THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER www.poetryproject.org

OCT/NOV 2009 #220

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS ESSAY JOHN BEER ON TEXT IN PERFORMANCE WITH RESPECT ROBIN BLASER POEM JACQUELINE WATERS INTERVIEW ALAN BERNHEIMER & STEPHANIE YOUNG CALENDAR OF EVENTS SHONNI ENELOW REVIEWS RODRIGO TOSCANO MILES CHAMPION REVIEWS IAN HAMILTON FINLAY GEOFFREY OLSEN REVIEWS CHAPBOOKS KAPLAN HARRIS REVIEWS BORDERS, ED. SUSANNE CHRISTENSEN & AUDUN LINDHOLM PAOLO JAVIER REVIEWS FILIP MARINOVICH PAUL KILLEBREW REVIEWS ERIC BAUS JOANNA FUHRMAN REVIEWS RACHEL LODEN





THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Architectural materials & words as matter ("concrete" words, • not abstractions—William •Carlos Williams's "No ideas but" • in things"); the structure—the engineering—of a building & • sentence-structure (diagram- • ming a sentence & plans/ • section in architecture); scripts • (narrative scripts, film scripts) & computer-scripting in ar- chitecture); punctuation—like Emily Dickinson's dashes—& • • the time taken to walk through • a building, through a city, through landscape); Roget's • Thesaurus as a geography, a • *terrain, of words (the dictionary* is from the mechanical age, • while Roget's Thesaurus pres-

We might read Michel Butor's
Mobile (traveling through the
United States in words, cities
& rivers & mountains scrawled
across the page); but we'll
also see the beginning of Alain
Robbe-Grillet/Alain Resnais's
Last Year at Marienbad (the

ages the internet)...

cont'd p. 11

ON THE COVER & P. 09:

Line drawings by Mary L Chan. Mary L Chan is a designer and illustrator whose work can be found at www.studiobartleby. com. She lives in Brooklyn.

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LETTERS

"Our senses of humor are keen and offer all the dazzle of a wrist corsage."

1. from the director

It's hard to believe that I'm beginning my third year as Artistic Director and fifth year at the Project. Sure, I feel some wear and tear (euphemism for bat-shit crazy—see "Hark the Herald Poets Sing") yet amidst all the rawness I'm still regularly and deeply charmed by that which is on the other hand genuine.

It was charming indeed when Arlo, Corrine and I reconvened for work in August all wearing grey pants and black shirts. Sounds dour but I assure you our senses of humor are keen and offer all the dazzle of a wrist corsage. I'm thrilled that the three of us will be working together and perfecting our group telepathy for another season. I hope you have already opened to the calendar of events-I love the way the schedule for the fall season came together and I hope there is something for everyone to get excited about.

The Project concluded last season with some unforgettable events (Giorno, Ashbery, reading for Spicer) as part of our Spring fundraising campaign. We also sent out our first email appeal to our members and supporters and were able to raise \$3,000 to help us defray the cost of a substantial increase in rent come January. We are not inflating the cost of any of our programs this year but we will be conducting more appeals than in the past. The Project is of course a poet-founded and a poet-run organization whose programming has developed out of a complete devotion to the risk, challenge and heart of contemporary poetry. And we know we've developed a community who is just as intensely devoted. The Project's new website is set up to accept both donations and memberships so if you would like to take a moment to join the others who have helped, please visit www.poetryproject.org.

One of our goals this season is to continue to develop the website into a valuable resource and sound/image archive. This kind of work has proven to take a longer amount of time than we would like yet we are getting it done. We have made the switch to digital recording and David Vogen spent his summer getting well acquainted with our new Micro Track II. Also, remember that our site has a blog where we will continue to feature photographs from readings, select introductions and posts from guest bloggers.

It wasn't very long ago that I didn't have a cell phone or Internet access at home-well, I just gave in and got an iPod Nano. I'm locking up the office now and heading out into the dusk with Psychic TV's Mr. Alien Brain vs. the Skinwalkers in my ears.

See you soon, Stacy Szymaszek

2. from the program coordinator

HARK THE HERALD POETS SING

I just crowed over to Stacy, "What if we become Grey Gardens?!" Imagine the two of us, I in a sweater-turned-cap, forty-four years from now. We'll have the same wheeled office chairs and she'll have fore-

gone emailing in favor of carrier pigeons—the last miraculous vestiges of the East Village (by then a biosphere shopping mall).

Welcome back! It's year 44! Those of us who have worked here for half a decade have gone bat-shit crazy, but there are thankfully new and fully hinged people populating the ranks. The 2009–2010 season will commence on September 23, a Wednesday night. Please refer to the center of this newsletter for all the juicy details.

We would like to thank Kyle Schlesinger, last season's Monday Night Reading Series Coordinator, for his terrific tenure. Kyle has flown the coop to Texas, where we hope he is doing very well. Monday Nights will now be steered by Dustin Williamson, a Milwaukee transplant who has been living in Brooklyn and actively involved here at the Project for the past few seasons. Dustin is the author of the chapbooks Exhausted Grunts (Cannibal Books), Cab Ass'n (Lame House), Gorilla Dust (Open 24 Hours), and Heavy Panda (GoodbyeBetter). Recent work has appeared in Tight.

We would also like to thank Diana Hamilton for her great work as co-coordinator of the 2008–09 Friday Late Night Series. This season, Nicole Wallace will be joined by Edward Hopely. Ed graduated from NYU a couple years back, and has long been one of our favorite volunteers. He is the author of chapbooks such as Rabbit on their way to the Capital and SHIp Treasure, and has written, with J. Gordon Faylor, the book for two readers *Tremblies*. His writing has appeared in *They* Are Flying Planes, mid)rib, Sustainable Aircraft, Ceptuetics, filling Station, and others; he edits NAP magazine via TREES+SQUASH, and a forthcoming issue of Physical Poets.

You might have noticed some aesthetic departures in this thing you hold in your hands. Any changes hearken a changing of the editorial guard. John Coletti (LOVE) has passed the well-worn hat to the inimitable Corina Copp (LOVE). Corina hails from Kansas and Colorado, and has lived almost as well in Louisiana and Tennessee. Recent work has appeared in Aufgabe, ON Contemporary Practice, Antennae, Puppy Flowers, and elsewhere. Formerly the Program Assistant (2003-05) and Monday Night Reading Series Coordinator (2004-06) at The Poetry Project, she is currently studying playwriting with Mac Wellman at CUNY-Brooklyn College. She and I are not the same person. Arlo Quint will continue to serve as Program Assistant and Monday Talk Series Coordinator, and Stacy will maintain her reign as Artistic Director and Wednesday Night Reading Series Coordinator. I am your friendly neighborhood Program Coordinator.

Corrine Fitzpatrick 3. from the editor

FALL! Romance is in the air, tooth gaps are back, Marion Cotillard is Lady Dior, Rodarte is doing a Target collection, and though the retail sector's back-to-school specials aren't exactly smothering the kids in padded silk appliqué this season, I know the leather-andlace phenomenon isn't going anywhere (surely Stevie Nicks shopped at Sal Army!). And to borrow a phrase from poet Jenn McCreary, "broke is the new black." Thanks, Jenn! See, I was a tyke at one point, and if you happened to ask me what I hoped to be when no longer a tyke, I would say "an editor." For serious (I thought it meant "being right"). Thus my responsibility is not only to watch for your fashionable backs edging into a Project reading, but to edit them. As Whoopi

Goldberg would say, "dreams do come true." (She did say this, and I wept.) I hereby espouse my gratitude to Stacy Szymaszek, John Coletti, Arlo Quint, and Corrine Fitzpatrick (we are not the same person) (dammit) for the opportunity.

A bit of your ear: this August I traveled to Chicago to attend The Printer's Ball, a semi-glamorous event for smallpress and magazine publishing hosted by The Poetry Foundation, the publishers of *Poetry* and creators of the exciting blog Harriet. When asked at a party why their office doesn't subscribe to this Newsletter, the reply (in jest; and a disclaimer—these folks are great): "You guys hate us!" Ah, but you guys hate us! What's us? No way. Suddenly I thought, "Wait. All this matters? To whom? Not to me!? So great, there goes my contrived apathy..." Apathy and worse, dismissiveness, are easy to come by and dislocating. You pick up the Newsletter, it's chummy, conversational—this seems alienating and uncritical? Or to others, wholly critical. And to others, not critical, as in, not undertaking. Whichever. (I'm just glad you're reading it! Are you? Actually I don't care! Are you?) What poetry and, as an artistic home, the Poetry Project, have taught me over the years is that it is precise, open attention and potential repair we are all after in the end, not aesthetic agreement or expedient harmony. This issue of the Newsletter partly responds to text in performance—it's in the crisp air, the "irreducible, / gentle eddy of wind, the familiar / sweetness which seems to recapture several lost lifetimes, illusory maybe" (Jennifer Moxley). All my hopes our combined poetic resources make for a stable, undeniably spirited site for thought.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOSSES

We regret to note the passing of the following people who were dear to the Project: Lionel Ziprin, Sal Salasin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Stefan Brecht, Robin Blaser, David Bromige, Gerry Gilbert, Harold Norse, Simon Vinkenoog, Darragh Park, and Merce Cunningham.

AWARDS

Congratulations to the 2009 NYFA Award Winners for Poetry! Winners include: E.J. Antonio, Edmund Berrigan, Tina Chang, Mónica de la Torre, LaTasha Diggs, Marcella Durand, Alan Gilbert - Gregory Millard Fellow, Jennifer Hayashida, Lisa Jarnot, Mara Jebsen, Suji Kim, Anna Moschovakis, Willie Perdomo, Julie Sheehan, Patricia Smith, Sue Song, Paige Taggart, and Anne Tardos. Congrats are also due to Magdalena Zurawski for receiving a LAMBDA Award for her recent book, The Bruise.

SAN FRANCISCO'S FIFTH POFT LAUREATE?

Diane di Prima! Congratulations Diane! She is the author of 44 books of poetry and prose, including a new expanded version of Revolutionary Letters (Last Gasp Press, 2007).



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

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PUBLIC ACCESS POETRY

Many thanks to long-time friend Greg Masters for his donation of videotapes from Public Access Poetry, a collection of about 60 readings, 1977–78. The shows were produced and organized by Greg Masters, Gary Lenhart, David Herz, Didi Susan Dubelyew and Daniel Krakauer. Rochelle Kraut joined after a few episodes as director. We are happy to be able to include them in the Poetry Project's archive.

ON BOARD

We are excited to announce the addition of three new enthusiastic and committed people to the Project's Board of Director's: Tim Griffin, Mónica de la Torre and Christopher Stackhouse. We also note with gratitude that Paul Slovak and Steven Hamilton have concluded their service on the Board and will continue to lend their support on the Friends Committee.

ALSO ON BOARD

Congrats to Katy and Matt Henriksen on their new arrival, Adele!

BROMIGE TRIBUTE AT POETS HOUSE

Friday, October 16, 7:00pm. Living in Advance: A Tribute to David Bromige. Participants include Charles Bernstein, Corina Copp, Rachel Levitsky, Bob Perelman, Nick Piombino, Ron Silliman, Gary Sullivan, Geoffrey Young and others. This evening celebrates the life and work of poet David Bromige (1933-2009). Cosponsored by the Poetry Project. Admission is Free. Visit www.poetshouse.org.

WITH RESPECT

Remembering Robin Blaser (1925-2009)

MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN

'm furious," Robin wrote to me on January 5, 2002: "HOW DID YOU GET THAT BOOK BEFORE I DID—I ordered it last spring—when it was just announced." The book in question was Avital Ronell's *Stupidity*. I had sent him a page of tantalizing quotes as well as a copy of an ironic set of test questions from her essay "The Rhetoric of Testing." Our correspondence

was all by fax (Robin had no use for email)—his letters were handwritten and often decorated around the signature with elaborate, abstract line drawings. At 9:55 a.m. the next day he sent a long quotation from Fernando Pessoa beginning, "The Great Sphinx of Egypt dreams into this paper. I write and she appears / through my transparent hand . . . ," which evokes for me the magic he found in language, and the flights of mind he adored in philosophy, painting and music. At 2:50 p.m. he sent a detailed response to the 10 test questions, including the following comment: "Relationship of allegory and history—well that relationship is to be found in their methodologies—the historical method that believes in a narrative progression—PROGRESS—is an allegory of unintelligibility—allegorical method is a way of reading—intelling—things as if one human life were another, infinitum."

