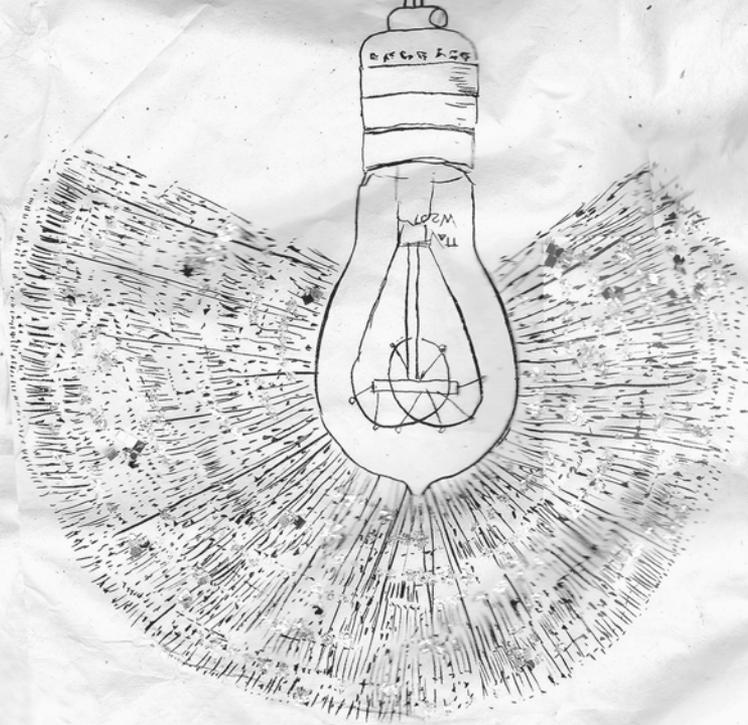


THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

Summer Writing Program 2009

Weekly Workshops June 15–July 12 • Boulder, CO

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Outrider: Jack Kerouac School Lineages

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WEEK TWO: June 22–28

Contemplative Poethics:

Endangered Species and Imagination

Faculty: Reed Bye, Amy Catanzano, Maxine Chernoff, Laura Elrick, Bhanu Kapil, Akilah Oliver, Elizabeth Robinson, Jerome Rothenberg, Selah Saterstrom, Eleni Sikelianos, Cecilia Vicuña, Anne Waldman and Wesley Tanner (printshop)

WEEK THREE: June 29–July 5

Polyvalent/Rhizomic Identities

Faculty: Rosa Alcalá, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Sherwin Bitsui, Bei Dao, Clayton Eshleman, Gloria Frym, Mark McMorris, Semezdin Mehmedinovic, Leonard Schwartz, Christopher Stackhouse, Truong Tran, Lewis Warsh, Zhang Er and Shari DeGraw (printshop)

WEEK FOUR: July 6–12

Artistic Sangha:

