poetry, including (most recently) Reason and Other Women; Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems 1970-2005; Alma, or The Dead Women; and In the Pines. With her sons, Anselm and Edmund Berrigan, Notley edited The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan. She is also the author of a book of essays on poets and poetry, Coming After. Notley has received many prizes and awards including the Academy of American Poets' Lenore Marshall Prize, the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Award, the Griffin Prize, two NEA Grants, and the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Poetry, Considered an important figure in the New York School, Notley now lives and writes in Paris, France, This event will take place in the Sanctuary. Reception to follow. Admission is \$10.

# 4/30 FRIDAY (6:30 PM) We Saw the Light: Conversations Between the New American Cinema and Poetry—Talk & Screening

In We Saw the Light: Conversations Between the New American Cinema and Poetry (University of Iowa Press, 2009), Daniel Kane draws on correspondence and interviews with key figures in innovative cinema and writing of the 1960s to provide a fresh look at film's influence on poetry. Please join us for a discussion amongst filmmakers and poets, and stay for a special screening of 16mm prints. Talk (6:30-7:30 PM): Ed Bowes, Jacob Burckhardt, Abigail Child, Jonas Mekas, Jennifer Reeves, and others TBA. Moderated by Daniel Kane. Film Program (8:00 PM): A selection of short films by Stan Brackhage, Christopher MacClaine, Abigail Child, Jonas Mekas, Marie Menken, Rudy Burckhardt and Jacob Burckhardt. Please check our site for more details. Program subject to change. Thanks to the Filmmakers' Cooperative, Jacob Burckhardt and Andrew Lampert at Anthology Film Archives Admission is \$10

# 5/1 SATURDAY (8 PM) John Ashbery's Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror for Six Voices

First published in 1975, John Ashbery's long poem *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* begins as a meditation on an extraordinary Mannerist painting

by Francesco Parmigianino. The poem, and the volume that includes it, remain among the most influential works of our time. In this performance, six readers with projected text and image make the work unusually available, as Ashbery's tonal shifts and juxtapositions are taken up by different voices. With Joan Arnold, Andrea Barnet, Jan Hanvik, James Occhino, Jim Paul and Annie Walwyn-Jones. Arranged and directed by Jim Paul. This event will take place in the Sanctuary. Admission is \$10.

# 5/3 MONDAY OPEN READING Sign-in at 7:45pm

#### 5/5 WEDNESDAY Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry

Newly published by the University of Arkansas Press, *Indivisible* brings together forty-nine American poets who trace their roots to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The poems gathered here take us from basketball courts to Bollywood, from the Grand Canyon to sugar plantations, and from Hindu-Muslim riots in India to anti-immigrant attacks on the streets of post–9/11 America. The reading will feature contributors Monica Ferrell, Subhashini Kaligotla, Vikas Menon, Purvi Shah, and Sejal Shah plus the editors Neelanjana Banerjee, Summi Kaipa, and Pireeni Sundaralingam. Please visit www.poetryproject.org for author bios.

#### 5/7 FRIDAY (10 PM) Will Edmiston & Anna Vitale

Will Edmiston is a poet and librarian living in Brooklyn. His writing can be found in *The Tiny, the Agriculture Reader, EOAGH, The Boog Reader 4,* and *The Bridge.* He serves as the volunteer archivist at The Poetry Project. Anna Vitale is the author of *Breaststa.* Her writing has appeared in *Model Homes, Shifter,* and *With + Stand,* and more is forthcoming in *Vanitas* and *The West Wind Review.* A freeform DJ at WCBN-FM Ann Arbor, she also helped start the online audio publication *textsound.* 

#### 5/10 MONDAY Ish Klein & Farid Matuk

Ish Klein's book, *Union!* came out in April 2009. Her poems have been published in *The Canary, Gare du Nord, The Hat, X-connect, Bridge, Spork* and online. She also makes movies and lives in Philadelphia. Farid Matuk is the author of *Is it the King?* His work is also included in the anthology *Between Heaven and Texas* and will appear in the forthcoming anthology *What's Your Exit?* His collection, *This Isa Nice Neighborhood*, will be released by Letter Machine Editions in the fall. Matuk lives in Dallas with the poet Susan Briante where together with the nonprofit WordSpace they host readings for traveling authors.

#### 5/12 WEDNESDAY Ray DiPalma & Michael Lally

Ray DiPalma's recent books include The Ancient Use of Stone, Pensieri, Further Apocrypha, L'Usage ancien de la pierre, Quatre Poèmes (both books translated into French by Vincent Dussol), and Caper, Volume I. Among his earlier collections are Numbers and Tempers. Le Tombeau de Reverdy. Provocations, Hôtel des Ruines, Gnossiennes, and Letters. He lives in New York City and teaches at the School of Visual Arts. Michael Lally has published 27 books, including: March 18, 2003 (with illustrations by Alex Katz); It's Not Nostalgia and It Takes One To Know One; Cant Be Wrong; Hollywood Magic; Attitude; and the 1970s "underground bestseller" Rocky Dies Yellow. Lally has worked at a variety of jobs, from college teacher to limousine driver, book reviewer to screenwriter and TV and film actor. Since 2006, he has hosted a blog called Lally's Alley.

#### 5/14 FRIDAY (8 PM) SPRING WORKSHOP READING

Please join us for a reading by students of the Spring workshops, led by **Anselm Berrigan, Daniel Machlin** and **Sharon Mesmer**.

#### 5/17 MONDAY TALK SERIES: Rachel Zolf—The Tolerance Project: A Collaborative MFA

Rachel Zolf is working with 84 writers and artists on what could be the first collaborative MFA ever. Reactions to this conceptual writing project have ranged from lauding it as a long overdue institutional critique to deriding it as an arrogant violation of the MFA workshop's privacy and sanctity. Zolf will talk about the origins of the project and its challenges, describe how the collaborative poems emerge each week, and reveal some of the traces of poetic DNA collected in The Tolerance Project Archive. Zolf's fourth full-length book of poetry, *Neighbour Procedure*, was recently released by Coach House Books. The Tolerance Project lives at thetoleranceproject.blogspot.com.

#### 5/19 WEDNESDAY Amiri Baraka & Mark Nowak

Amiri Baraka published his first volume of poetry, Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note, in 1961. His book Blues People: Negro Music in White America, is still regarded as the seminal work on Afro-American music and culture. His reputation as a playwright was established with the production of Dutchman at the Cherry Lane Theatre in 1964. Most recently, his book of short stories, Tales of the Out & The Gone (Akashic Books) was published in 2007; Home, his book of social essays, was re-released by Akashic Books in 2009 and Digging: The Afro American Soul of Music (Univ. of California) was published in 2009. Mark Nowak is the author of Coal Mountain Elementary and Shut Up Shut Down. For

the past several years he has been designing and facilitating "poetry dialogues" with Ford autoworkers in the United States and South Africa (through the UAW and NUMSA), striking clerical workers (through AFSCME 3800), Muslim/Somali nurses and healthcare workers (through Rufaidah), and others. A native of Buffalo, NY, he currently works as Director of the Rose O'Neill Literary House at Washington College in Chestertown, MD. Visit his blog at at coalmountain.wordpress.com.

#### 5/24 MONDAY Andrew Hughes & Michelle Taransky

Andrew Hughes is the author of Sweethearts of the Great Migration. His first full length collection, Now Lays the Sunshine By, is forthcoming from BookThug. His work has appeared in Forklift, Ohio, Cannibal, Puppy Flowers, and others. Michelle Taransky lives in Philadelphia, where she works at Kelly Writers House and teaches poetry at Temple University. Taransky's first book, Barn Burned, Then, was selected by Marjorie Welish for the 2008 Omnidawn Poetry Prize.