"OH!" he begins a fax the next day, then playfully reverses it on the opposite side of the page, "HO!" followed by the opening paragraph, hand-copied, of Ronell's *Finitude's Score*, a book which he signed and gave me. During our intense correspondence from the late '90s to about 2007, he also gave me Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, Colette's *The Pure and the Impure*, and Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* (all of Arendt's work being particularly dear to him).

On another four-fax day, Robin sent two stanzas from Thomas Hardy's "A Singer Asleep," followed by a discussion of the morpheme *-ject* (thrown) in relation to Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, plus a comment on a passage from Gertrude Stein's *Narration* which I'd sent to him. "[D]ear Quellenforschung," he began one of his notes. He ended another with "R / Fingerspitzengafühl" and in another he wrote "Signed / Beulah, peel me a grape / Mae West." Another ends:

Oh ——— F
Delicious books —— Oh!

labyrinthine heart

He wrote about Edward Bond's notion of "radical innocence" ("the most brilliant record of it is in Blake"), about "heart labyrinths" at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, about *Literature and the*

Gods by Roberto Calasso, about the 10-volume Ocean Story, about Bataille's Georges The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge about Robert Duncan and Nerval, about Samuel Beckett's "For Avigdor Arikha," about Merleau-Ponty's Primacy of Perception, about Alphonso Lingus's sense of the other, about Fernando Pessoa's Book of Disguiet. "There's a kind of oceanic irony in Ger-



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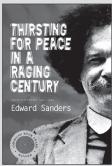
man genius," he says of Karl Kraus, which leads him to think fondly of Robert Musil, and one of Robin's most beloved books, *The Death of Virgil* by Hermann Broch ("I would ask that it be buried with me except I know that is nonsense, like taking your jewelry with you").

At one point we got onto what it would be like to be Métis living inside Zeus's stomach. "Ah! Métis, the darling," he wrote, "wisdom that has a skill to it—that never allows it to sit still in an Absolute of itself—well, living in the stomach of Zeus would take great skill—and she did it—but the point is that Zeus swallowed her—his first wife—the Greeks had a problem with the one-sidedness of pregnancy—so some . . . came up with the idea of a male womb—trouble is Zeus doesn't know that stomach and womb . . . ARE NOT the same biological intelligence. The stomach is close to the intelligences of necessity, while the womb is tied to the excitements and creation of life—Zeus is clearly a godhead that is to die into another and another—on and on—Métis gets out and meets Hermes."

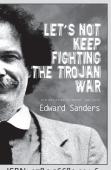
If only I had remembered *The Death of Virgil*, I would have thrown it into Robin's grave with the poems we read and the bottle of cognac.

Meredith Quartermain's most recent book is Nightmarker (NeWest 2008), prose poems that explore the city as animal behavior, museum and dream of modernity. In another recent book, entitled Matter (BookThug 2008), she playfully riffs on Darwin's Origin of Species and Roget's Thesaurus. Vancouver Walking won the 2006 BC Book Award for Poetry. She is co-founder of Nomados Literary Publishers.

NEW FROM COFFEE HOUSE PRESS



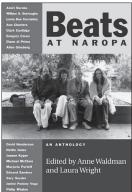
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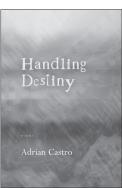
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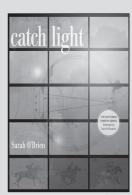
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ESSAY

The Text in and of Performance

JOHN BEER

heater belongs to poets. Or it should, or it does at its best, which, granted, may not be the present moment. And on the other hand, the modern hypostatization of the lyric mode at the expense of its ancient partners the epic & dramatic is by no means the healthiest news for poetry. Good, then, that the fortunes of a poet's theater, the scrappy, hybrid form that could trace a lineage to Artaud and Stein (with, maybe, the Irish Abbey Theatre as a benevolent great-aunt), through fugitive mid-century institutions in Cambridge and the Bay Area, seems to be enjoying a moment of relative prosperity: Small Press Traffic's annual festivities have been joined by events in Alexandria, VA and (ahem) Chicago, while the crisp cornucopia of Rodrigo Toscano's Collapsible Poetics Theater (Fence Books) will soon be joined by a much-awaited anthology from Kenning Editions.

While poets theater may entail an ethos as much as it does a mode of aesthetic production-emphasizing the small-scale, the communal, the evanescent-recent productions in both New York and Chicago demonstrate the continuing relevance of what might be termed in contrast a poetic theater. The distinction (which, as the terminology itself reflects, isn't at all a hard and fast one) lies in the relative import of ties to literary community and acceptance of the canons of professional theatrical performance—even in a poetic theater, you learn your lines, dammit! In the States, the blazon of this theatrical mode has been carried most visibly through the past decades just down the hall, by Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, still vital as it begins its fifth decade. In some instances, poetic theater is emblematized by its attention to the formal and performative possibilities of language, as in this spring's Telephone, by the poet Ariana Reines. For me, at least, the category need not be limited to language-centered works, though, but applies as well to those pieces which eschew the traditional theater's focus on character and conflict in favor of association, image, and caesura-the kind of work pioneered by Robert Wilson and long associated by the sadly defunct Chicago-based group Goat Island; Cupola Bobber, a younger group also rooted in Chicago, masterfully deploys such performance strategies in its Way Out West, the Sea Whispered Me.

TELEPHONE

Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book* is as archetypal an artifact of its time as a fin-bedecked Studebaker or a iPhone 3GS. Published in 1991 at the apogee of high theory and designed with a giddy appreciation of the new possibilities desktop typesetting afforded, Ronell's inquiry into what is called calling served as an indispensible

accessory for any humanities grad student or ambitious black-clad undergrad: not only was it terminologically au courant, but it was also, like the later Kristeva, kind of irresistibly goth. Two decades later, what's most astonishing about Ariana Reines's theatrical adaptation of Ronell's book is how deftly it manages a hat trick of transposition, bringing Ronell's transgressive academic idiom into its own poetic vernacular, finding performative correlates for the book's thematic concerns, and bridging the temporal gap between *The Telephone Book*'s present and ours, all tasks which she brings off almost seamlessly.

Telephone was produced by the Foundry Theater at Cherry Lane last February, and will be followed by another much-heralded venture by the company into wedding performance and poetry: a bus tour through the Bronx scripted by Claudia Rankine. The production of Telephone deservedly won praise from both audiences and critics; subtle and gorgeous design by Marsha Gisberg, Tyler Micoleau, and Matt Hubbs underscored the dramatic texture and thematics of Reines's text, expertly performed by Matthew Dellapina, Gibson Frazier, and Birgit Huppich, who won an Obie award for her work. But the center of the piece remained Reines's words and canny adaptational structure. Mimicking the mosaic composition of Ronell's original, Reines carves her piece into three brief acts. The first stages the legendary conversation in which Alexander Graham Bell (Frazier) requests the presence of John Watson (Dellapina). The section blends a kind of music-hall male duo comedy with a Stoppardian theater of ideas as the dreamy Watson tussles with the harder-headed Bell over the meaning of his new communications device. The second part is a virtuosic monologue delivered by Miss St. (Huppich), a schizophrenic patient of Carl Jung's, who believed that a telephone had been embedded inside her. Finally, in the act entitled "The Lovers," Reines presents a series of brief, stuttering phone conversations between people in relationships that seem to be rocky, if not on the verge of demise; for instance:

- B: I just felt. Beholden to you.
- A: Is that why you didn't wanna talk.
- B: Yeah. I just felt weird. And I didn't want to feel. Beholden to you.
- A: Oh.
- B: silence
- A: What do you mean by beholden.

silence

silence

silence

B: I don't know.

Throughout, issues of communication, as might be expected, loom large, even as the tone shifts jaggedly; the surface of *Telephone* offers a dazzling display of wit, but there's a constant melancholic undertow. It's visible, for instance, in the increasingly insistent gestures with which Watson attempts to get Bell to attend to the former's speculations, or at the very least just to listen to him. And it's heartbreakingly on display in the scattered moments at which Huppich's Miss St., who often appears in the course of her monologue to be channeling both language and history, in all its economic, technologic, and political particularity, pauses for breath, visibly searching for a thread with which to resume her speech.

"Warning: The Telephone Book will resist you," Ronell's treatise begins. One might wonder how much of that resistance, fundamental to the book's philosophical aims, survives the transition to the stage. While Reines does emphasize the psychological and interpersonal aspects of the text, enabling her work to show up as intelligible drama, the poetic and intellectual work of Telephone may take place most acutely in its silences. As the above excerpt suggests, silence is an inescapable element in the piece. While it marks on the one hand points of particular misunderstanding-places where characters fail to understand one another, or themselves, or the very meaning of their own words—its ubiquity, often mediated by the low throbbing hum of Matt Hubbs's sound design, grants it a gradually accumulating force, as the background of incomprehension and incomprehensibility from which fragile and hopeful sallies into speech emerge, a background whose contours may be altered by technological change, but which remains regardless. It's in these silences that the rueful wit of Telephone grows into something like the tragedy and comedy of language use itself.

WAY OUT WEST, THE SEA WHISPERED ME

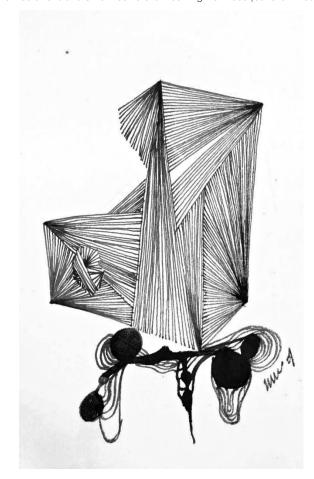
Stephen Fiehn and Tyler Myers have been performing as the Chicago-based duo Cupola Bobber for the better part of a decade. Taking its cues somewhat from the elegantly gestural and time-based performance work of Goat Island, Cupola Bobber adds a layer of gleefully anarchic energy; while its pieces sometimes display the stoic classicism of Buster Keaton, its heart seems to be closer to the Marx Brothers, building things that fall apart beautifully.

Way Out West, the Sea Whispered Me, the pair's fourth full-length performance, debuted last April at Chicago's Links Hall; it will appear at PS122 in New York briefly this September. Its opening moments establish the imagistic method that powers the piece, as Tyler Myers, in jacket and tie, slowly makes his way across the performance space, sweeping up tiny heaps of dust with a small broom and depositing the results in his breast pocket. Slowly the piece's thematic concerns

emerge as Fiehn and Myers describe a series of remembered and impossible vistas, Myers standing still and silent, his tie carefully poised pointing straight up and obscuring his face, and Fiehn sitting within a white mound of fabric, what will later turn out to be a cloud. "The sea has my shoe, my pen, my armchair, my set of encyclopedias. . ."

The imagination and its discontents may be often-explored territory, but Myers and Fiehn find new possibilities nonetheless. In part, they do this by contrasting the verbal play of description and negation, conjuring and demolishing imaginary landscapes, with real physical labor: Myers makes waves by repeatedly rolling and unrolling a large blue canvas; he supports Fiehn on his shoulders or across his chest as the latter spools out memories of photographs. In the piece's final moments, Myers hurtles back and forth, his top half hidden in a huge white wad of fabric, shouting, "I am a storm, I am a beautiful storm": it's as though the piece crystallizes around the deployed grit of the actual world, transforming its nostalgia for the absent into a real, watery event.

John Beer is a Chicagoan, theater critic, and student of philosophy. Poems and essays to be found in Crowd, Verse, Brooklyn Rail, and War and Peace. The Waste Land and Other Poems is forthcoming Mar. 2009 (Canarium Books).