Performance, Publishing, Community & Collaboration

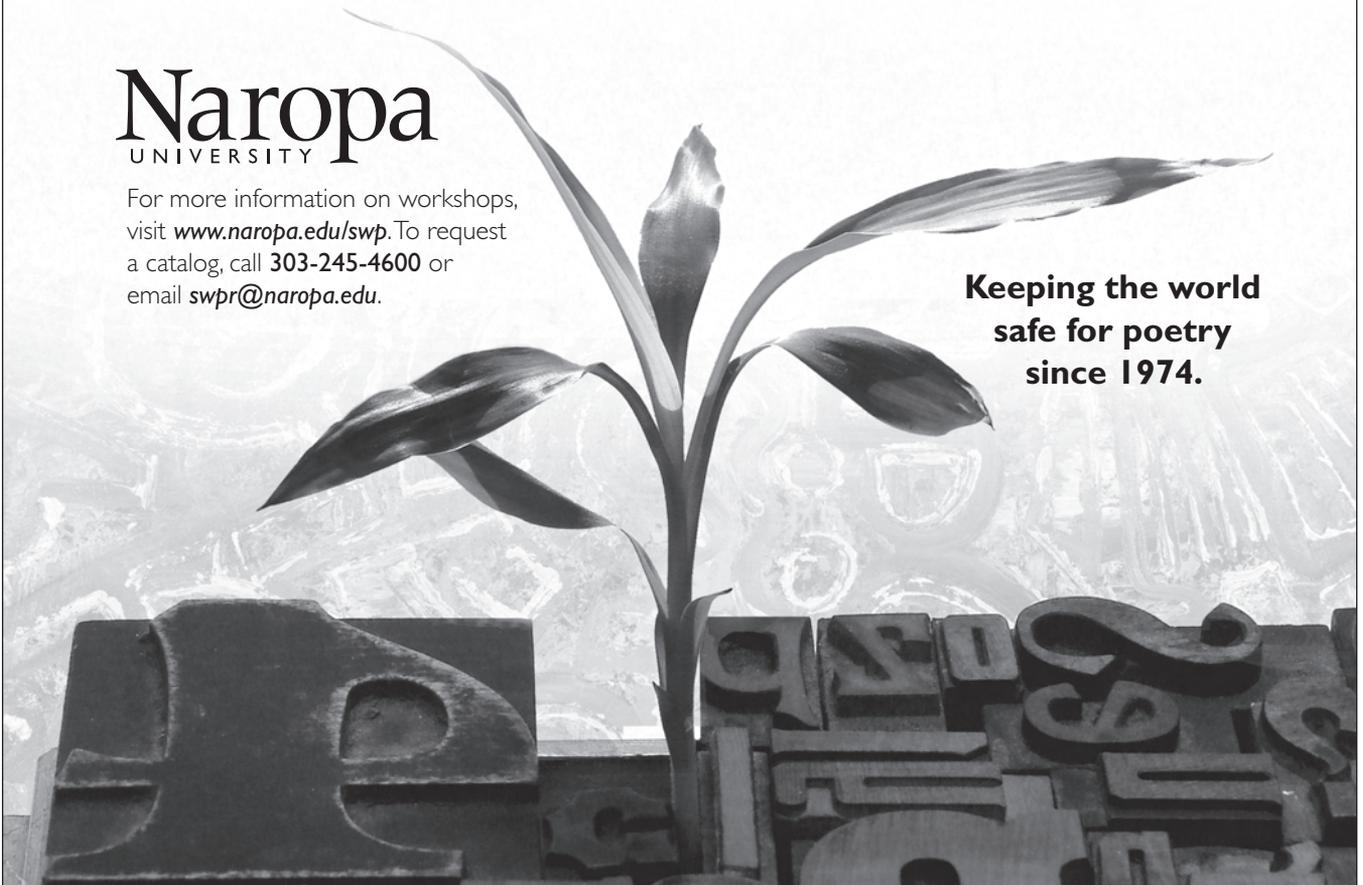
Faculty: Michelle Ellsworth, Brian Evenson, Simone Forti, C.S. Giscombe, Joanna Howard, Dan Machlin, Rusty Morrison, Hoa Nguyen, Max Regan, Ed Roberson, Alberto Ruy Sanchez, Dale Smith, Steven Taylor, Wang Ping and Mary Tasillo (printshop)

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THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#218 FEBRUARY/MARCH 2009

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

This February/March issue is always the most challenging for us to get out as we are simultaneously producing a gigantic event called the Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading. I looked up my favorite poem about work a few times last week. It's by John Ashbery. Here's a bit of it: "I look down into the street and see people, each walking with an inner peace, // And envy them—they are so far away from me! // Not one of them has to worry about getting out this manual on schedule."

Exhaustion aside, we have done it again! The 35th New Year's Day Marathon Reading was another beautiful manifestation of a community at work. I'd like to thank all of the poets, dancers, and musicians who made the program loop-the-loop with such energy all we had to do is stand back and let it happen. (Okay, we had to do some behind-the-scenes maneuvering, but hopefully we made it look easy.) In an event splitting with "wowie" moments, one of the most remarkable to me was Jonas Mekas taking the stage with a box that contained Allen Ginsberg's beard and suggesting that we try to clone him! I would also like to thank our 80 volunteers, the 900 people who attended throughout the day, our book and food donors, David Vogen for handling everyone's tech needs with unparalleled skill and finesse, and our Board of Directors, Corrine, and Arlo for deepening my understanding of teamwork. We raised just over \$13,000, which is on par with proceeds from years past. We are delighted that so many people continue to join us to celebrate and reaffirm our work.