## 5/26 WEDNESDAY Robert Fitterman & Matvei Yankelevich

Robert Fitterman is the author of 12 books, including war, the musical, Notes On Conceptualisms (with Vanessa Place) and rob the plagiarist. His latest book, Sprawl: Metropolis 30A is the fourth book, and likely the last, of his Metropolis series. He teaches writing and poetry at NYU and Bard College. Matvei Yankelevich's first book Boris by the Sea is just out from Octopus Books. He's also published several chapbooks, including The Present Work. His translations of Daniil Kharms were collected in Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms. He recently edited a portfolio of Contemporary Russian Poetry and Poetics for the magazine Aufgabe (No. 8, Fall 2009). In NYC, he teaches at Hunter College and Columbia University School of the Arts. He lives in Brooklyn where he edits and designs books for Ugly Duckling Presse.

# 6/2 WEDNESDAY READING FOR THE RECLUSE 6

Please join us to celebrate issue 6 of *The Recluse*, the Poetry Project's annual literary magazine. Readers will be announced later this spring; please check www.poetryproject.org for details!

#### 6/4 FRIDAY (10 PM) POET'S POTLUCK VI

Come say goodbye to Ed & Nicole and make mark of the end of their co-Friday Night Series run before the Poetry Project's annual summertime pause. Bring your best gal, or a casual gentleman or two, your ma's macaroni salad, and a choice tipple, like grandma's punch or grandpa's whiskey, to wash it all down. There will be poems read, songs sung and early summertime romantic merriment for all.

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.

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

#### CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY BRANDON BROWN

**01.** The Empty-Handed Messenger Lauren Russell (GoodByeBetter, 2009)

**02.** The Lack Of
Joseph Massey
(Nasturtium Press, 2009)

**03.** *Not Time*Lauren Levin
(Boxwood Editions, 2009)

**04.** Cold Genius
Aaron Kunin
(The Physiocrats, 2009)

Writing about avant-garde poetries of the 1990's, Steve Evans theorized that such poetries were related by a common "hatred of identity," a negativity which nevertheless was capable of resolving into a humanist poetics aimed at effecting positive political change. The question of identity, far from stabilizing or disappearing in the oughts, remains, nuanced I think by an increasingly consensual focus on our moment as, to use Rob Fitterman's phrase, "an age not of invention, but inventory." Whether you buy this or not, there seems to be no doubt that our political reality, our somatic experience of the empirical world, have undergone and are undergoing major shifts as a result of the expansive role of technology into our daily lives.

None of the four books I discuss below foreground appropriation as such or "inventory" as primary vehicles for their forms. They rarely refer to cyberspace. But I think all of them are concerned with questions of how identity and affect are and are not viable categories for contemporary poetics. I take it for granted that the world in which these works emerge is inflected by the contours of contemporary grids of space and time, and poetry, I hope, is a powerful provocateur to adjusting awareness about those grids. In other words, I want to ask, as the identities so scorned in nineties' experimental writing experience this molecular change, what are some of the approaches attempted by contemporary poetics?

Lauren Russell's The Empty-Handed Messenger collects short works from 2005-2007. Much of this work is directly concerned with guestions of identity. This line of questioning is initiated by poems "sort of after" other authors, sometimes explicitly named (Anselm Berrigan, Adam de Graff), sometimes implicit in poetic tradition (Sappho, Ezra Pound). These short lyrics are followed by the two centerpieces of the book, "Reckoning at Keystone Sack: The Peculiar Career of Bud Fowler" and "My goal in life is to make out with Adrian Brody." "Fowler" is a collage text about Bud Fowler, the first professional African-American baseball player. The texts, largely appropriated from sports media of the time, use the "timelessness" of baseball as a counterpoint to the ongoing saga of white racist language.

The "everlastingness" of social categories founded on dominance is crucial to the poem which follows, "My goal in life is to make out with Adrien Brody." If identity itself in contemporary life attains to the fragment, this text performs the catastrophe of identity in a dialectic with the imagined, but all too real, all too coherent, interlocutors of hegemonic oppression. This "devastation memoir" stages a provocation to the commodification of celebrity which is distantly yet intimately related to the current consideration of allegory in commodity life. You know how Charles Baudelaire says that all artists are prostitutes? The Empty-Handed Messenger affirms this, but it also turns the gaze back on power.

The other side of this poem's favorite word "devastation" is of course that our identities never signify outside of "memoir." That the grotesque allegorization inherent in the commodity form just is our experience, and that

affect manifests as "the canned agony of one's ordeal." If it is even "one's own:"

Poets do not even speak like poets unless they are pretending to be actors pretending to be poets in devastatingly depressing films.

Tonight I'll pretend to be Gwyneth Paltrow pretending to be Sylvia Plath. Or Leonardo DiCaprio pretending to be Arthur Rimbaud

Where Russell's text suggests that feelings all-too-naturally adapt to genre and aspire to a mediated repetition, Joseph Massey's The Lack Of evacuates all such formal determination from the world of the text. You know how the title is kind of amusing because saying The Lack Of precisely lacks something, that is, a predicate? So one effect of this is that one constantly desires, reading the text, to provide the predication for what's lacking. But that's what's doubly uncanny about the work: the failure of predication is what it's after. In this way, in terms of affect, it provokes a bleak reading of contemporary life: the perpetually unfulfilled roving subject. The speaker finally appears a totally feelingless, hollowed out observation-cyborg, incapable of speech ("Where I feel my mouth / might be, / a wordlessness"), or participation in experiential time ("Woke to white / windows, / whether dusk / or dawn / I didn't / know.")

The solipsism of uninflected observation is a blatant provocation to Adorno's understanding of the artwork as productive of a world in direct antagonism to the empirical one. Mimesis minus anima seems to be Massey's aim here. Can you imagine zombie pornography? I mean, that's kind of how I'm reading Massey's text here, as porn for whatever kind of creature "embodies" and does so without feeling.

Where Massey's book sketches the hollow interior of a recording machine, Lauren Levin's *Not Time* performs the aporia of listening-in to information overflow, privileging its many strata of mediation rather than

# New Books from Hanging Loose Press

Jeni Olin Hold Tight: The Truck Darling Poems Poetry. Paper, \$18.

**Mark Statman** 

Tourist at a

Miracle

Paper, \$18.

Poetry.

Vacations on the Black Star Line Poetry. Paper, \$18.

Michael Cirelli

Erica Miriam
Fabri
Dialect of a
Skirt
Poetry.
Paper, \$18.

Mark Pawlak, Robert Hershon, Dick Lourie (editors) When We Were Countries: Poems and Stories by Outstanding High School Writers

Poetry and fiction. Paper, \$19. Hardcover, \$29. Chuck Wachtel 3/03
Fiction and poetry.

Paper, \$18.

Gary Lenhart
The World in
a Minute

Poetry.
Paper, \$18.

#### And keep in mind -

Face, Sherman Alexie, \$18, \$28

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

solipsitically eliminating them. Not Time seems less a negation of "time" than a proposal of two simultaneously occurring times, the time of experience with its many filters, and the world in which "it came to be written on your writing." Our world, that is, inflected by the omnipresent surveillance of social networking, the urban world especially in which every spectacle is accompanied by a secondary spectacle, snapping camera phones. You know how my friend Andrew Kenower always says, "Link or it didn't happen?" Well, yeah, that's kind of what's going on in Not Time. Levin refers to Francis Ford Coppola's The Conversation in the text and that makes sense, given that her project in its fragmentary overheardness suggests a noir with no real detective, or what is almost the same thing, a collective detective.