POEM

from Phil-

JACQUELINE WATERS

khaki-clad constable

positioned by the brick kiln

hefts rifle to shoulder, aims with room to maneuver,

works the bolt action

over dummy bullets and a cartridge case

anticipating

tourist incursion, or another

wintry week, another turn

of the cheek to receive

the haymaker: and thus things change

even the "things you cannot change"

that surplus powering the acrobat

swinging across the stage, holding herself nearly horizontal

as her hair blows in a breeze

her head created -

or killers drive up, shoot, pick up your body like a sack

and burn it in the outskirts

of Casavatore: every refusal, in other words,

provokes another blow: every bond, be it

affection, ownership, religion

is a concession

to the competition:

how often "pain" has saved you from certain disaster, or more often the disaster of a pile of certainty: as in The Odd Couple when Jack Lemmon seals an envelope marked "To My Wife and Beloved Children" moves to the window

set to hurl himself

from the ninth floor

of the Hotel Flanders:

driven to the end of the line

by pain occurring

pre-movie,

pre-plot: but Jack Lemmon

is foiled by a stuck window: presses one way

windmills his arms to switch his grip

presses again,

till his eyes widen

both hands fly to his back: Oh no.

Plan comically thwarted

by painful back pain

Jack Lemmon staggers to the bed

and reclines: cut to Lemmon

exiting the hotel

down to the drugstore for a cure

from p. 03

camera traversing corridor after corridor as the narrator's voice performs a travelogue & a hypnotism); & we'll listen to Vladislav Delay & Alva Noto (music & architecture are the same: each makes a surrounding, a context, an ambience—you can do other things while listening to music, you do other things while in the middle of architecture, both architecture & music engender multi-attention, the keynote of the 21st century)...

From a background of poetry & then art,

Vito Acconci became a designer/architect
& formed Acconci Studio in 1988. They've
recently built a person-made island that
twists from bowl to dome in Graz & a
clothing store as soft as clothing in Tokyo;
they're working on a strip-mall makeover in the U.S. & a floating park over a
railroad in Vienna. He still begins projects
with words.

POETRY AND MAGIC WORKSHOP MITCH HIGHFILL FRIDAYS AT 7:00PM—10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 9

This workshop takes the work of Jack Spicer and "the practice of the • outside" as a starting point. We will explore different technologies long- associated with magic (technologies • such as spells, sigils and divination) • to generate writing, both in and out . of the workshop setting. We will work. with sources as diverse as Gerard • •de Nerval, Christopher Dewdney and · W.S. Burroughs. A magical approach. • to poetics will include such concepts • as the Muse, the Duende and the • lore accompanying these ideas. The • goal here is to gain access to writ-• ing that is not limited by the habits of personality or the predilections of the. poet, but can expand our ranges to . include what Robin Blaser called the . "outside."

cont'd p. 31

```
- but having thought through the act
```

having set a baseline

to communicate doubt, hesitancy, confidence

and resolve: having gotten a monitor

about twelve inches high

and considered its face your mirror: so that whenever you feel strong emotion

of any kind, or wish to scratch your eye, rub your nose, move a toothpick

around in your mouth,

tap the table with your fingertips, you go out and drive a car

and know you know

how what you're feeling looks: though trees, boulders, telephone poles

seem to fall from every direction, one after another

as you move down the street: a ball bounces in

chased by an obstacle

shorter than the foreshortened

hood of your car: and old people foil you, as do toddlers,

perambulators, ambulances, fruit wagons, bicycles and a sawhorse

around a pothole big as a right front wheel.

Or you find a tutor, thus turning the ball over to the other team

which scores even more and widens its lead -

your next stop

will be a moment-by-moment second-guessing

"am I hot" "am I cold"

till a path is formed

by your constant aboveground treading
and when showing it to your neighbor at the table
you think about shaking your head

at the difficulty she has

sitting up in her chair: some equation must be at work some principle whereby weak units, fragile when combined grow stronger when separated and you start to think about this as if you are Time magazine, aiming to focus on one thing

and make it stand for every thing
ruined by the huge, unmanageable currents
that wrap winds around the world
thinking the point of thinking

were to establish new, though false, content for your day then chronicle the unraveling of the content you came out here with.



Jacqueline Waters is the author of A Minute without Danger (Adventures in Poetry) and a chapbook, The Garden of Eden a College (A Rest Press).

Recent work has appeared in No: A Journal of the Arts and Zoland Poetry. She is an editor of The Physiocrats, a new pamphlet press: The Physiocrats.com.

PHOTO CREDIT: EUGENE MASSEY

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INTERVIEW

10 Questions for Alan Bernheimer

STEPHANIE YOUNG

01: What movie did you most recently see?

AB: On the silver screen, *Cold Souls*. It questions whether melancholy is an honorable feeling. On DVD, *Touchez-pas au grisbi*. If gangsters can make a midnight snack of pâté and a glass of wine from Nantes and go to bed in striped pajamas, civilization may be worth saving.

02: At the end of Happy Days last weekend [a production at the California Shakespeare Festival we went to with friendsl, you and I shared a strong visceral reaction to the curtain call. Almost immediately after the lights came up (following a long, lovely and flickering fade-out, appropriately slow and semi-agonizing) the actor playing Winnie popped around the mound of dirt from stage left to take her bow. She was bounding and full of energy and almost sprightly. I thought she was a tech person at first. It was really shocking to see her embodied, especially following the second act where one had to struggle to make out her face among the clods of dirt and debris. It was a perfect example of my overall problem with the (otherwise outstanding) production—its speed, which I registered as discomfort with gaps, spaces, silence. But my question is more about something you said a few seconds after that disconcerting curtain call, seemingly in response to the entire production: "Poets theater." Maybe it's obvious, but can you say a little bit about what you were thinkina?

AB: As for Winnie's curtain(less) call, the abruptness of the actor's break with her character was even more disorienting than when a just-deceased character takes his bow at the footlights, death's pallor replaced by an appreciative smile. This woman had a body? And if so, why wasn't it still in the first act's electric-blue dress? (And, come to think of it, did that dress even exist below the waist?) Her sudden appearance in what looked to be black rehearsal togs—how could she even move so energetically after two hours of mostly stasis? How could she not? Did she need to do yoga at intermission? And, yes, it took too long for me to reconnect that head to this new body, when I should have been bravo-ing what was some kind of tour-de-force performance, other issues aside.

My recollection is I actually made the "poets theater" comment at the end of the less downbeat and dismaying Act I—reacting largely to the foregrounded language vis-à-vis production and narrative, the modernist avant-garde distancing from naturalistic mimesis, the surface tension as buoyant medium. And just as poets theater has never really succeeded in attracting a crossover theater audience—not even with the relatively rich production values and thee-weekend runs that SF Poets Theater in the early 1980s

afforded—I overheard a departing audience member remark his amazement that this was the third time the leading lady has performed Winnie, amazed that "this play" had even had three productions...ever. Beckett in the suburbs!

03: You and I first met and had the chance to work together on poets theater a few years ago when you were between jobs. You've written elsewhere about a particular economic and personal climate in the '70s/'80s that lent itself to a vibrant poetstheater scene in the Bay Area. What's the current relationship between your day job and writing life?

AB: Sad to say, they are at loggerheads. The only time I have the mental clarity to write is in the morning. Since I've never had a night job, or even a swing shift, writing takes the back seat. I can usually find a little vocabulary at work to repurpose (terms of art), but I've never been able to harvest it as productively as, for instance, Kit Robinson has. That year off was very productive. I got writing done, did poets theater, reconnected with the Bay Area poetry community, and got a translation project off the ground. It cured any fear of idleness, which I never had when I was younger, but had begun to lurk, perversely.

04: It's been a real gift to the Bay Area scene, your reconnection and presence. I just read your guest appearance in the most recent installment of *The Grand Piano*, where you write about Warren Sonbert's films, narrative, and poetics. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between some of those filmic techniques you discuss (the cut, the shot) and your writing, especially the books of poetry?

AB: Replacement and displacement are my habitual modes of avoiding sentimentalism, which seems like a necessary discipline in this sad, Kerouacian world. The right word always has a neighbor and the bumps between them are how I get my thrills. In film editing, it's even more obvious that you are assembling the final effect from discrete pieces that you order and reorder, delete and replace. Warren made this sublimely clear in his talk on "Film Syntax" in the San Francisco Talk series.

05: I was watching Sondheim's Into the Woods last night (Clive is directing it for a local high school next spring) and there are a few moments that occur between scenes/acts where the language reminded me so much of your work; especially the play, Particle Arms, and the poems collected in the The Spoonlight Institute. During the moments I'm thinking of, characters from overlapping narratives rush the stage and deliver one-line aphorisms that are sometimes tangentially and sometimes directly related to the "action." They're not really talking to each other, the audience or themselves, but rather some combination of these positions. In Sondheim's case, those moments are rare, when the language gets peeled back from its narrative aims. In the case of your writing, it's quite the opposite, language gets freed up from narrative requirements and seems to even hide out from narrative that would settle onto the language too easily, like a coat. I'm thinking here less about narrative and more about voice, particularly in your many investigations of aphorism and cliché in both the plays and poetry. Who's talking and who's listening?

AB: My most liberating moment as a young writer came in the permission to eliminate introspective self and emotional (in)experience as abject subject matter, and get on with things. Stop trying to manipulate the feelings of your audience. That's their job. Make every word an interesting choice, but make it a choice, often through use of calculated accident. Along with that liberation came the realization that there was (and is) an audience, not unconnected with social formations like the St. Mark's Church Poetry Project in the '60s and '70s, the Language writers ten years later, and ongoing writing communities in San Francisco, New York, and elsewhere today. "It is so very much more exciting and satisfactory for everybody if one can have contemporaries." -Gertrude Stein. But back to your earlier thought. The bulk of my reading has always been narrative, and when the opportunity came to write a play for SF Poets Theater in 1982, I picked up where my high-school drama career had foundered in college. Although I knew the written surface would inevitably maintain a hallmark fragmentation, I deliberately asked Nick Robinson to direct *Particle Arms* because I thought he'd give it a more straight-ahead production than our other more wildly inventive director, Eileen Corder. The tension between the somewhat fractured, foregrounded text and the enacted, noir-comedic plotline was what drew me on. And the play of received phrase against fresh recombination in the service of an absurdly thin narrative seemed to work as well in this genre as in lyrical prosody.

06: That makes me think of the live film narration performance you did a few years ago, to a scene from Letter of Introduction. The scene features a conversation between a ventriloguist and his dummy. Rather than alter or rewrite the language of the scene, you turned the sound off and then voiced/lip-synched the dialogue exactly as it occurs in the film. It was a complicated performance choice, ventriloquizing a ventriloquist and his dummy, and I'm still not entirely sure what it did-its action was multi-dimensional. I do remember your performance opening up/illuminating these gaps between performer/audience that are always already there, really really fine layers, like the layers butter makes in a croissant. I think what I'm trying to ask is, is there a relationship between ventriloquism and the way aphorism/cliché shows up in your writing? Does a phrase like "cultural ventriloguism" apply? But in the sense of a doubled or triple ventriloguism. What is the work of a cultural ventriloquism? What is its relationship to the outside, as in the outside of poetry?

AB: When Konrad Steiner, the impresario of Neo-Benshi, asked me to do a piece, I was casting about for the right film sequence and I remember deciding it would be better if it was unfamiliar to audiences. About the same time, he suggested someone should someday try the "null set" approach—not in fact creating an apposite dialogue or narration but just reenacting the original. When I happened upon John Stahl's 1938 backstage Broadway melodrama, *Letter of Introduction*, I hit pay dirt. To begin with, a backstage narrative is reflexive in itself. The genre shift to film adds another remove. And to find Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy

actual participants in the theatrical boarding house plot, instead of just vaudevillian relief, was an unexpected richness. I took the Neo-Benshi challenge as a form of ventriloquy in its basic effect, so using a sequence where Bergen not only ventriloquized the dummy but also a milkman's horse was too good to be true. My greatest satisfaction with the piece was that many in the audience didn't realize that I was simply reenacting the original dialogue, and that's a testament as well to the screwball genius of the script. But what is cultural ventriloquism?