- Stacy Szymaszek

GRATITUDENOUS

We the Poetry Project staff would like to thank you the community for the invaluable time and energy you spent on making the 35th Annual New Years Day Marathon happen. Over 130 readers and performers, almost 100 day-of volunteers, dozens of

book donors and food givers...you deserve showers of splendid, magical happiness rained upon your year. Despite the fog of exhaustion enveloping we three, we have clarity enough to recognize how dynamic, kind, and generous the poetry community-at-large can be.

Volunteers: Bob Rosenthal, Don Yorty, Carol Mullen, Douglas Rothschild, Kyle Souza, Kelly Ginger, Susan Landers, Natasha Dwyer, Christa Quint, Joe Eliot, Derek Kroessler, Kaitlyn Fitzpatrick, Diana Hamilton, Eddie Hopely, Elinor Nauen, Adam Davis, Kate Jaeger, Jeff Perkins, Gillian McCain, Donna Brook, Cliff Fyman, Evelyn Reilly, Nathaniel Siegel, Kim Lyons, Shannon Fitzpatrick, Erica Wessmann, Joe Robitaille, Nicole Peyrafitte, Miles Joris-Peyrafitte, Dorothy Friedman August, Larry Warshaw, Adeena Karasick, David Kirschenbaum, Kristin Prevallet, Phyllis Wat, Ian Wilder, Stephanie Gray, David Cameron, Tom Savage, Joanna Fuhrman, Thomas Seely, Nicole Wallace, Patricia Spears Jones, Pam Brown, John S. Hall, Edwin Torres, Erica Kaufman, Evan Kennedy, Will Creeley, Marcella Durand, Bill Kushner, Will Edmiston, Kim Wilder, Maria Mirabel, CAConrad, Amanda Deutch, Jim Behrle, Kyle Schlesinger, Evelyn Reilly, Brenda Iijima, Paul Killebrew, Corina Copp, Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle, Bianca DeMars, Dustin Williamson, Nina Karacosta, Susie Timmons, Lauren Russell, KB Jones, Nathaniel Siegel, Ben Malkin, Kathleen Connell, Lisa Ozag, Sara Wintz and all of the people who rolled up their sleeves and helped us at the end of the night.

Vendors: Bob Rosenthal and Don Yorty (chili!), Veselka, S'Mac, Two Boots, Life Café, Porto Rico Coffee, Fat Sal's, Nicole Peyrafitte (crepes!), Grand Daisy Bakery, Amy's Bread, Buttercup Bake Shop, and all the individuals who brought baked goods that day.

Books: Bootstrap Press, Eileen Tabios & Meritage Press, Faux Press, Otoliths, Anselm Berrigan & Karen Weiser, Bloop Books, Instance Press, Ugly Duckling Presse, Edge Books, Susan Mills, Brown Boke Press, Krupskaya, Coffee House Press, Litmus Press, Sandy Berrigan, Belladonna, Futurepoem, David Henderson, Brenda

Iijima & Portable Press at Yo Yo Labs, Stacy Szymaszek, CAConrad, Lyn Hejinian & Jack Collom, Vernon Frazer, Star Black, Susie Timmons, David Kirshenbaum, Pierre Joris, Nathaniel Siegel, Barry Denny, Thaddeus Rutkowski, Cliff Fyman, Phyllis Wat & Straw Gate Books, Renato Rosaldo, David Cameron, Richard O'Russa & Marcella Durand, Kristin Prevallet, Anne Waldman, Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith, Dorothy Friedman August, Edwin Torres, Reuben Butchart, and everyone else who made day-of donations.

- Corrine Fitzpatrick

SNOWED IN. NO SNOW?

At 4:55AM, well after the largest snowstorm Portland, Oregon had seen in seventy years had thawed, bleary-eyed, airport-brained, and Iron Maiden cycling through my head, full ready for my midnight kiss and to hear Taylor's auld yearly bawdiness rain Casio upon my dehydrated melon, the only flight in town...cancelled. Really?