Part of the beauty of *The Conversation* is its demonstration that the detective's desire will always overwhelm empirical evidence. *Not Time* demonstrates the experience of living on the threshold between event and representation, about the prolongation of that threshold in which everything's aura is subject to appropriation and contextual resettlement: "These old fake flower clots have been replicating in slices." But its subject is human desire and agency; it tracks the will of the subject of surveillance to negotiate between these two strata:

What is not here today: paddle-wheel.
Proverbial phrases.

I will put a speech into that dizzying grand

Where Levin's book performs a representation of information overflow mediated by human desire as it extends along two simultaneous, non-exclusive experiences of time, Aaron Kunin's *Cold Genius* portrays the world of discursive writing as itself antagonistic to affect. This portrayal, however, is a critique, which I read as a reappraisal and, finally, reclamation of feeling as a viable trope for poetics, if necessarily a trope built largely out of negation.

You know how Alice Notley's *Descent of Alette* uses quotation marks as a visual cue to initiate a brief prosodic pause? Well, *Cold Genius* uses quotation marks in a slightly different way. Quotation marks initiate indirect discourse and thus effect a literal disjunction. In regular writing quotation marks often

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Burning

#### Jane Unrue: Life of a Star

An actress of sorts, a woman recalls her childhood, longs for her absent lover, imagines traveling, and wanders through gardens and galleries of art. Hers is a life meticulously lived, a carefully crafted and rehearsed engagement with a real and imagined world; a search for love and meaning that has left her, in the end, alone. Unrue's intricate and intriguing sentences — now one word, now comprising whole paragraphs and interrupting one another — manage to fuse detachment and emotion, heartbreak and humor.

Jane Unrue, born in Nevada, now lives in Boston and teaches at Harvard.

arove.

"Unrue's debut, *The House* [Burning Deck 2000] accrues a subtly disarming power as the speaker investigates her domestic environment from a wide array of perspectives, including the intergalactic.... Unrue successfully forges an evocative approach that could be seen as metacubist in its dizzying, varied takes of the familiar world."

—Publishers Weekly



Novella, 112 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-936194-00-1, original pbk .\$14



#### Jennifer Martenson: Unsound

These poems are landscapes in which abstract concepts have the presence and force of physical objects—you may hit your head on them. The focus is on dissonance, whether between perception and received ideas, between feelings and convention, between lesbian identity and social prejudice, or between the desire to make the world orderly, intelligible, and finding the systems for doing so wanting. The diverse forms push against words in single file, against the ways syntax projects coherence and smoothes over disjunctions.

Jennifer Martenson was born in Seattle and has lived in Chicago and now lives in Providence, RI. *Unsound* is her first full book.

"Xq28" appropriates the authoritative diction and discourse of science, and makes it boomerang back on itself.... There's nothing artificial or superficial about her own deeply investigatory impulses. She bonds description to rhizomic narrative in an admirable sort of 'molecular origami."

—Christine Hume, Chicago Review

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

set apart their enclosed content to make an ironic point. Like, and to use a somewhat Kuninesque example, I would write you a letter from some torture chamber and it would say, "This is 'awesome'."

To some extent *Cold* is set in the academy and its speaker is a University professor. I admit that for this reader such a setting and narrator are not immediately compelling and perhaps the opposite. But the book surpasses the specificities of English Department drama by elaborating a challenge to the very kinds of approach to information that professional scholarship entails. A challenge to the very sense in which affect can be the object of analytic philosophy.

Thus the subject of the chapbook is in some ways citationality itself, writing itself. The text highlights the literal irony that all writing performs. It turns its attention to forms of writing that superficially purport to transcend that irony, such as the form of the oath in "For Shirley":

The promise to love something is Provisional. It "is" a kind of lawlessness. Thus "the" demand For "love" also "ls" unlawful since "it is" not Enforceable.

Shirley, as this book explains, is a cat. The gaudiness of a poem addressed to the pet is legible in a recurrent attention to melodramatic acts and hypertrophic displays of emotion: "Good spot to commit suicide." "Thanks for the excuse to cry". In some ways, the point of all these high-frequency emotional references may be to suggest that writing is ultimately incapable of expressing whatever empirical emotional content is experienced by the subject. But the larger critique is of the "cold genius" who comes wielding brackets as prison bars, performing a hubristic classification, categorization, and proscription of feeling as such. It's as the cold genius is exposed for what it is that fissures can open

up in the rather sheer exclusionary posture of writing.

**Brandon Brown** is finishing a translation of the poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus in the city of San Francisco, California.

Clampdown Jennifer Moxley (Flood Editions, 2009)

REVIEW BY TIM PETERSON

The ambiguous title of this book is what initially drew me to it. One of the available references is that it's the title of a Clash song. I also initially read it allegorically as a possible reference to recent get-with-the-program gestures in poetics. Yet in the poems themselves the clampdown trend has a complex and inchoate quality, the feeling of a malaise that goes deeper. Like Joe Strummer's improvised line, "gonna be split down the middle now" the book is conflicted and often bleak, but very moving. And perhaps most importantly, it has or tries to salvage a political conscience.

The book seems to me to be asking how one might recover the possibility of dissent (a problem left over from the hystericizing of the left during the "weapons of mass destruction" days), and I think it's not asking this as a rhetorical question. At the same time, from a different direction entirely, the book is confronting banalities of neoliberal self-doubt, ranging from the installation of moneyed special interests within the conscience of leftists to the dilemma (evoked by Frost) that a liberal is someone who can't take his own side in an argument.

The clampdown in this constellation of ideas seems to come both from the outside and from the inside ("the difficult vigil we must always keep / against the invasion of our minds" [22]). It is a trend threatening to colonize and preempt the possibility for action in the very space in which poetry does its most

useful work, "vivid spools of thought / we'd miss, were all this to be / shattered by foolish executive / verdicts" (70), At its least optimistic, such gestures are sarcastically predictive ones, "Watch the edgy / message turn into the blathering of a paradigm / expired, bulldozed, and neatly paved" (47–48), but I think there are many moments here that maintain the gap between interior and exterior as a "holding environment" in which thinking and poetry can still have a critique of cultural consequence.

It feels nostalgic using a phrase like "still have," of course, opening oneself up to claims of being backward-looking, but in fact the insinuation of a defensive posture to those who keep track of facts is what capitalism has done to the left, the way it has erased histories. Moxley understands this problem in a double-edged way when it comes to lyric poetry; her poems are not about recollected memory so much as reversing the figure-ground relationship implied by the lyric (a word I find to be hopelessly vague and not very useful, so I'll avoid mentioning it further in this review). In Clampdown the details of experience, while respected as real places, objects, and occurrences, are primarily used as a set of framing devices, occasions she uses to call forward a shared background predicament and ask questions about that predicament: "Will a loss-strewn personal history / swallow or create our relevance? / Does the permission to silence others / come with the authority to speak?" (23).

The most explicit and dramatic moment of this problem occurs in the poem titled "The Occasion," during a conversation in her living room between liberal writer-friends:

Though we had come together as friends
To seek solace in talk, we were fearful, defensive,
Giddy, hysterical, dominant, and anxious in turn.
We were the "us" and the "them," the "they" and the
"what if," enemy and friend, accuser and accused.
Our impotence was a red ball and it grew large
And organic between us. It filled the coffee table
And strained our voices. It stained our cheeks.

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This ball was not called "fear of death"

Or "loss of liberty." It was called, stupidly,
"love of life," and it made us quite ungenerous.

Was it the first equation? Was it the warmonger's gift?

Had it been granted and were we complicit? (20)

I think this scenario is true, that it gets at something important about the zeitgeist and how what writers do best is constantly and disappointingly eclipsed by a kind of mummifying, trickle-down praxis from the "warmonger's gift," dividing us against ourselves.