07: I'd forgotten that part, about the audience not realizing you were lip synching the dialogue as given. Yeah, what do I mean by cultural ventriloquism? I think I'm trying that phrase out as a way to think more about the way your work inhabits these daily, culturally available, rhetorical figures of speech. An example, from the poem "As you may know": "Melancholy is the new irony". That's a case where it feels like you're lip synching a given script exactly (given script: language as collective, group activity). I'm the audience member who can't quite tell. Haven't I heard this exact iteration of an endlessly updated construction before? Or have I? Then there are cases where a slight shift registers with a pop. The given, with difference: "nature especially abhors the smell of vacuums" or "the one worth fainting for". Other moments where I feel/recognize the structure but the content is totally switched out: "Nobody knows / what kind of trope is / has your name on it". Of course it's not as simple as diagramming three modes; "Everything I touch turns / to flesh or vice versa". Although I can't stop trying to schematize things. Maybe poetry is the dummy, sitting on the performer's knee, or maybe the poet is the dummy who finds a way to go off script and talk back (although ugh, the dummy's speech is always recuperated, part of a closed loop managed by the ventriloquist). Maybe the question should be: can you talk about the relationship between ventriloquism (as metaphor, or as historically specific performance moment) and your idea of writing? What about your poem "Ventriloquy"?

AB: Ventriloquy was one youthful ambition that I never mastered, even though I sent away for a small device advertised in comic books that was supposed to help produce certain sounds. I did have some modest success with hypnosis and sleight of hand. Ventriloguy shares a lot with the latter, since one of its fundamentals is misdirection. Misdirection of attention for magic, misdirection of perception for ventriloguy. (I once took a set of precepts for card tricks and substituted the word poetry for magic. The effect was partly successful.) I think of ventriloguy as a voice that seems to come from somewhere else. Related to artistic distance, estrangement, Shklovsky's defamiliarization, laying bare the device. Which explains why I am busy torquing conventional formulation. Plus, it's my job to keep the reader reading, and I'm likely to resort to irony and verbal humor, which are distancing devices as well. But I'm very sincere about wanting to know what kind of trope is "this bullet has your name on it"!

08: You brought up Kit Robinson's work earlier, his repurposing of vocabularies from a work/professional context (his writing probably has something to do too with these questions I'm trying to pose around ventriloquism). What vocabularies does your work engage with and draw from?

AB: Scientific vocabulary, with its phenomenal precision, though you have to watch out for its drying effect. You need to temper it with supple, labile language. For me, there is always an oversupply of nouns, not enough verbs. Abstract terms, especially ambiguous ones. We haven't talked about ambiguity, my calling card, and where I need to avoid overindulgence. I need to be careful of too much multivalence, in phrase to phrase and line-to-line maneuverings.

09: Melancholy is a word that keeps showing up in this exchange, and one that I would use to describe the emotional tenor of *The Spoonlight Institute*. Even (or especially) in its wit and humor. Are you actively working against something like melancholy appearing in the writing, or are you working it in?

AB: I've been reading Orhan Pamuk's memoir, Istanbul, and melancholy, or the Turkish hüzün, is his theme, the bitterwseet sorrow for the lost, crumbling city of his youth, his people's lost empire. But it's a much more complex and ambiguous concept, with deep Muslim roots. He explores it as a state of grace, "a way of looking at life that implicates us all, not only a spiritual state but a state of mind that is ultimately as life-affirming as it is negating." And that, of course, circles back to Kerouac, the pervading pity (his trademark use of "poor") and his concomitant, "leaping lizards" joy.

10: I'm curious about the location of *Particle Arms* in your new book, at the very end. Is it a coda? Does it close? Is it an appendix? A final performance of what the rest of the book has been doing/does? Is it a version of what the poetry makes possible in some way?

AB: I'm not sure there's an interesting enough answer! The play takes up a quarter of the book, so shape made it sensible as a bookend. Poetry certainly made the play possible, as a practice and method enabling me to put words together. Poems and play share vocabulary and sensibility. Any script is just a piece of a play, lacking all the dimensions of performance. But a poets-theater script has a better life than most, since the language is at least as interesting as the performers.

Stephanie Young lives and works in Oakland. Her books of poetry are Picture Palace (in girum imus nocte et consumimur igni, 2008) and Telling the Future Off (Tougher Disguises, 2005). She edited Bay Poetics (Faux Press, 2006) and curated/produced several Poets Theater Festivals during her tenure on the board at Small Press Traffic. Current editorial projects include Deep Oakland (www.deepoakland.org).

Alan Bernheimer grew up in New York City and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for more than half his life. Books include Café Isotope (The Figures, 1980) and Billionesque (The Figures, 1999). Adventures in Poetry is publishing The Spoonlight Institute this fall.



[an · (A) lgebra] DON BOGEN

FROM CHICAGO

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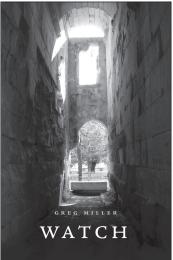


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POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

9/23 WEDNESDAY

PRISMATIC PUBLICS:

Nicole Brossard, Margaret Christakos & Catriona Strang

A reading to celebrate Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women's Poetry and Poetics edited by Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne, published by Coach House. Nicole Brossard has published more than thirty books, including Museum of Bone and Water, The Aerial Letter and Mauve Desert. In 2006, she won the Canada Council's prestigious Molson Prize for lifetime achievement. Her most recent book is the novel Fences in Breathing. Margaret Christakos is the author of seven books of poetry and a novel. A new collection, Purple, is forthcoming. Catriona Strang's latest book, co-written with the late Nancy Shaw, is Light Sweet Crude. Other works include Cold Trip and Busted, both co-written with Nancy Shaw. She is a founding member of the Institute for Domestic Research. She is currently working on "Extrafine Imperial Twankay," a long work based on the history of tea.

This event is co-presented with Coach House Books and Délégation générale du Québec.

9/28 MONDAY

Mel Nichols & Michael Nicoloff

Mel Nichols is the author of Catalytic Exteriorization Phenomenon, Bicycle Day, The Beginning of Beauty, Part 1: hottest new ringtones, mnichol6, and Day Poems. She teaches at George Mason University. Michael Nicoloff is the author of the chapbooks "Punks" and Bruised Dick (cowritten with Alli Warren). With Jennifer Manzano, he co-publishes olywa press. Come Oct. 09, he will co-curate the (New) Reading Series at 21 Grand in Oakland.

9/30 WEDNESDAY

Joshua Beckman & Jack Collom

Joshua Beckman is the author of six books, including Take It, Shake, and two collaborations with Matthew Rohrer: Nice Hat. Thanks. and Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty. He is an editor at Wave Books and has translated numerous works of poetry and prose, including Poker by Tomaz Salamun. Jack Collom was born in Chicago in 1931. He grew up in Illinois and Colorado small towns, walking the woods a lot, loving nature, and then studied Forestry at Colorado A&M. He spent four years in the U.S. Air Force as a clerk-typist, then worked in factories for twenty years while becoming a poet (first poems writ in Tripoli, Libya). Since then, 23 books and chapbooks of poetry, the latest being Situations, Sings (with Lyn Hejinian) and Exchanges of Earth & Sky.

10/2 FRIDAY, 10pm VIBRANT FUTURES: EPISODE TWO

Vibrant Futures, directed by Robin Schavoir and Lea Cetera, is a fictional mini-series about a tree-dwelling community living in giant redwoods that experiences a rebirth of consciousness. Episode One, the 55 minute pilot, was screened at Guild and Greyshkul Gallery, NYC. To view Episode One please visit vibrantfuturesmovie.com.

Vibrant Futures: Episode Two is the second installment of this five-part miniseries. Approx. running time: 60 min. Robin Schavoir is a Belgian-born artist. He attended the Cooper Union School of Art, and the Longy School of Music in Boston. Lea Marie Cetera received her BFA from the Cooper Union School of Art. She is the co-founder and director of the experimental puppetry collaborative, IMAGINATIONEXPLOSION. imaginationexplosion.com.

10/5 MONDAY

OPEN READING (sign-in 7:45)

10/7 WEDNESDAY

Naked Lunch at 50 (Sanctuary)

William S. Burroughs's Naked Lunch was first published in Paris in July 1959. To mark this golden anniversary, the Poetry Project will inaugurate the New York portion of an international series of festivities with a group reading of Burroughs's masterwork. Join Eric Andersen, John Giorno, Genesis P-Orridge, Victor Bockris, Simon Pettet, Jürgen Ploog, Anne Waldman, Nick **Zedd** and more TBA in paying tribute to the book that Allen Ginsberg described as "the endless novel which will drive everybody mad." A segment of the film Nova Express by Andre Perkowski, and Kate Simon's WSB photographs, will be shown. Hosted by Keith Seward. Visit nakedlunch.org.

10/09 FRIDAY, 10pm

Josef Kaplan & Jarrod Fowler

Josef Kaplan's work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Sprung Formal, Model Homes, Lana Turner, mid)rib, NAP* and the *West Wind Review.* He edits *Sustainable Aircraft*, an online journal of mostly critical writing on contemporary poetry, and lives in Brooklyn. Jarrod Fowler is a conceptual percussionist. His works may be presented in the form of documents or site-specific happenings. He is the author of *Translation As Rhythm* and *'percussion' as percussion*.

10/12 MONDAY

Richard Deming & Dmitry Golynko

Richard Deming is a poet and a theorist who works on the philosophy of literature. He is the author of *Let's Not Call It Consequence*, winner of the 2009 Norma Farber First Book Award from the PSA.

Currently a lecturer at Yale, he is also the author of *Listening on All Sides: Toward an Emersonian Ethics of Reading.* **Dmitry Golynko** was born in 1969, in Leningrad, USSR. He currently lives in St. Petersburg, Russia, where he is a poet, scholar in Visual Ethics and Biopolitics, and a literary and art critic. His books of poetry include *Homo Scribens, Directory, Concrete Doves,* and *As It Turned Out.* In addition to poetry, Golynko regularly publishes essays on contemporary literary process and cultural phenomena. His work has been translated into English, German, French, Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Swedish and Italian.

10/14 WEDNESDAY Anne Waldman: Collaborative Works

Anne Waldman has been an active member of the international "outrider" experimental poetry community several decades as writer, sprechstimme performer, professor, editor, magpie scholar, infra-structure and cultural/political activist. This evening she will be joined by frequent collaborators Ambrose Bye, Steven Taylor, Douglas Dunn and Akilah Oliver. Waldman grew up on Macdougal Street in Greenwich Village, where she still lives, and bi-furcated to Boulder, Colorado in 1974 when she co-founded The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics with Allen Ginsberg at Naropa University, the first Buddhist- inspired school in the West. She is the author of over 40 books of poetry, including Kill or Cure, Marriage: A Sentence, Structure of the World Compared to a Bubble, and Manatee, as well as Fast Speaking Woman and the lovis trilogy. Ambrose Bye, musician and composer, studied drumming, gamelan, and blues (piano) at Naropa. He graduated from UC Santa Cruz and from the music/ production program at the Pyramind Institute in San Francisco. Steven Taylor is a poet, musician and ethnomusicologist. He is the author of False Prophet: Field Notes from the Punk Underground. He has toured and recorded with Allen Ginsberg,

Kenward Elmslie, the Fugs. **Douglas Dunn** is a dancer and choreographer. Visit his company at douglasdunndance.com. Poet **Akilah Oliver**'s latest book is *A Toast in the House of Friends*. She lives and teaches in Brooklyn.