The solution to all this seems like something that might be far up ahead, barely visible, and the outlook of the poems is thus more often cynical than hopeful. The opening poem frames the book by asking an important question about dream life, aka our general alienation from ourselves: "All is fake / Why should we awake?" (4). One answer, or at least a delaying tactic, that the poetry most concretely endulges in, is its detailed descriptions of banal everyday objects. Her way of describing things somehow evokes and contains the histories of these objects, collapsing time in a way that changes the present. There's something I love about her intimate descriptions of things-a bedspread, the moon, or a set of wooden stairs that used to be a tree-and how these descriptions (posed always as digression) are anchored in language which generates all the material from a middle distance, a veil cast over events which makes them visible in the first place as symptoms, and then perhaps as sites for intervention. This floating consciousness is not foiled or preempted; on the contrary, Moxley is wide awake.

**Tim Peterson** is a poet, critic, editor, curator, and octopus living in Brooklyn.

The Selected Poems of Steve Carey Steve Carey, ed. Edmund Berrigan (Subpress, 2009)

REVIEW BY DAVID PERRY

"(Me and my absences..."

—Steve Carey, from "Gentle Subsidy"

Steve Carey's poetry is as fascinating for itsand his-absences as it is for what is made present. Flirting with autobiography, the work pursues the daily disappearing act-with many a surprise pulled from many a hat-of a life lived among poets well known for their roles in shaping American writing from the sixties on. Indeed, Carey directly addresses a graduate seminar's worth of post-Beat and second-generation New York School luminaries: Whalen, Notley, Ted Berrigan, Berkson and Collom to name a few, and does so by way of a comfortably sprung American idiom drawn in fairly equal measure from Carey's hometown Los Angeles, the experiments of his poet compatriots, the movies, everyday American life ca. 1945-1989 and, perhaps most beautifully of all, the (fading?) art of epistolary verse.

Those literary-name associations, along with the fact that the 108 pages of Carey's Selected have been edited and prefaced by Edmund Berrigan and selected for publication by his brother Anselm, may create the impression among some that Carey, who died at 43 in 1989 of a heart attack, is primarily notable as a poet in subordinate relation to some larger history. Such an impression? Wrong. Carey's role in the still-unfolding story of 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry is far less the matter here than the poems themselves, which are remarkable for their deftness, warmth and light touch on one hand and on the other their deep, persistent concern and engagement with poetry, friendship and the underlying emotional and phenomenal experience of being in the world cut with an acute awareness of the necessity of loss. That such

often-dark matter is handled so lightly may be Carey's signal achievement, one that announces itself immediately in the first verse of the book's first poem, "The Old Enthusiast":

Doubts of plastic certainty—age and wisdom an automatic ivy one of many reasonable shades

trucking its applicability and mouthing hands far over the horizon at the farthest fence and morning —

never memorable in a mirror or a shadow but possibly summoned by surprise in a similar dying

sometime that day.

The constantly new darks.

The concerns and turns that surface here persist throughout the *Selected*: moves like using "darks" as a noun that verbs; the impeccable ear contrasting the hard t and c sounds with plush m's and a wash of sibilance; the smoothly calibrated rhythm; and finally the play of the *certain* and *constant* against the possibly (constantly) dying, though always conducted within earshot of, as "About Poetry," dedicated to Bill Berkson puts it, "Trust of the joy of telling. / Trust of the strength / In a subject to be placed / And sustained, hopefully resumed."

Even in the poems' lighter moments—of which there are many, some skirting hilarity—Carey worries the fort/da fabric of reality until the holes show through and, often, threaten to swallow it, only to cough up a moment marvelously singular (poetry as magic as physics as phenomenology) whether in the form of channeled Hollywood-Americana patter or addresses to absent friends, lovers and fellow poets. The resulting poetry is tender yet tough-minded, a kind of Californian Metaphysical-Romantic hybrid by way of Whalen's everyday Zen poetics and Berrigan's amped New York—schooled experiment in living poetry full time; yet it is thoroughly its own.

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The tension of living (gently, roughly) on the edge permeates the work in a matter-of-fact sense occasionally cut by booze and pills without romanticizing consumption-"Two different kinds of sleeping aids / (three if you count Jack Daniel's) / (four if you count a boring movie) / and, as I heard a lady say the other day, nada" ("Providence," for Peg Berrigan)—as recent remembrances of Carev underscore: Eileen Myles writes in her recent "Steve's Reading" on the Harriet blog that Carey struck her as a "wrecked Viking" and Alice Notley's statement in her essay on Carey that "if you're a poet and you aren't somewhat ravaged" then "there's probably something wrong with your poetry" hits a nerve ("Steve" from Coming After). But again, to the work: When, in the long poem "Rarity Planes" Carey sets himself, and poetry, in existential suspension, wrangling doubt and its certainty, the struggle ultimately dissolves in "the joy of telling":

Or am I mocking myself?
Or am I an immediate echo?
One thing—

there is no doubt I would ask these questions Ask David Sandburg, ask Bill Bathhurst

Should you, really,

or

do I want to be remembered there as I'm remembered here?

I am grateful for these dilemmas

Still not because they can never really be in practice here which here it is is why I came

"It is a song / of sorts of usual and triumphant nature" ("Song") that is at the heart of Carey's work, whether present in a Hollywood-speak joyride like "Goodbye Forever" ("Vamoose, I! Picking them up and laying them down!" etc.) the idiom-savant high jinks of "The Complaint: What Are You, Some Kind of" ("Actuarial plight Nostradamus Devil Bat" etc.) or the quieter, carefully cut verses that,

in being "Letters for nobody, nothing" ("Japan," for Philip Whalen) yield "Not a cloud / the sun nothing sudden / a spinster winter a sink full of steam / coming up." Yes, again, "About Poetry": We are "Talking in our sleep... / The books grow bigger / And bigger. Fine books." More, please.

**David Perry** lives in Shanghai with his wife and daughter, where he teaches writing in the NYU Shanghai program and works as an editor and writer. He is the author of Range Finder, Knowledge Follows and New Years.

#### Absence Where As (Claude Cahun and the Unopened Book) Nathanaël (Nathalie) Stephens (Nightboat Books, 2009)

REVIEW BY JULIAN T. BROLASKI

Absence Where As explores the littoral space between selves, between text and body, the proliferating moment of the thing continually put off, "the book I am coming to"—Claude Cahun's Écrits, unopened (11). Not to mention the curious physical similarity: N. is-isn't Claude Cahun, who are named "l'auteures" and pictured together on page 25 of the book, looking like anachronistic twins. Turning back to the frontispiece of my copy, I notice N. has crossed out Nathalie and signed Nathanaël. So that my book reads Nathanaël (Nathalie Stephens) Nathanaël, a further distortion in the mirror. Verisimilitude: the likeness of (but ultimately not being) truth. The self t/here exists in relation—to itself at the threshold, itself before the doppleganger, whose mutually reflective autre resembles. transfigures and transfixes an originary which never existed anyway.

Even in the author's moniker—before we even get to the book—we are aware of this imperfect symmetry of language with which the book concerns itself (se concerne): the problem of naming. Nathanaël (Nathalie Stephens), and then the book's foil, its mirrorobject in the form of artist Claude Cahun, be-

hind whom lies the birth-name Lucy Schwob, beside whom Marcel Moore (born Suzanne Malherbe, Cahun's lover, stepsister, collaborator, possibly the photog behind Cahun's self-portraits). Nathanaël equals-doesn't-equal (Nathalie), they are in a parallelism: "Nathanaël, then, that I choose for myself, am, one for other, away from Stephens, the patronym, behind which lurks a complicating Cohen" (63). N.'s prosaic poetics defy palpable *genre* as Cahun's photographs defy binaristic *gender*<sup>1</sup>; both words evoke the idea of *categorization* that the artist would dismantle.

The book is framed as a philosophical inquiry or dialogue occasionally reminiscent of Édouard Glissant<sup>2</sup> or Rosmarie Waldrop's Reproduction of Profiles, but honing its own poetic attention—towards (moving towards) what Wittgenstein warns metaphysical language skids on (skids us on): slippery ice. In the envoi (that which is sent out), the book begins like an epistle: "I will speak to you of a relation, possibly of a liaison, certainly of a correspondence...", but the speaker hesitates, "uncomfortably settled in the liminal space of the envoi" (3), this sending out from which the self cannot recover. And the self seems to desire to remain at this threshold, though it also constitutes a torture, since the photo "cannibalises its subject as well as (s)he-in this instance me-who looks, who dares to look, who risks herself by looking, by adopting the proposed trajectory which is one of exhaustion, of interminable exhaustion, approaching a relentless inferno of looking" (42). The liminal is not purgatorial then, it is actually hellish.

Underpinning the Sartrian resolution that *l'enfer c'est les autres / hell is other people*— is N.'s invocation of Rimbaud, so that *Je est un autre / l is an other* becomes an epistemological move. We cannot come to knowing via categorization—inhabiting an individu-

- 1 The words share the Latin etymon *genus* meaning type, race, kind; in fourteenth century English it also comes to mean grammatical gender.
- 2 N.'s translation of Glissant's *Poetic Intention* is forthcoming from Nightboat Books.

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ated genre leaves us familiarly at the maw of the abyss. In the absence of a telos what is known is gleaned by what is missing-errorroundabout knowledges, forgoing the usual (literary, familial) "bloody lineage" (17), "for antecedence...renders us residual" (40-41). Moreover, N. exposes the gulf between la famille (family) and la fa ille (fault line, flaw, rift), "between which a letter comes to be absent" (22). The cipher [m] later reiterates in an alliterative section: m for "miroir most male... mastadon...mislead" (99) but even as it's reiterated, even as it's striven for "[t]he letter would indicate: too great a distance" (39). Rather than language calling a thing into being, for N. a thing's articulation becomes its demise: "[b]y saying JE...we fulfill its finality" (36), we disappear the self.

There was some question as to what pronoun to apply to Cahun, or N. for that matter—ultimately N. uses (s)he and her: "All this time we are seated—(s)he is in fact standing—Claude Cahun and I, so to speak, across from one another," and in a footnote:

She, when referring to Cahun, or to myself, might just as easily be he, splitting (apart) the binary with annuling reversal. For when the two correspond, here, disappear, when their I's touch, I like to think that one and the same turn into some other, nameless, name. I keep to her for the sake of unconstancy. (27)

On the photograph of "l'auteures," N. writes "the resemblance is troubling" (27), and the anxiety around physical correspondence engenders a "dread verging on madness" (27), since in the crossfire of looking "the transposition of features muddles what of each of us would otherwise be distinct" (45).

The book is a self-translation from the original L'absence au lieu (Claude Cahun et le livre inouvert) (Nota Bene, 2007), and maintains many of its frenchisms: relation, liason, correspondence, melodically balanced with frank anglo-saxonisms such as the verb read-write. But to describe as N. does the work as l'entre-genre, between categories,

languages, is perhaps more fair than to call it macaronic. It is certainly a hybrid, actions and selves are melded "so as to denature" (14) the concept of origin. Language literally attacks the body, "inculcates a denatured, fraudulent, morbid gait" (24).

Beyond this multi-valenced, hybrid body, the purported binary between reader and writer is also dissolved, or the reader is projected onto the frame, implicated in the project or problem of self-dissolution, which N. describes as "a battering invective, to make you guarantor of this JE, call you to witness, implicate you, at last, in my own affliction" (47). And "[e]choing Bataille, I have already said so: to resemble oneself is to disappear" (59). What then is to become of the self if N. is there/not there, resembling? Notice that it is (Nathalie) that is in the parenthetical, although "Nathanaël does not exist either, it is well documented..." (64)—despite the extensive cross-referencing of N.'s own earlier works, self-quotation within in a work that is itself a self-translation.

Absence Where As seems to be an exercise in functional aporia (a, not+ poros, passage-impassible)-the thing continually put off, like Tristram Shandy or Godot: "[t] hat the book, the one I would reach for as much as the one I would write, puts me off" (13, emphases mine), ultimately concluding "Je veux l'intraduisible" / "I want what no language holds" (75). N's book is a fascinating set of inquiries toward an epistemology of the self whose horizon is continually vanishing, its worldly hermeticism troubled by a hellish awareness of the present as the only (haunted) reality. Littorally. The self with its attendant selves, and beyond them Cahun, whose absence-presence is painful fodder for this philosophy, like Rosalind saying to Celia "thou and I am one."

**Julian T. Brolaski** is the author of gowanus atropolis, forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse this fall.

The Spoonlight Institute
Alan Bernheimer
(Adventures in Poetry/
Zephyr Press, 2009)

REVIEW BY BILL MOHR

The imagination is often regarded as a facilitating trajectory of human consciousness in which an observer can partially identify with some unexpected exchange between disparate elements of spatial chronology. Alan Bernheimer's poems seem more interested in defining imaginative language as instances in which a reader should look askance at any potentially sustainable narrative; the rapidity with which a reader needs to adjust to his alternative propositions can be disconcerting if one still retains a lingering, if camouflaged, nostalgia for a comfort zone of discourse padded by empathy. Fortunately, even for readers such as myself who still find it difficult to restrain from excessive emotional involvement in a poem, Bernheimer manages to taunt the absurdity of reliable knowledge with a deftness that makes his frequently elusive references appealing and enjoyable rather than puzzling or irritating.

Of all the poets associated with the first contingent of Language writing, Bernheimer seems the most stoic, although his deadpan humor keeps his stoicism marvelously buoyant. It would be a mistake, however, to assign some kind of flippant nihilism to his poems. If social arrangements in the world as it is found are almost obsequiously unstable in their palpable tangency, then Bernheimer counters with a delectable skein of parodic consequences. Few poets can so quickly puncture the pretense of social arrangements to any claim of enduring legitimacy.

The provocative logic of these poems is especially ebullient in a poem such as "A Cannibal Finds a Fork in the Road." One can read it any number of ways; it is, on one level, the best parody of Frost's meditation on free will and fate produced in the past century. The pun on "fork" in the title is the first hint of the poem's savory humor:

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He is lying or telling the truth He know the missionaries will lie

The village lies to the left and the right The fork is in his mind The missionary is already on the fork

Even the road is gone

In the first of a half-dozen end-stopped lines, Bernheimer invokes a well-known "brainteaser." Within a gauntlet of a mere five additional lines, Bernheimer has skewered imperialist stereotypes buttressing the mind-body dualism of such language games and suggested an alternative outcome of action-based resistance.

From his earliest poems, Bernheimer shows an almost all-encompassing dexterity in scooping up disparate contingencies of this planet's evolution. "One monkey don't start the show" is the farewell line of the book's title poem, echoing a circularity that surfaces throughout the book. In "Amarillo," for instance, "the last dinosaur turns back / for a blink at the gingko" as if some lumbering final integer of flesh-interred willpower several eons ago was the first to experience recombinant nostalgia. Rarely has existential humor seemed so droll.

Impermanence is the major theme of every enjambment; if the destabilization of sentences has become the primary goal of free verse in post–World War II American poetry, few poets can unsettle the reader with such a high degree of grim playfulness. Enjambment is only part of the choreography, however; "Piece of Cake," for instance, has a vigorous pas de deux with a subtle chiasmus. "Mouse traps and ping pong balls," the poem begins, and if the implicit "clicks" do not accompany the reader's forward motion, then the wit of "longevity" ['s] pressure on the rest of the poem will be utterly lost.