10/19 MONDAY

Sueyeun Juliette Lee & Tracey McTague

Sueyeun Juliette Lee edits the small chapbook series, Corollary Press, and is pursuing her PhD in English from Temple University. Her chapbooks include Trespass Slightly In, Perfect Villagers and Mental Commitment Robots. Her book of poetry, That Gorgeous Feeling, explores East/West discursive circulations through the notion of celebrity. Tracey McTague curates the Battle Hill reading series and is coeditor of Lungfull! Magazine. She is a writer and visual artist whose work includes a number of chapbooks. A longer book, about urban dog mind, will be published this fall by Overlook.

10/21 WEDNESDAY Christopher Nealon

& Catherine Wagner

Christopher Nealon is the author of two books of poems, The Joyous Age and Plummet. He is also the author of a book of criticism, Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Emotion before Stonewall and forthcoming is The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Spectacle in the American Century. After teaching at UC Berkeley for many years, he is now a member of the English Department at Johns Hopkins University. Catherine Wagner's new book, My New Job, is forthcoming from Fence. Her other books are Macular Hole and Miss America. Recent chapbooks include Articulate How, Hole in the Ground and Bornt. Cathy is editing a manuscript of Barbara Guest's unpublished 1960s poems. She is permanent faculty in the MA program in creative writing at Miami University in Ohio.

10/23 FRIDAY, 10pm Michele Beck, Jorge Calvo

& Jennifer Bartlett

Beck and Calvo are multidisciplinary artists working with video, sound and performance. Tonight they will show two 15-minute videos from a series called "video portraits in a day"-one about poet Bill Kushner and one about poet Jennifer Bartlett. The videos will be followed by a performance by Beck and Calvo and a reading by Bartlett. Michele Beck completed her Bachelors in Art History at NYU and her MFA at Parsons School of Design. She teaches at the New School and the ICP. Jorge Calvo pursued his studies in experimental theatre in Sydney, Australia. After finishing his training, he performed with the alternative theatre companies G.R.O.U.P and Dangerous Visions Theatre. Jennifer Bartlett was a 2005 NYFA Poetry Fellow. She is the author of Derivative of the Moving Image and (a) Iullaby without any music. Bartlett teaches poetry to students with disabilities at United Cerebral Palsy.

10/26 MONDAY

Micah Ballard & Dawn Lundy Martin

Micah Ballard lives in San Francisco and is co-editor for Auguste Press. Recent books of his include Absinthian Journal, Bettina Coffin, Negative Capability in the Verse of John Wieners, Evangeline Downs, Parish Krewes, and the collaborations Death Race V.S.O.P. and Easy Eden. Dawn Lundy Martin was awarded the 2006 Cave Canem Poetry Prize for A Gathering of Matter/A Matter of Gathering. She is the author of The Morning Hour, FENCE, nocturnes and Encyclopedia. She is a founding member of the Black Took Collective, a group of experimental black poets; co-editor of a collection of essays, The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism; and a founder of the Third Wave Foundation in New York, a national young feminist organization.

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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POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

10/28 WEDNESDAY Robert Glück & Eileen Myles

Robert Glück is the author of nine books of poetry and fiction, including two novels, Margery Kempe and Jack the Modernist and a book of stories, Denny Smith. Gluck co-edited the anthology Biting The Error: Writers on Narrative. He was Director of The Poetry Center at San Francisco State, Co-director of Small Press Traffic, and Associate Editor at Lapis Press. Last year he and artist Dean Smith completed the film Aliengnosis. Eileen Myles remains a green and prolific poet (Sorry Tree, Not Me...) whose first collection of essays on art, poetry, queerness and culture The Importance of Being Iceland, for which she received a Warhol/Creative Capital grant, is just out from Semiotext(e)/MIT.

11/2 MONDAY OPEN READING (sign-in 7:45)

11/4 WEDNESDAY Will Alexander

& Edwin Torres

Will Alexander is a poet, novelist, essayist, artist and educator who lives in Los Angeles. His poetic works include Exobiology as Goddess, Asia & Haiti, Above the Human Nerve Domain and The Stratospheric Cantacles. He is also author of philosophical essays, Towards the Primeval Lightening Field, and a novel, Sunrise in Armageddon. Edwin Torres creates performances that intermingle poetry with vocal and physical improvisation, sound-elements and visual theater. He's inventor of a noh-boricua inspired non-movement called NORICUA. His books include, I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said, Fractured Humorous, The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker and The PoPedology of an Ambient Language. This reading will launch his new book, In The Function of External Circumstances, forthcoming from Nightboat Books.

11/6 FRIDAY, 10pm José Felipe Alvergue & Patrick Lovelace

With an MFA from Cal Arts, José Felipe Alvergue is a student of the SUNY Buffalo Poetics Program. His writing on Cecilia Vicuña, the architect Toyo Ito, the Tijuana-based art collective Torolab, and Martin Heidegger have been presented at academic conferences. He is the author of us look up/ there red dwells. Patrick Lovelace puts out Patrick Lovelace Editions. The Collective Task, a project featuring a dozen poets and artists, edited by Rob Fitterman and designed by Dirk Rowntree, is due in the fall. His most recent endeavor is an executive production collaboration with the CLEVELAND TAPES collective

11/7 SATURDAY, 2-5pm ROCKPILE SYMPOSIUM (FREE)

Michael Rothenberg and David Meltzer host a discussion on Art and Activism; Poetry, Music and The Troubadour Tradition; Censorship and The Academy; Community and Collaboration: open discussion with Ammiel Alcalay, Teresa Carrion, Jim Christy, Marty Ehrlich, Michael Franklin, Murat Nemat-Nejat, Wanda Phipps, Robert Priest, Harris Schiff, Suzi Winson and Bill Zavatsky. We welcome audience participation. Moderator: Jim Feast. Refreshments and admission FREE. More about ROCKPILE on the road at bigbridge.org/rockpile.

11/9 MONDAY

George Albon & Karl Gartung

George Albon's most recent book is *Momentary Songs*. Other books are *Step, Brief Capital of Disturbances, Thousands Count Out Loud,* and *Empire Life*. His essay "The Paradise of Meaning" was the George Oppen Memorial Lecture for 2002.

Presently, he's working on a "big prose book" called *Café Multiple: Life, Work, Love, and Poetry.* He lives in San Francisco. **Karl Gartung** is the author of *Now That Memory Has Become So Important.* He has also collaborated with Elizabeth Robinson on a privately printed chapbook, *Speak.* He cofounded Woodland Pattern Book Center. He works as a truck driver, helped organize his workplace into the Teamsters Union in 1993, and has served as a union steward since

11/11 WEDNESDAY TRIBUTE TO GEORGE

SCHNEEMAN (FREE, Sanctuary)

Friends—artists, poets, filmmakers-as well as family, will gather to salute the life and work of George Schneeman, a major artist and friend to the downtown community for over 40 years. George was probably the greatest and most extensive collaborator with poets in the annals of this genre. The Poetry Project was his extended family. With Emilio Alexander, Bill Berkson, Sandy Berrigan, Michael Brownstein, Jacob Burckhardt, Douglas Dunn & Grazia della Terza, Larry Fagin, John Godfrey, Leon Hartman, Odetta Hartman, Camilla Hartman, Yvonne Jacquette, Steve Katz, Doris Kornish, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett, Harris Schiff, Peter Schjeldahl, Katie Schneeman, Paul Schneeman, Anne Waldman and Charles Wright.

11/13 FRIDAY, 10pm Mensa & AMJ Crawford

Mensa is a performance collective formed by the installation artists Ariele Affigne and Sarah Maurer, previously known for nested architectures: built spaces which make physical the personal within a larger area. Synthesizing the structural conceits of a magician's theater with the discourse charged trans-identitarianisms of alchemical practices, their performance for the Poetry Project will seek to enact this prescriptive fun within the spaces and sensoria made available by their audience. **AMJ Crawford** is the author of *Morpheu*, editor of *zenSLUM*, and co-editor of *Le Dodo*. He is a former Fulbright Scholar to Portugal and currently studies at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program.

11/16 MONDAY

TALK SERIES

Lytle Shaw: The Source of the Hudson—A Dutch Landscape of American Prospects

Keyed to the Hudson Quadricentennial, this talk comes out of a book-in-progress on the politics of time in the depiction landscapes—and more generally on what happens to American history and aesthetics when the Dutch, not the English, get read as forbears. The goal will be to excavate a version of landscape aesthetics out of the deep historical past and reposition it within our own moment of samplings, performances and installations. Lytle Shaw's books of poetry include Cable Factory 20, The Lobe, and several collaborations with artists. His essays and reviews have appeared in Cabinet, Artforum, and Parkett and in catalogs for the DIA Center for the Arts, the Drawing Center, and the Sculpture Center.

11/18 WEDNESDAY

Ted Greenwald & Kit Robinson

Ted Greenwald was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and has lived in New York City his entire life. During the course of a career that has spanned some 30 years, he has been the author of numerous books of poetry, including In Your Dreams, 3, Two Wrongs with painter Hal Saulson, The Up and Up, Jumping the Line, Word of Mouth, Common Sense, and You Bet. Kit Robinson is celebrating the publication of his new book The Messianic Trees: Selected Poems, 1976-2003. His recent collaborations with Ted Greenwald have

appeared in SHINY 14, onedit 12, and Antennae 11. A co-author of The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco, 1975-1980, Robinson is also the author of Train I Ride, 9:45, and The Crave.

11/20 FRIDAY, 10pm Poets' Potluck V

All ye gather 'round, for it is time for thanks and communal turkey (or tofurkey) burgers at the Poetry Project Friday Night Series' (precariously annual) Thanksgiving potluck. Come join us for a warm thanking of friends and good times with food, drinks, music, poetry, and other forms of shareable merriment.

11/30 MONDAY

Allison Cobb & Ana Božičević

Allison Cobb is the author of the poetry collection Born2, a chronicle of Los Alamos, New Mexico—her birthplace and the home of the atomic bomb. Her work has been published widely, and she is the recipient of a 2009 New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship. She recently moved from Brooklyn to Portland, OR. Ana Božičević emigrated to NYC from Croatia in 1997. Her first book is Stars of the Night Commute. With Amy King, she curates the Stain of Poetry reading series in Brooklyn, and edits an anthology, The Urban Poetic. For more, go to nightcommute.org.





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BOOK REVIEWS

Collapsible Poetics Theater Rodrigo Toscano (Fence, 2008)

REVIEW BY SHONNI ENELOW

WHO'S STILL IN THE CAVERN—STAY! (Toscano 153)

When you come to the end, don't stop: the last piece of Rodrigo Toscano's Collapsible Poetics Theater—"The Makings: A Prelude to a Night of Poetics Theater Performances"-provides a retroactive frame for the work as a whole. So how fascinating to discover there, in a conclusion that is also a reopening, a version of the ultimate parable of ambivalent theatricality: Plato's cave. With the snappy seriousness Toscano does so well, four players discuss the inevitable circularity of the avant-garde project ("And the pillars remain in place, and the pillars come piling down/And there's dust...And it all dries up-hardens-to rock" [152]), arriving at the verdict, "it's gotta be all right/Burn kindle in the cavern/It's thundering outside." Instead of the bright sunlight of Plato's truth beyond mere appearance, Toscano's world outside the cave[rn] is filled with the deafening thunder of capitalist interpolation. It's the world inside the cave[rn], the world of shadow puppets, the theater, with no claims on the real, that opens a space for what Spivak has called "the minute foothold of praxis." "Though it's only poetic theater's faux duress / It's a vantage point, nonetheless": the theatrical pose provides a vantage point to consider the faux-ness of identity itself (153). This and the intrinsic sociality of theater give Toscano's poetic language a foothold in the fulcrum between subverting truth and speaking truth to power.