In noting how quickly Bernheimer gives any proposed social arrangement its comeuppance, one shouldn't regard his sardonic reflections on the impingements of social necessity as insincere or undeserving of our ironic affection. We may indeed have been down roads similar to the ones he is on before he pauses at a provisional destination, but Bernheimer's metaphors have a tensile quality that reminds us of how much we overlooked while passing through the first time. The drive home after reading each of these poems is more rewarding than anyone could have prepared us for. Don't be surprised, in fact, if you don't recognize your own front door.

I've got to have results to hide the details under and remember every time

like stations of the cross
The rabbit always thinks
it is fascinating the anaconda



#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

but what is the good of making mistakes if you don't use them

to distinguish former glory from sunrise in a rear view mirror or a bad day at the office

("As You May Know")

In a review this brief, one of Bernheimer's most appealing qualities is hard to address in an adequate fashion. His variety of strategies ranges from minimalism to the prose poem, and while the tonal control of his eclectic diction remains consistent over the several decades during which these poems were written, it is precisely his formal variety that I find especially attractive and invigorating. The one-word-per-line distribution of "Zoom" seems to be a parallel to the work of Kit Robinson, who in turn most likely was influenced by W.C. Williams's "The Locust Tree in Flower." One might suspect that maximizing the enjambment through such compression might reduce this poem's playfulness, but Bernheimer is every bit as adept as Robinson in keeping an hypnotic slow boil going.

"Inside Cheese," a prose poem consisting of three sentences in which two long ones sandwich the brief one in between, is a pell-mell tour of transmogrifying molecules; indeed, to read Bernheimer's poems is to be reminded in a very subtle manner that the Copernican poetics of mainstream poetry is perhaps the major delusion that enables the banality of so much contemporary poetry to pass under the guise of "accessibility."

In addition to the poems, Bernheimer has included a short play at the end of *The Spoonlight Institute*. The decision of where to place Bernheimer's short play in the book might well have been one of the trickier decisions about its table of contents. The play could be considered a prose poem meant through its recital to gain the plastic traction of minimalist theater. With seven characters, none with more than a first name, "Particle Arms" has a relatively large cast compared to most plays embedded in the avant-garde theater between 1960 and 1985. One of the characters, "Bunker," has a slightly grouchy quality that is

more endearing than one might expect from a character who perhaps is meant to invoke the "bunker mentality" of a famous television character of the period. "Particle Arms" does not seem to have been performed since its initial staging in San Francisco almost thirty years ago. If it has retained its freshness, it is in large part because its dialogue shares with Bernheimer's poems a constant sense of the unexpected.

What we don't know is what you are about to say

("Portrait of a Man")

**Bill Mohr**'s most recent collection of poems is Bittersweet Kaleidoscope (If Publications, 2006).

A Mouth In California Graham Foust (Flood Editions, 2009)

REVIEWED BY DOUGLAS PICCINNINI

In Graham Foust's fourth full-length collection, A Mouth In California, his penchant for precisely tuned and detuned musical speech builds on the efforts of his previous volumes and yet, A Mouth In California avoids the stylistic trappings of self parody. Instead, Foust's willful, playful regard for making work, which both leads and misleads a reader's senses, prevails. The result is a book of poems that at times seems to constrict the windpipe only to be concealed by the poet's forethought to then provide the fresh arrest that returns with its release. Reading A Mouth In California, to borrow a phrase from Foust, the reader "arrive[s] as if at a picture, pinched / into a syntax we grope for and map."

What's satisfying about these poems, beyond Foust's ability to knife out shards of language, is in the same sum of this sonic residue, which has the great capacity to linger in mind and mouth. Like a handful of song lyrics one occasionally sings to him or herself throughout the day, the poems in *A Mouth In California* have an eerie staying power. The poet's ability to sour sounds within the line offer a tactile experience to the work. After

reading and rereading this book many times, I still find myself repeating the coupling of "basic yard" from "Real Job," a poem, early on in this collection, which seems to underscore Foust's project.

To think to leave a place forever, wherever you are.

To then head back through the gate, your basic yard.

To lay off the day's controls and keep your suit on like a scar.

To then improvise restraint behind an open, broken door.

And,

To feel that every possible shape's been made.

To then crush a cup of water.

To crush another cup of water.

To then work the human room.

The closing lines of "Real Job" express a typical artist's frustration: to feel that everything has been done. Fitting, however, is the destructive image of crushing a cup of water, which perhaps mimes the way sound clamps out the mouth's wet through speech. Additionally, in this frustration is a call to action as the speaker resolves "[t]o then work the human room" and navigate the space(s) of language.

The poet maps this acoustic geography in what the speaker of these poems often refers to as the "room"—the stanza: as meaning navigates by sound and sound, meaning. This task is perhaps best summed up as the book begins with "The Sun Also Fizzles":

What's this place, between geography and evening? The sun also bludgeons; a car has three wheels; and what's the wrong way to break that brick of truth back into music?

And,

Swallowed whole, a songbird might could claw back through the hawk— or so I've thought.

The choosing of a word might be its use, the only poem.

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The place between geography and evening—darkness—can be navigated with sound in the absence of sight; call this sonar. By light, the sun reveals the physical features of existence—trees, industry, highways. By sound, the brick-like, physical truths of existence can be mapped in music.

The interesting play here is Foust's admission of how the speakers of these poems arrive at "music." The songbird is preyed upon, like language, as sustenance for not only existence but potentially, growth. However, unlike the songbird that nourishes the hawk and is subsumed into what I'll call "hawkness," the language that is consumed in *A Mouth In* 

California often leaves identifiable amputees. "Poem Beside Itself" invokes amputations from Don Covay's song "Chain of Fools" and also, the incantation from the children's game, duck, duck, goose:

The by-heart bags of music in this body are collapsing. This carved little mind I've been smashing around in, thinking around with, is flashing, not with plastic or with shadow or with damaging winds or laughter, but with plans—I plan at you; I play unsanitary; I point and I pull at your eyes.

I say, "Duck duck chain" and I say, "Chain chain goose" and should you feel a person tearing at your hands, delay the why.

This volume will more than likely please readers who may have resisted the blink-and-miss charms of Foust's As In Every Deafness and Leave the Room to Itself. Where Necessary Stranger begins to add meat to Foust's formerly lean lines, A Mouth In California offers a body both full and filling (and this is not to say that one is a matter of preference to the other). A Mouth In California forces the thoughtful reader to rethink acts of speech, connecting audible language to the room it begins in, the mouth. Foust's attention to the conversions of the physical world to one of sound adds value and evaluates language's construction(s) and intentionality. Where attempts at communication can belie communicating, Foust straddles the convergent, sometimes destructive zones at which these places meet:

Keep talking while I tend to the lines on your face. Keep talking while I touch your face and keep talking through your face and throw your face through your face.

**Douglas Piccinnini**'s writing has recently appeared or will appear in The Cultural Society, EOAGH, Jacket, Lana Turner, mid)rib, So and So, Supermachine, Verse and West Wind Review.

The Bruise Magdalena Zurawski (Fiction Collective Two, 2008)

#### REVIEW BY ERICA KAUFMAN

What do you get when you combine the relentless rhythms of a Steinian prose, with the questioning and questing of the author/writer figure à la Blanchot, with the raw realities of love, lust, and loneliness of a Springsteen song? The answer is Magdalena Zurawski's debut novel, *The Bruise*, a book uniquely able to harness the reader and guide her through centuries of literary thought, self-reflection, and the Freudian hysteric within us all, symptomatic and sublime.

When we first meet Zurawski's protagonist, "M," we are at an unnamed university, pondering Rilke. From the very first pages of the book, M appears as character uniquely concerned with the difference or divergence of body and mind. After hearing a "sound," M observes, "something the body could make independent of the mind's idea of it" (16). There is a clear differentiation of what is physical and what is intellectual and awareness that the two are not always in sync. This split becomes even more apparent (and intriguing) when M is visited by an angel and "She was too close to me and I was scared she would creep inside me and before I even thought what to do I swung...The skin above my eye rose and stretched. A darkening bruise swallowed it" (20). The origin of the book's title shows its face, and the face of Zurawski's "M" is now provocatively marked, ready to enter into a whirlwind of obsessions tackling the real versus the imaginary, concentration versus isolation, and the perhaps universal dilemma of telling (or writing) the story of the self.

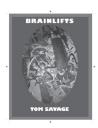
It is as if, freshly marked, M now dives into a contemporary quest narrative, rife with the sort of sentiment Springsteen sings about in "This Life," "at night my telescope along/ This emptiness I've roamed/Searching for a home." Can one call a dormitory home? Can friends who do not acknowledge "the bruise" be true friends? When/how/should one put the imagination on display? M states, "the reason I had a bruise on my forehead was



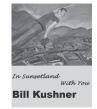


David Mills, The Dream Detective









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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

because I was not telling them the story of my imagination and for some reason this made me feel distant from them and close to them at the same time" (29).

In Blanchot's chapter on "The Essential Solitude" (from The Space of Literature), he addresses (among many other things) the relationship between writer and "silence." Blanchot posits, "To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking... the part of the writer which can always say no and, when necessary, appeal to time, restore the future" (27). Zurawski's "M" is hyper-conscious of this "echo," it seems to fuel this narrator, and appeals to a desire to come to an understanding of where the writing ends and the writer begins. "I could no longer believe that my thoughts were just thoughts and could slip away into a dream and be forgotten because now there was this thing here and it was mine and I had written it" (64). So, what does and can language ac-

In a recent piece posted on X Poetics, "Statement on Crossings," Zurawski writes, "The kind of crossing I'm more interested in thinking about right now, especially in regards to [The Bruise], has to do with the relationship between textual space and extratextual space, or, as my narrator, who is both me and not me, would say, the relationship between the writing in books and the real life outside of books." M is certainly the character to use as an avatar to do this - an individual who has friends but seems to be lonely and in various states/stages of isolation, a person of statues, tree branches, doorknob dictations, and a person who experiences what people do-love and loss, contact and disconnect. The book is in many ways an existential and even aesthetic struggle to try to map and unpack where the story ends and reality begins.

But, what makes Zurawski's book unprecedented is the form she chooses for M's meanderings. Zurawski's prose itself conflates the usual boundaries/binaries between reader and writer—the sentences cycle through and into each other it feels as if as reader, you are virtually experiencing and partaking in a craft in progress. M states, "I wanted to live in the same world with somebody and so

soon I stopped looking at the sentence altogether because it made me think it would be impossible ever to have enough sentences to speak to somebody in a real way and I might be stuck alone in my thoughts for a long time" (69). The repetition of the various words in this phrase causes the reader to experience the experience being detailed ("looking at the sentence") as if he/she is "M", but at the same time observing M.

In "The Making of The Making of Americans," Gertrude Stein writes, "Repeating then is in every one, in every one their being and their feeling and their way of realizing everything and every one comes out of them in repeating." Stein proposes that repetition is an invaluable part of the making and evaluating of the self and the experience of the individual in the world. And, it seems that language is what makes this repetition possible. What Zurawski does is take Stein's notions of the purpose and function (and grace) of repetition and infuse it with the particular emotive experience of M, creating a novel that stimulates on a visceral level. Zurawski writes, "just when I felt so much in my body again I thought that I was a person and not part of everything that I saw around me so I was worried..." (113) and later, "so I tried to understand what made me say the words" (123).

So, what about *The Bruise?* M cycles through relationships to it, with it, and examines the metaphysical impacts the bruise has on others. Yet, as Zurawski's prose continues to amaze, page after page, the bruise no longer seems as flagrant. She writes, "it seemed to me that the bruise and the poem had made me try to become a face and a body when I had just been a head of meat waiting to slip out of my own mouth like an idea" (159). I can't help but be reminded of Springsteen's "Living Proof":

I went down into the desert city Just tryin' so hard to shed my skin I crawled deep into some kind of darkness Lookin' to burn out every trace of who I'd been

And it is this "every trace" that Zurawski's obsessive M manages to examine, and it is this "every trace" feeling that makes *The Bruise* a prose masterpiece, an unprecedented story of what's both real and imagined.

Erica Kaufman is the author of Censory Impulse.

The Kenning Anthology of Poets Theater, 1945–1985 David Brazil & Kevin Killian, eds. (Kenning Editions, 2010)

REVIEW BY MAXWELL HELLER

A poetry anthology is a slender volume of must-haves collected for casual readersunless two San Franciscans head the project. In that case, a poetry anthology must be a manual comprehensive enough to withstand the Bay Area's scrutiny. San Franciscan poets miss nothing (they're probably blogging about my saying so right now), so editors David Brazil and Kevin Killian cover as much ground as possible in their Anthology of Poets Theater, presenting celebrated texts together with overlooked works lost to archives or rubbish bins. They offer a sweeping history of Poets Theater (PT) from Provincetown Playhouse to Timken Hall, searching for the common elements that unite this singular albeit unstable genre, beginning with an introduction written in a casual tone that opens the discussion to all readers, not just PT enthusiasts or academics. After all, PT has roots in the Victorian era, when poets wrote theater for the general public and "modernism had not yet created a specialized audience for poetry."

At the outset, the problem of defining PT looms large. Brazil and Killian take a cautious approach, exploring PT as a stepchild of everything from Aristophanes' slapstick. Thornton Wilder's artifice and Brecht's wideawake aesthetic to Fluxus experiments and Schneeman's Meat Joy. They seem to posit that it is not a discrete genre at all, but a name that can be assigned to works in retrospect, or adopted by anyone wishing to fly the PT banner. But in order to contain their discussion within a single volume, they provide a working definition that includes only works by poets (so, no Richard Foreman), and only poets who established themselves during the post-war period (thus excluding Eliot, Stein, Zukovsky, et al). The result is a collection that reveals the characteristics that first set PT apart from traditional theater, from other readings, happenings, and performance art-characteristics that continue to set it apart today.

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If nothing else, the PT presented here is a theater of text and language, rather than of narrative or character. Even the most linear pieces seem like collages of literary references, colloquialisms and clichés-the psychologies of the people depicted seem inconsequential in comparison to the elaborate and observant word play. O'Hara's Houses at Falling Hanging (1953) opens like a Wilde-esque comedy of manners, but the cardboard characters divert our attention to his cunning examination of bourgeois smalltalk patterns. Ron Padgett's Kiss Behind the Smile (1966) mocks verse itself with a ghastly rhyming scheme and dialogue as stilted as John Marston's. And as years pass, PT focuses more on melopoeia, gradually moving further away from lucidity and character. PT poets begin allowing their words to exist independently from communicative meaning as gestures or "purely articulated movements." This approach to language is beautifully echoed in Reveille dans la brume (1977), where Theresa Hak Kyung Cha projects a black-and-white image of a door onto the door itself, thus highlighting and celebrating the distance between referent and signifier.

But PT works are often remembered for the performances they inspire rather than for their poetic texts. Theresa Hak Kvung Cha's performance texts are rarely published simply because they seem incidental to the celebrated actions that grew out of them. And one might forget Mary Caroline's translation of Erik Satie's Ruse of the Medusa (1948) in favor of the performers who first realized it-Cage did the score, De Kooning the set, Cunningham the choreography, and Buckminster Fuller played the lead. In the collective memory PT is 10% text and 90% action, a thing made by the moment of its presentation and the diverse artists presenting it. With this in mind, Anthology's attempt to capture the essence of PT on the printed page seems an almost impossible task. Readers who have not experienced the energy of a PT event will have difficulty understanding how Jackson Mac Low's polyvocalic pieces might come together, or how Kathy Acker's impossible visions could be realized for the stage-and readers in the know will be left starving to know more about how these plays were first enacted.