I suggest this reading in part because I think it's important to locate *Collapsible Poetics Theater* not only in the context of contemporary progressive poetry but also within the complex history of poets' engagements (and disengagements) with the theater. Plato famously rejected theater—and wrote in dramatic form. Similar parodoxical arrangements appear in the work of poets from Mallarmé to Olson (for a detailed account of this phenomenon, see Martin Puchner's *Stage Fright: Modernism, Antitheatricality, and Drama*). And (as Puchner

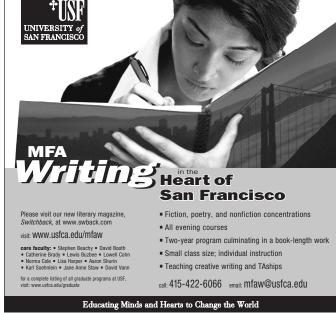
points out) this ambivalence is entirely related to politics, and the relationship between art and collective action. It's one thing to write the multiple self, and dream about revolutionary overthrow of the coercive "I"; it's another thing to figure out what to do with other people's bodies. Poets Theater as it's practiced today seems to me to sit uncomfortably between attraction to the theater and repulsion from it: interested in theater's collective possiblities (and the fun), but repelled by the seeming inescapability of subjectivity once real bodies are on stage (based on the erroneous but widely-held prejudice that all contemporary theater is "psychological"), it often strikes a less-than-satisfying compromise. Indeed, one could index Toscano's ambivalence through the vast variation in his stage directions, as he wrestles with the interaction between poetic language and stage action. Sometimes his players seem like E. Gordon Craig's übermarionettes, with almost parodically detailed instructions (diagrams included) for their activities ("Cordoned," "Spine," and "Clock, Deck, and Movement"). Other pieces, such as the fabulous, operatic trilogy, "Truax Inimical." have no directions at all: Toscano lets the language do the talking. There he seems looser, more comfortable.

Admirers of Toscano's poetry (myself

among them) will recognize the dense and sticky language, the sharp jokes, and the smart, self-critical politics. And when Collapsible Poetics Theater works, it works great. Several of my favorites, "Eco-Strato-Static," "First Box," and "Memories of Somewhere. To Somewhere Else,' come off like Beckett for the internet age, their speakers scrappy and self-conscious, aware of their absurdity but trying very hard anyway (and sometimes, aware of the absurdity of their awareness-"Who're you-Bozo, the Existentialist?" [68]). But I

can't shake the feeling that the more "theatrical" Toscano thinks he's getting, the more "embodied," the less compelling the work becomes. Why, for instance, do we need to be told over and over that the "players can be of any age, gender, or accent"? Isn't that obvious? And is Toscano seriously instructing us, as he does in the directions for "Clock, Deck, and Movement," to, "weeks before the performance...come up with physically demonstrative 'psychic triggering' for each BMP [Body Movement Parameter]...whether it originates from some sort of trauma, or dream, or fuzzy memory of some real-life experience," but make sure that "though the BMPs register the harmonic overtones of the other activities, they must by no means fall into mimesis" (117)? Is that a joke about Method acting or is he just kidding?

In "Memories of Somewhere, To Somewhere Else" (138), one player muses, "perhaps together we can conjure up a volatile space...where signs shake off their 'natural selves'...cloak and de-cloak, you know?" (138). It's in that last phrase, "cloak and de-cloak," that the double movement of theater, always simultaneously revealing and concealing, stakes its claim. Poetic theater has a long history—not necessarily an illustrious one. But if Toscano continues to explore the



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BOOK REVIEWS

particular volitility of the theatrical medium, without sacrificing our juicy enjoyment of his poetry, he may just "re-volitalize" (139) a genre.

Shonni Enelow is a Brooklyn-based writer and a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania.

A Model of Order: Selected Letters on Poetry and Making lan Hamilton Finlay, edited by Thomas A. Clark (wax366, 2009)

REVIEW BY MILES CHAMPION

Thomas A. Clark has brought the lightest of editorial touches to bear on this modest but radiant selection of letters from what is surely a considerable correspondence (IHF was a wonderful letter-writer, as anyone who has read his 1963 letter to the spatialist poet Pierre Garnier-long available on UbuWebmust know). Indeed, Clark gives us only a brief paragraph by way of Introduction before we are straight into the first (undated) letter, and the 56-page book is entirely free of footnotes, references or additional context of any kind. Also, to judge by the ubiquity of the ellipse, almost all of the selections presented are in fact excerpted from longer communications; again, no details are given, save that the letters themselves are to be found in public collections, or have previously enjoyed magazine publication.

Any initial impression of cursory or slapdash editorial treatment is, however, quickly dispelled as we realize that Clark intends us to focus solely on the matter at hand: Finlay's evolving ideas about poiesis (making and form) as set out in his correspondence, and their possible implications for poetryof whatever kind. The first (ca. 1960?) letter, to George Mackay Brown, finds Finlay already an agoraphobic, but not yet a concrete poet. One of the pleasures of A Model of Order's chronological arrangement is that we get to chart the progression of Finlay's thinking as he becomes a concrete poet, having first been a writer of stories and then of plays (Finlay himself would have had little use for either thought or thinking as terms, preferring intelligence with its connotation of fineness). There is the familiar-to us Moderns—disparaging of those poets (all Scottish poets, seemingly, but especially Hugh MacDiarmid) who feel they have something to say (one thinks of de Kooning's "content is a glimpse," of Coolidge's "why not be a speaker?"), alongside an early statement of recurrent themes: the relationship between goodness and circularity; the idea—itself a result of the "totality" of the circular—as a moral shape.

In a 1961 letter to Lorine Niedecker, a distinction is made between movement and meter, the former corresponding more to tempo and cadence, qualities Finlay ascribes to prose that "goes on its toes"-Saroyan and Stevenson (the short stories). Sterne and Beckett (that "Sterne IN SLOW MOTION"). Tempo later connects to the tango (or is it the angle?) formed by the one-word poem and its title, a kind of corner that-if constructed correctly-opens out in all directions. Many of the letters from the sixties are studded with breathtakingly casual turns of phrase; when, due to heavy rain, fireworks at the commencement of the 1962 Edinburgh Festival fail to go off, Finlay writes-to Robert Creeley-that this non-event allowed the "waiting sadness" to come out (was this how Robert Smithson felt when he watched Neil Armstrong step out of Apollo 11 and realized just how drastically alone we are?). Already, rhyme seems merely another rhetorical device, and what Finlay wants is "for the words not to join into phrases but to be in space, each, as a sign." The next letter to Creeley carries enthusiastic mention of the Brazilian Noigandres group, along with the news that Finlay has begun work on concrete poems of his own. Around this time, he begins to make toys and objects-boats, airplanes, fish-out of wood. He refers to his poems as thingpoems - things themselves being always cast in a positive light in his correspondence, as true, simple, subtle, good. His toys are "pure objects" (not for you kids!). Nouns advance; syntax recedes.

An argument for the provisional nature of theory is succinctly stated in the letter to Garnier, although one wonders if it was actually harder for the Cubists to come up with Cubism without the historical example of Cubism to guide them (one thinks of how difficult it was for Pierre Menard to write Don

Quixote, just as the identical sequels to In Sara, Mencken certainly took their toll on John Barton Wolgamot). By late 1963, the concrete poem has come to be firmly aligned with goodness and sanity, in contradistinction to the anguished poem of self; it is a model of order, "even if set in a space which is full of doubt" (and how about that for a restatement of negative capability in concrete terms!). By the mid-sixties, Finlay is constructing poems in wood and glass (when finances allow), along with ponds, paths and flowerbeds (the latter in collaboration with the gardener Sue Finlay, his second wife). A letter written on Christmas Day, 1965 attempts to make Creeley feel better about not writing, and one guesses that Creeley may have recalled Finlay's kind and encouraging words when he came to offer similar advice in his 1976 essay, "Was That a Real Poem or Did You Just Make It up Yourself?": "To work. Useless paper, useless pen. Scribbles of habit and egocentric dependence. But you did it once, didn't you-they said so, you thought so too. Try again." By 1967, Finlay regards such impasses as an inability to find the right form or "receptacle of the flow." We are, all of us, filled with innumerable poems; what comes and goes (and is usually mislabeled "inspiration") is our ability to find-to make-their forms. Sadly, the activity of toy-making has, in the meantime, lost its appeal: Finlay has become proficient with his tools, and now feels art where once he saw pleasure. But he and Sue are hard at work at Stonypath, even if the mole-trap they have somehow to set looks forbiddingly complicated, especially when placed among the garden-poems (moles can, under cover of night, make extremely short work of such texts). Atoms, he tells Ronald Johnson, are but the "lollypops of the ignorant," and "noone really believes in them."

One registers the increased orneriness and entrenchment of later years: a 1978 letter to Hugh Kenner makes passing reference to "recent Battles," and the outline of an argument with critic Christopher Norris (of PN Review) as to the validity and historicity of concrete poetry is drawn in several letters to Michael Schmidt, with Plotinus invoked as an early apologist of the non-discursive (and no, that doesn't mean only pictures). If the concrete poem situates itself in space, then

BOOK REVIEWS

the non-concrete is often to be found, in all its dishonesty, in society. But the space of concrete isn't physical only: it is an experience "on the level of being," whereas the lower-aiming poetry of social protest always includes its other by implication. Humor and dignity are regarded as excellent bedfellows, and one reflects almost ruefully that, these days, it is common for poets to take themselves far more seriously than their work.

This reviewer wishes he could share Finlay's high—the highest—estimation of Louis Zukofsky's poetry ("the operation of intelligence, as seen in the poetry of LZ, is one of the things which for me redeems the idea of 'man'"), but this is by the by—we each have only to find what we can use. In his letter to Kenner, Finlay points to language's ability to move forward while simultaneously standing still, and this in turn opens onto that more general ease with which art achieves the paradoxical (one wants, here, to paraphrase Alan Davies, who once wrote something to this effect: people who don't

think you can be in two places at once have clearly never read a book). Finlay's concern with ways of making is everywhere apparent; in a 1970 letter, he suggests that Johnson use italics that slope *backwards* (no, not that way!) to prevent his words from hurrying over-eagerly into the abyss.

The last letter in *A Model of Order* was written in 1998; Finlay writes that he feels "more and more that the purest poetry exists in single words or seemingly minute effects." Ten years earlier, he had written that all his work was "based on an aspiration to ordered simplicity." Both the joys and the anxieties attendant on that aspiration are fully alive in this gem of a book, which must, surely, be the first of many (larger!) volumes of lan Hamilton Finlay's correspondence to come.

Miles Champion's How to Laugh is forthcoming from Adventures in Poetry.

CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP REVIEWS BY GEOFFREY OLSEN

01. Elsewhere & Wise Kristi Maxwell (Dancing Girl Press, 2008)

It offers a sense of being multiple—of shifting between states of multiplicity and individuality as forms of emotion and compassion. The owl appears throughout the work as totem and identity. The language emulates the form "a pairing. / a parting. / a paring." This is a poetry of slight accumulations, quiet divestments. "Reveries depend on quiets to vary them." In reading this work one senses the eroticism of its language, sensing that these are love poems. But love poems thriving in language and poem-making. The way that the poems softly accumulate between the pages. The smallness of the sensations makes the poem-Maxwell congeals the emotion from the glinting fog of the lan-

ning Deck 2009

Jean Daive:

Jean Daive

UNDER THE DOME:

Walks with Paul Cela

Under the Dome: Walks with Paul Celan

[Série d'Ecriture, No. 22; translated from the French by Rosmarie Waldrop]

An intimate portrait of Paul Celan in his last, increasingly dark years. Celan and Daive translate each other, walk, talk. Tensions, silences and, discreetly, Celan's crises and suicide. The book blurs the time of these encounters (1965-1970) with the present of the author writing, 20 years later, on a Mediterranean island.

Jean Daive's impressive oeuvre alternates between poetry, narration and reflective prose. He has also translated Paul Celan and Robert Creeley. His first book, *Décimale blanche* (1967) was translated into German by Paul Celan, into English by Cid Corman. Our book is volume 5 of the prose series, *La Condition d'infini* (1995-97: 7 volumes).

Memoir, 136 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, ISBN13: 978-1-886224-97-1, original pbk. \$14 Burning Deck has also published his poem, *A Lesson in Music* (trans. Julie Kalendek).