Even so, Brazil and Killian provide a solid sense of PT's seminal decades, bringing to light its central concerns and lost masterpieces, on one hand and, on the other, revealing its importance to the genre as we know it today. Like the pieces collected here, contemporary PT delights in synthesis, drawing freely from contemporary poetics, dance, visual art, music, and film, not to mention pop-culture, politics and whatever else comes to hand. It is unembarrassed by appropriation, eager to let its seams show, to reveal evidence of the creative process. It grapples with questions of form, but remains "ambiguous or ambivalent" in its relation to the form of theater as such, and to familiar poetic forms. In fact, it usually tosses dogma out the window-theatrical conventions concerning psychology, narrative and character go first, followed shortly by modern poetic norms (even the most punishingly hermetic pieces offer moments of linear clarity). But there is an odd development in PT that deserves some notice: its new, affected casual attitude. In "Some Remarks on Poets Theater" (2007), David Buuck associated PT with counter-professionalism and rigorous amateurism, calling for pieces that were under-rehearsed, budget-less, "cobbled together from what folks have at home," "total coterie, with everyone in on the jokes." His statement captures the spoken sentiments of his contemporaries, but it overlooks the intense research, argument, intellectual conflict, academic analysis and constant revision behind each piece. Yes, PT folk like to crack jokes with friends and call it a performance, but they do so with serious intentions, and the activity is anything but casual. As Brazil and Killian reveal, PT has a legitimate history, shaped by remarkable poets and artists, and today's poets are no less ambitious than their predecessors.

Maxwell Heller, Arts & Literature editor at George Braziller, will publish his essay on artist Tavares Strachan with MIT's List Visual Arts Center this May.

Century of Clouds
Bruce Boone
(Nightboat Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY ROBERT DEWHURST

With characteristic sparks of ingenuity, Nightboat Books has beautifully reissued New Narrative impresario Bruce Boone's long-lost classic, *Century of Clouds*. Practically unattainable since the initial scattering of its 1980, small-run first issue by San Francisco's Hoddypoll Press, *Century of Clouds* has for the last three decades circulated only clandestinely; as a worn copy, or mere rumor, passed between friends; an evocative but slightly unplaceable piece of literary-historical gossip. Nightboat's reissue—replete with



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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

new paratexts by Rob Halpern (who critically prefaces the slim volume) and Boone himself (who has penned a sparkling new afterword for the occasion), as well as a suitably gorgeous oil painting by John Constable (*Study of Cumulous Clouds*, 1822) wrapped wide across its cover—wonderfully restores this essential text to the public domain, where it still reads, the snowy Buffalo Sunday that I write this, with an affecting and remarkable currency.

Written in earnest out of a broad desire to "tell you stories," and to narrate, in a selfconscious present tense, a set of intuited linkages Boone was feeling across his leftist politics and "Some important friendships, in between spaces as my life moves outward," Century of Clouds relays the day-today ecstasies and uncertainties of Boone's emotional life while attending a Midwestern "Marxist literary" retreat, in-between anecdotal loops backward in time to Boone's late teenage years as an unlikely novitiate in a Roman Catholic monastery. Readers familiar with Boone's earlier My Walk With Bob (self-published by Boone and Robert ("Bob") Glück's Black Star Series in 1979, and itself reissued by Ithuriel's Spear in 2006) will not be surprised by the dizzy admixture Century of Clouds thus proposes, nor by Boone's noticeable use of "direct address" and metalevel textual self-commentary in the passage quoted from above. Together, Century of Clouds forms something of a pair with My Walk With Bob, and, as Halpern's preface observes, represents at 86 pages nothing less than a full-blown realization of the "New Narrative" strategies first imagined and performed in that book.

In My Walk With Bob, Boone irresistibly wonders over the affects and effects of storytelling to narrativize "unsolved problems of my own life" (turning a couple over so as to read them from every possible angle in the wake of a difficult breakup), and in Century of Clouds projects his and Glück's emergent insights into narrativity onto more outwardly "political" questions. Quickly counterposing personal reverie ("In the years of friendship I see those I love in mosaic-like patterns . . .") and historical reality ("Letelier is being blown up in his car by the agents of the Chilean re-

action . . . 9 black men are dead in Oakland from police assassination") in the very first pages of the novella, Boone begins *Clouds* with a resonant and formal question: "These thoughts large and public, how to relate them to my life? How to link with experience that touches—only rarely—my past? To tell about desiring too."

Boone is particularly concerned to narrativize and so make legible to himself-a series of events and personalities he encountered one summer at a convention of the Marxist Literary Group in St. Cloud, Minnesota. (A kind of adult summer-camp-cum-high-theory-workshop that met in the summers of '78 and '79 and was presided over by Frederic Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Stanley Aronowitz, the Marxist Literary Group strikes me, maybe, as something like today's European Graduate School.) Unsurprisingly, the fellow travelers Boone met at the socialist school were often more disappointingly masculinist and homophobic than we might hope their leftist party affiliations would indicate, and Boone is so perceptive and entertaining a reader that his smart, gossipy critique of the group's dynamics makes his account of their everyday class discussions, nights out, and comically competitive volleyball games come off as absolutely compelling, totally silly, and very important all at once.

Over the course of Clouds, Boone manages to encompass personal feeling, political philosophy, friendship, critique, and desire in one seamless and insightful flow by improvising a new kind of capacious and energetically self-reflexive narrative. Enacting the hallmark New Narrative techniques of digression, selfcommentary, and interruption as his narrative itself theorizes them, Boone calls upon his personal memories of St. Cloud and the religious order as a way to mobilize an ensemble of stories to achieve a simultaneity of critical and aesthetic affect. For Boone, stories serve as a kind of treasured, emotional connective tissue that can yoke and synthesize the apparent disjunctions between the different scenes of the personal, political, ideological, erotic, and so on. His writing is inspired, but not driven by, theory, and is, in its unabashed entanglements with signification and feeling, productively out of step with some of its Bay

Area contemporaries. "Words are redeemed by the commitment of a life," Boone writes in one moment, and in another:

By writing this story I want to make you think about certain political matters—a praiseworthy objective, no? But I also want to amuse and entertain you, and more. In what I write I would like you to be able to feel pleasure, even joy. I don't want to give up on either goal, though only one of them is concerned with power. Isn't it possible to think about power in new ways? . . . how is it possible to make a truly human social life for the first time?

Reading Century of Clouds again in its new edition, I am struck by Boone's triumphant success in achieving all these effects. His language is at once eloquent, rhapsodic, melancholic, and lush, and the novella offers a rush of delight that feels both multivalent and necessary. A further treat here is Boone's new afterword, in which he acknowledges these very calculated designs with his inimitable candor, and sketches something like a genealogical outline of emotional, affective writing. It is a thrill to have this text back in print, and to see a sense of recognition in the air for New Narrative.

#### Further Reading on New Narrative:

Harris, Kaplan. "New Narrative and the Making of Language Poetry." *American Literature* 81.4 (Dec. 2009): 805–32.

Glück, Bob. "Long Note on New Narrative". Narrativity 1. www.sfsu.edu/~poetry/narrativity/issueone\_toc.html.

Robert Dewhurst edits Satellite Telephone, and co-edits, with Sean Reynolds, WILD ORCHIDS. He currently lives in Buffalo, NY, where he is a PhD student in the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo.

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