Peter Waterhouse: Language Death Night Outside POEM.Novel

[Dichten=, No.11; translated from the German by Rosmarie Waldrop]

An "I" between languages. A text between the genres of poem and novel. 3 cities, 3 poems, 3 philosophers. A life takes shape through precise particulars in short, staccato sentences. But the effort toward the concrete and definite stands in tension with the boundlessness of thought where the city turns ship, and a flower in Vienna touches the sand dunes of North Africa.

Born 1956 in Berlin, of an English father and an Austrian mother, Peter Waterhouse is one of Austria's leading poets and a noted translator from both English and Italian. He has received numerous prizes.

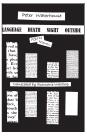
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BOOK REVIEWS

guage, not dense but wonderfully shifting and elusive. The work is rife with textures and fabrics: "still as a hem," "the heft of silk we call creek."

"our hands verbs ornaments with action"

Later

"Heist we hive / that our taking be natural"

Maxwell articulates the experience of poem as momentary surface—not poems generated into the context of assumed knowledge, but that the language is something that we immediately receive. As we face the contours of these poems, the meanings just barely elude us and the poems remain feral. Perhaps that is where the owl as symbol begins—elusive forest figure, action of the poem where one is struck and pinioned, like the owl pinning a mouse in its talons. It is not clear whether the reader is the owl or the mouse, or the writer is the owl or the mouse. Becoming hybrids in the process of engaging with these poems.

The address to the other/otherness. These poems move obliquely along the edge of the void—they make the page both word substance and word space. These "flail pinned."

02. The Drought Dana Ward (Open 24 Hours, 2009)

The drought is here—the lost, the dead, the adolescent embarrassment. These poems flow through those past droughts, recounting and reawakening the dried memories. A sense of loss permeates the work: the lost adolescence, innocence, friends, virginity, place. A fear of "what would I do with these" experiences, emotions. The drought seems to me to be the melancholy, the interiorized mourning, that must melt, rain, flow, pour out into the poem. Catharsis perhaps, but moving towards something more impersonal. An evocation of the lost, to make it be.

The poems themselves are beautifully consonant in the ear: rich tones float in and out; delicate, rapid cadences move, though still tough, unflinching. They move in a way

that makes the poems vitally *present*. A cascade of thought and emotion made tactile with voluble movement. Poem "feeds on the empty momentum."

So there is impurity, commodities: "the LV on a Luis Vuitton bag," "Penelope Nokia Telephone" but we "live our reveries." Maximalist, not stationary or pure, taking in the accidents and catastrophes of poem/life. Ward uses the poem to move with and through what is lived, what is profoundly experienced. Like, looking back at what happened and recognizing that as language and memory and behavior. It is hyper-focused, allowing these minute deviations in the aggregated particles of the poem. They tumble out, unfold down the page.

The body and the poem is a little sloppy, a little awkward—it gets a sense of itself, and then it loses it some. It's beautiful, watching that. The awkwardness that Ward puts into play makes it so lithesome somehow. The grace of allowing the slight fall. Adolescence still feels terrible. The not-knowing all that you knew you could know or would know or that this would be lost and that would be there forever. These moments glint there in the streams. In the end the elegy stands as the great possibility of the poet: "He who would change the world by being beautiful and sporadically attentive to its wreck."

03. Shaved Code Frances Richards (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2008)

Immediately, with the first poems the forest is presented as force, movement: "Tall trees fell down." Redwoods shifting the forest floor, "flinging these great slabs of recalcitrant / matter..." How humans disrupt this "concentric patience, standing" of the trees, force the explosion concussing the forest. The first poems are lyrical, capturing the privacy of these catastrophes, movements of living. Forest as information: "mangled syntax."

The poems are condensed and flickering, attentive to the living forest. "syllables push in plush ground, conceive / diameter while propulsive from the gut..." The trees are imbued with emotion, not dead giants, but made emotive without being made human.

At one point they are buffalo, brought to "its knees before ecstatic fellers." The sudden violence culling the trees.

Juxtaposed against the fluctuating lyrics on the trees are excerpts on the harassment and attacks on "Earth First!" activists by FBI agents. The excerpts are clear accounts of the events, relating the car bombing of the activist's vehicle. The falling trees destroyed in clear-cutting generate explosions in a forest floor that is pelvis and chassis of car, linking the ravaging of the forest with the FBI's attempt on the lives of Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney. The rhetorical mode recounting the events and trial is flat, factual, countered with the eroticized, living, wild forest presented in other sections of the chapbook. An ecopoetics enacting shifting modes of attention, intensity. The contrast between the two modes appears stark at first, but a careful reading soon reveals the points where they spill into each other, overlap. Work both subtle and bold.

Geoffrey Olsen is the author of the chapbook End Notebook (Petrichord Books), and lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

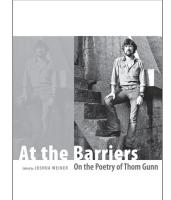
Borders, ed. Susanne Christensen & Audun Lindholm (Chain Links, 2008)

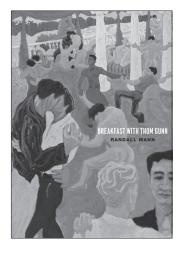
REVIEW BY KAPLAN HARRIS

Borders is the second installment in a new book series from Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr's journal Chain. One would think that generating a buzz for this project would not be a problem, but I think it was mostly overlooked last year. This is odd given what one would assume is a timely moment to connect (or reconnect) with writers outside of the U.S., in this case with contributors who are Norwegian, Swedish and Danish.

Spearheading the book are Susanne Christensen and Audun Lindholm, two editors for the Oslo-based literary magazine *Vagant* (which features writers like Alfred Jarry, Aase Berg and Caroline Bergvall). In *Borders* they give us three works translated into English. The first is Swedish writer Ida Börjel's "European Waistmeasures." Organized in a sequence of prose squares, the

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October 28, 7 p.m.

(www.newschool.edu)

Special Session: Thom Gunn

Modern Language Association, Philadelphia

December 29, 1:45 p.m.

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poem compiles national stereotypes that often pass for cultural wisdom. Each member of the European Union is subjected to a portrait, and they often overlap: "All Luxembourgian homes are clean vacuum-cleaned surfaces to stand on. Greek people walk barefoot on the kitchen floor over the bathroom floor and out in the hall. Luxembourgian men do not walk in any mud and never ever show any filth under their fingernails. Luxembourgian babies are clean white silent." Börjel focuses on what she calls "generalizations, trifles, and prejudices," She suggests that one can't get outside of politically incorrect views of others, and in foregrounding these views so relentlessly, she plays on the discomfort of a knowing irony. Börjel sets up a problem: people hold whacked ideas about other people, let's just hope they don't act on them. But whether Börjel thinks they act on them is left open because her lists are purely generative without ever pointing to a reassuring closure. We wait for a wink that never comes. The aggression of these preconceived ideas are (so it seems) here to stay: "Yes, Belgians know partner, participant, and peculiar. Yes, we know particular and party. Will a tension arise between walls?"

The other two sections explore different kinds of fictional histories. One is Matias Faldbakken's essay imagining a what-if world where the actor Edward Norton is also a civic-minded activist bent on creating a "Planned Community for Mainstream Dissidents." The other section, the longest in the book, is by Das Beckwerk, a Copenhagen-based theater and arts group, represented here mainly by Nielsen and Rasmussen (whose full names are never given). Their work is "The Democracy," a photojournalistic account of their travels in Denmark, Kuwait, Iraq, United States, and Jordon. In their own words, they seek to inaugurate "a parallel world history, a European alternative to the American led attempt to 'introduce Democracy and Freedom in every part of the world." In one early episode, the theater building of Das Beckwerk is declared an Iraqi territory. It follows that the building must be open to U.S. military inspectionsand that the surrounding areas in Copenhagen may suffer fallout from any conflicts.

The members meet inside of Das Beckwerk to discuss self-management, constitutions, and democracy. Meanwhile one member marches around the city carrying an Iraqi flag. Then the real journey begins, all documented in glossy pages that maximize the photographic detail. The effect is like the splendors of a travel magazine, but it stands in a paradoxical relation with the content-a quixotic journey across heterogeneous contact zones. The package on each phase of their trip is a metal box with a slapdash paper sign: "The Democracy." Always dressed in fine suits of the business-professional class, the two members carry the box through security gates and airport terminals around the world. Note the difficulties of such a scheme in 2003: "Presumably because of the heightened terror alert, the box is detained for two days by Customs in John F. Kennedy airport, and then the Americans send The Democracy back to Europe." They mean the actual box is sent back, but the message is clear. Undeterred, the two members continue on and record their many encounters in the U.S. They are met with baffled stares, for example, when they speak at a Democratic Party rally in NY. The crowd reactions are included: "Are you guys some kinda artists?"; "If I throw a party one of these days, would you then bring your Democracy-box?" More stares greet them when they set up a display tent called the "Nomadic Parliament" at Georgetown University and then again at the University of Jordon. Is this all for real? So it appears, even if they call their project, "A fictionalisation of the real. A realisation of the fiction." Das Beckwerk has made something that is part performance art, part The Amazing Race. At one point they even refer to themselves as a "reality show" taking place in the public arena. And aren't reality shows a kind of wishful thinking? Das Beckwerk says it is "the work of art as utopia or prophecy."

Kaplan Harris is editing, with Rod Smith and Peter Baker, The Selected Letters of Robert Creeley.

Zero Readership: an epic Filip Marinovich (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008) REVIEW BY PAOLO JAVIER

Zero Readership for Filip Marinovich's long poem, the writing of which spans nearly a decade of travel to Belgrade and the surrounding region—site of NATO's two-month bombing campaign in '99, and whose tenth anniversary this year couldn't even earn its entry into the "fashionable politics of the youth."

Zero Readership for an anti-war poem that lacks fashionable outrage. Marinovich, who is Serbian-American, dares to question "sing[ing] the dead [he] never knew"—a sense of western liberal entitlement to speak. Early on in Book 1: first, in the voice of the Old Man in the Prolog ("You want me to help you / 'liberate' the country? You uncork the grenade with your teeth— / ... Who christened you / the leader of a nation to send boys in sacks home?") then Marinovich himself ("Belgrade lights / is this a metropolis now that I've arrived?").

Zero Readership for a poem whose expression of outrage over the NATO bombings the poet defers to his relatives. "People here like to talk in monologues," Marinovich writes, and his family members' accounts of the war and its aftermath in the region frequently interrupt his wi(l)de-eyed, streaming consciousness. Grampa Mercy, Grampa Chaki, Granma Nada, Aunt Ivana, Nurse Mira, Wolfman—they relate their experiences in wide-ranging tones. Such variety works to interrupt an otherwise persistently manic text that wavers between the poet's urge to "bring me back to my self" and his need to "kill the diary whining."

Zero Readership for a poet open about his ambition to compose an epic. In a way, Marinovich's poem reads like an epic note to self. "True muse, Do sing in me," the poet utters in Book I, and the proceeding lyric bursts into fragments of relief ("I spread black typewriter discharge down white sheets and feel clean"), invocation ("Sister Ellipses pray for me that what I come up with after you is peaceful"), poesy ("There is nothing to make with here / but what

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you heard and saw and smelt and touched and tasted"), megalomania ("Prophecy, I'm wired for rhetoric and sentences"), fragility ("be thoughtful enough to spill my guts / so my guts don't spill me"), and exasperation ("HELL CEMENT POURED IN HOT GOBS / ON BALKAN MOBS / I can't write this").

Zero Readership, for in spite of the poem's formal division—a Prolog, Books 1 and 2, and a Restpage—, it remains consistently in-progress, messy, and raw. And the book's design perfectly captures this: oversized like an art journal or notebook, whose covers and chapter pages reproduce Marinovich's frenetic oil-chalk lettering and doodles. It also honors a poem whose speed and frenzy suggest a drawing, as much as writing, of the words.

Zero Readership for a work that continues the innovation of the American long poem pioneered by Williams, Pound, Zukofsky, and Ginsberg. Teeming with more than "LIVE CANTOS OPEN ALL NIGHT," Marinovich's poem slips in and out of varying forms of address: epistolary, conversation, journal entry, prayer, interview, dramatic scene, ode. The opening of Pound's Cantos is echoed in its final line ("Took a ship / and we went to it!"), but Zero Readership's restless shape recalls the virtuosity of 'A'. "One problem facing anyone writing a long poem is simply how long it takes to write. Either the world changes so radically that the original design for the poem no longer fits, or the poet does," Peter Quartermain luminously writes about Zukofsky in his essay "Instant Entirety." Marinovich, channeling Zukofsky, avoids such a quandary in Zero Readership by "deliberately building discontinuity" (Quartermain's words, again) into the poem's structure. He also rejects official verse culture's regulatory "[p]ersona with voice and reader," and eschews a driving narrative ("if you want prose there's the newspapers") for a writing "whose beat," as Zukofsky writes in 'A', the poet "cannot / entirely be aware of."*

Such negative capability informs much of *Zero Readership's* thought and composition. The poem's penultimate stanza "[i]n Marinovichland, / Marinovichland / where I don't understand / the Marinovich language" offers both a critique and a cel-

ebration of the astonishing paratactic writing that precedes it on the same page, and throughout earlier sections of the book

zero fix mistaken serense submarine Labor Day paresis radiant Birofix greetings to Zero Readership flotilla lighter obligate

so that the language enacts Marinovich's own sense of a famous line by Pasternak, "the tumult amidst the music of the dictionary." Not surprisingly, a long poem as willing to operate outside of narrative purpose as *Zero Readership* locates "[its] story...in each word," as Peter Quartermain also observes of Zukofsky's 'A':

and what remains

words or rather

word remains

husks arranged

Here, Marinovich "[thinks] to write an inquiry into 'Uncreative Writing'", but at ground zero of the poem, why bother to shine a light on its already blindingly "irradiated language"?

"Muse, hah? Sounds progressive!", Marinovich quips early in Zero Readership, but such moments of self-deprecation recurring throughout the poem cannot mask its achievement of singing beyond its noodle, before humankind, and with humankindess. This truly post-post epic caused my "Art palpitations," not to mention a persistent inability to resist staying "in Belgrade morning ink," "sane / enough to kiss the living room windowpane / Goodmorning."

Paolo Javier is the author of LMFAO (OMG!), Goldfish Kisses (Sona), 60 lv bo(e)mbs (O Books), and the time at the end of this writing (Ahadada Books); and he publishes 2nd Ave Poetry.

Tuned Droves
Eric Baus
(Octopus Books 2009)
REVIEW BY PAUL KILLEBREW

It's so difficult to break the mind out of its habits. Slavoj Zizek talks about how strange

it is to catch sight of yourself in a mirrored room from an angle just off from dead-on, how it takes a moment to ratchet back into yourself from the position of someone observing you. We've all had experiences when, after reading something dozens of times, even over several years, you suddenly realize that a word or a phrase is totally different from the way you had been reading it, and for a moment you negotiate between the alternatives, as if it really could be either way.

Eric Baus's careful and beautiful second book, *Tuned Droves*, is written in the belief that such experiences have metaphorical and romantic resonance. Baus has said in an interview that people tend to misread the book's title as "turned doves" and "tuned bones," and the language often seems to invite these kinds of mistakes. The line, "To me it is like I am walking to a microphone," asks, to me anyway, to be misread ("To me it is like I am talking to a microphone"). The line is from the sequence "I Know the Letters This Way," a title that practically apologizes for any misunderstandings.

Misreadings are so personal, though, so who's to say whether anyone else will see these things the way I do? Tuned Droves was built for questions like this. Patterns suggest themselves-words repeated at meaningful intervals, poems that seem to be the product of mechanical compositional methods, a sort of he and she narrative, or the use of titles within poems-but the patterns only suggest themselves. Take, for instance, whatever mechanical compositional methods might be at work. Baus said in an interview that he used different kinds of "mechanical processes that didn't involve a lot of my conscious intervention: putting things in columns, cutting them up, mulching and harvesting the language." It's interesting, though. These poems aren't like Ted Berrigan's Sonnet XV, where the compositional method used is fairly apparent. Whatever processes Baus used, he didn't accept their results like the outcome of a survey. And yet at the same time, it certainly does seem like a mechanical process was at work. And that's how all the larger patterns are. They leave no discernable hook, so one is left with occasional suggestions

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that surface and dissipate like déjà vu sensations. What happens to you after you pick up on something like that? What kinds of decisions are you making, and why do you make the decisions you do?

Tuned Droves is constructed so that there's time to consider. Much of the book has a fairly spartan vocabulary, and one- and two-syllable words predominate: "The way I talk is a result of the way I hear her I was told but it took how long to show up in cursive." The austerity of the words pulls the poems down to rudiments, but it doesn't make the poems any chummier. If anything, it's like an lan Tyson image made up of blocks of blue or gray; the poems strike you with the incredible abstraction that resides at the very basic levels of the medium.

Tuning involves modulating a pitch or frequency within an interval until you find a desired point: "A boy becomes related to water. A body recording over waves." Imagine a kind of tuning where the point can't be found because it keeps slipping. Like the title of one poem, "Inside any good song someone is lost," words in *Tuned Droves* are moving targets: "What is wood is wood, what is cat is beautifully cast." Or consider the dense reverb in this title: "An echoed exoskeleton". Or "it's raining.' It's raining."

Lused the word "romantic" earlier and did so for a reason. It's not only because Baus gendered the poems in Tuned Droves-we have a he and a she, a boy and a man and a woman (though never a girl), a Mrs. Hand and Miss Toy, a woman named "Ding"-but also because romance is one way to tap into the broader meanings of the modulations occurring at the level of language. I thought of it this way: say one day I realize I have developed an unfavorable impression of another person, and the same day a friend brings up that person in a conversation. I ask, What do you think of him? My friend says, I really like him, he's so nice! I don't quite know what to say. I ask myself, Is there something wrong with me? Does my friend know something I don't? Later, I fall in love with him, and later still I think, No, I had him pegged all along. This, I think, is largely how I've come to know anything about the world. New experiences recalibrate expectations,

a process that feels like refinement while it's happening but that in retrospect is probably better described as flailing. What narratives there are in *Tuned Droves* seem to follow this course, one that "romance" seems to capture well enough. "She appears as herself. The same someone else." "I am not her son. A ding and its echo, snow." But the narratives are only part of it; thermostatic familiarity pervades *Tuned Droves*. We see it happen to the speaker and his voice ("Out of the bus and talking, he is trying to reappear."), and to the poems and their words ("Hello. Normal Hello.") The book's great beauty is to make it all of a piece.

Paul Killebrew is the author of Flowers, forth-coming from Canarium Books. He is a lawyer at Innocence Project New Orleans.

Dick of the Dead Rachel Loden (Ahsahta 2009) REVIEW BY JOANNA FUHRMAN

According to Washington Post journalist Elizabeth Drew, a Republican senator described Richard Nixon in 1969 as "the man with the portable center," in other words, a man with no convictions except for his own desires for power and ego-gratification. In recent years, at the height of the Bush/ Cheney oligarchy, many of us felt nostalgic for what we saw as the lesser evils of the Nixon years. Nixon's pragmatic, albeit empty, moral stance seemed preferable to those who looked down on the "reality-based community" and felt that they could refashion the world through sheer belief and ideology without any regard for history or facts. Perhaps because of this contrast, a tongueonly-slightly-in-cheek nostalgia for Nixon as the monster du jour infuses Rachel Loden's new collection Dick of the Dead. Throughout the book, Tricky Dick reappears as a pathosfilled ghost, haunting Loden's kitschy dreamscapes, theme-part distorted history and brand-saturated lyrics.

Loden implicitly contrasts Nixon's ego-defined emptiness with contemporary zealots. In "The Pure of Heart, Those Murderers" she writes:

Preserve us from the pure of heart, those murderers, unsullied

balletmasters of faux-heroic

barricades, spoonfed aesthetic-poseurs

There is, of course, great humor in the extreme nature of the speaker's plea, a shock elicited by the unexpected juxtaposition of the words "pure of heart" with "murders." The stanza break between the words "heart" and "murderers" emphasizes this contrast. Her use of sound here is characteristic of her craft throughout the collection. The combination of internal alliteration (c sounds), slant rhyme ("heroic"/ "aesthetic") and short lines with strong enjambment gives the poem its staccato music and uncomfortable feel. These techniques slow the poem down, keeping the poem's polemics from feeling too predictable or easy. There's also a wonderful slyness to the poem's movement; the speaker shifts quickly from referencing army police ("faux-heroic / barricade") to religious fanatics of all denominations, from bornagain Christians ("fiery reverends") to Orthodox Jews ("paralyzed / by female treyf"), and perhaps even mainstream poetry audiences ("spoonfed / aesthetic poseurs"). All of these groups are equally dangerous, not so much because of their hearts, but because of their rigid belief in their own purity.

The anger in "The Pure of Heart..." is in sharp contrast with the almost sweet treatment Nixon receives throughout the collection. Nixon's "portable center," even more prominent in death, is continually referred to as "freedom" and is lyrically described. In "Milhous as the King of Ghosts," a clever line-by-line rewriting of Stevens's "A Rabbit as the King of Ghosts," Nixon speaks from beyond the grave.

There is no use in counting. It comes of itself;

All the blue votes turning a brilliant red, Even in Chicago. The wind moves on the lawns

And moves in myself. The last lowa sweet corn

Is for me, the snows of New Hampshire drift up

Into an empire of self that knows no boundaries.

I become an empire that fills the oleaginous pipelines of the earth...

Never has the image of states voting Republican been described with such beauty. Nixon's emptiness—the wind is literally moving through him-is reminiscent of the Romantic/Modern idea that the summit of lyric poetry is a sublime destruction of the self. Stevens's description of the sublime (which is rather funny in the original) has been humorously transformed into an image of empire and oil. One might see Loden's rewriting as a send-up of the lyric tradition. By creating a sublime image that's morally repugnant, Loden calls into question the validity of the lyric moment. Still, to me, the poem is more interesting than mere parody. The poem's content, commentary and humor never diminish its aesthetic beauty. It may very well be a parody of the sublime, but it is also oddly sublime in itself. This tension is typical of the collection and what makes it so intoxicating.

Despite the title and the truncated picture on the cover, there is much in the collection that has little or nothing to do with Nixon. As in her first collection, *Hotel Imperium* (another book with Nixon on the cover), Loden's poems wittily explore constructions of femininity, the absurdity of runaway capitalism and the role of art in commodity culture. She does all this with restraint, trenchant wit and rich sonic play. If Nixon were still alive, he might not understand the subtlety of Loden's humor, but I am sure Checkers would love it.

Joanna Fuhrman is the author of three books of poetry, including Moraine (2006). Her new collection, Pageant, is forthcoming from Alice James Books in November 2009.

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We might also consider the more mundane but equally interesting usage of the word "magic," that is to say, sleight of hand or prestidigitation. What does a stage magician have in common with the writer?

There will be lots of reading and writing in this workshop.

Mitch Highfill is a poet and Tarot consultant who lives in Brooklyn. He is the author of several books, including Moth Light (Abraham Lincoln) and REBIS (Open Mouth).

DRAWING THE BOUNDARIES OF A FIRE PAOLO JAVIER SATURDAYS AT 12:00PM— 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 10

Since the advent of the modern cartoon strip, poets, artists, and poet-artists alike have turned to its language as a vital source for innovation in their own practice. We will explore such a tradition. The presence of the poetic in the modern comic book will be a focus of our writing and discussion, and we will experiment with its potential through a diverse practice. Collaboration between participants will be required for selected exercises, and encouraged throughout the workshop.

Paolo Javier is the author of LMFAO (OMG!),
Goldfish Kisses (Sona Books), 60 lv bo(e)
mbs (O Books), and the time at the end of
this writing (Ahadada Books). He is currently working on OBB, a multimedia poetry
comic with artist Ernest Concepcion; and he
publishes 2nd Ave Poetry.

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—Elaine Equ



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