No snow on the ground, but a heavy wind? I call b#\$%^&! on Delta Airlines. But at least I wouldn't be spending New Years in Salt Lake, nor missing the Marathon while buying a temporary champagne membership in some Utah tavern revisiting memories of missed Elder glory. But I missed my kiss and missed the gumbo.

Then somewhere near gate C7 it hit me: soon I'll only have one more of these issues to plate. And I began to miss my maker. And my maker missed me. This is my family, my church. The free time coming isn't all that free. I'll be released with a cost, and that cost is a kind of vacant price—silent space, so little to do. I really am going to miss it all. Crazy.

- John Coletti

CORRECTION

In last issue's conversation between Lee Ann Brown and Kristin Prevallet, Andrea Baker's name was wrongly cited as Andrea Brady. (Andrea Baker is a poet who runs a store named "Clank" on Franklin Avenue in Brooklyn.)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I am so glad that Kristin Prevallet bought up the story of Helen Adam's infamous rocks. I remember that day well. The poet Andrea Baker and I had been discussing Adam for a couple of weeks. One night she showed up at my apartment with a huge bucket of rocks. She said, "I can't explain now, but these are Helen Adam's rocks." She later told me that she had retrieved them from the dumpster of our local junk shop, "The Thing." The event was no less than magical. My first book had come out a few months before to quiet notice. I was feeling dreadfully like an orphan in the poetry world—and often still do. That day, Adam, who was a bit of a misfit herself, was my sun telling me to just keep on like I do and pay no attention. The rocks now live throughout my bedroom and garden with a few distributed to my people in New Mexico.

- Jennifer Bartlett

POETRY PROJECT MEETS NOGUCHI MUSEUM

We will co-present an event called "Poetry in the Presence of Sculpture" in the main gallery of the Noguchi on Sunday, February 8th at 3PM. Poets **Paul Foster Johnson**, **Christopher Stackhouse**, and **Cathy Park Hong** will read original work written both directly in response to Noguchi and thematically in keeping with ideas of community and identity. Free with museum admission (ten dollars for adults, five for students and seniors). For directions please visit: <http://www.noguchi.org/directions.html>.

NOT ENOUGH NIGHT

Naropa University's low-residency MFA Creative Writing program announced the launch of the Fall '08 issue of its electronic magazine *Not Enough Night*. Check it out at: <http://www.naropa.edu/notenoughnight/index.htm>.

WHITING WRITERS' AWARDS

Congratulations to playwright and long-time friend of the Project Dael Orlandersmith, recipient of a 2008 Whiting Award. For a complete list of winners visit: http://www.whitingfoundation.org/whiting_2008.html.

ONWARDS

We are sad to note the passing of artist Grace Hartigan (b.1922), poet Nanao Sakaki (b. 1923), poet James Liddy (b. 1934), and Fluxus artist George Brecht (b. 1924).

TRIBUTE TO EMMA BEE BERNSTEIN IN MARCH

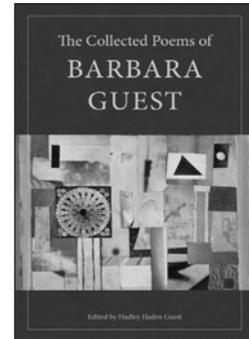
We are deeply saddened by the news that Emma Bee Bernstein passed away on December 20th in Venice, Italy, and our deepest condolences go out to Charles Bernstein, Susan Bee, and their son Felix.

The art world has lost one of its youngest and most accomplished luminaries. Emma graduated from the University of Chicago with degrees in Visual Arts & Art History. She showed and sold her photographs at A.I.R. Gallery in NYC, the Smart Museum in Chicago, and in numerous student exhibitions at the University of Chicago. She also starred in the film *Emma's Dilemma*, directed by Henry Hills, in which she interviews dozens of artists from the downtown NYC scene.

At the time of her death, Emma was working on a number of projects—including *GIRLdrive*, a project co-authored with Nona Willis Aronowitz, that aims to "interview and photograph young women across the country, finding out what is important to them and what they think and feel about feminism." *GIRLdrive* is scheduled to be published as a book that includes "photos, essays, interviews, and diary entries" by Seal Press in the Fall of 2009. For more information on *GIRLdrive* see: www.girl-drive.blogspot.com.

Emma was also at work on an event for the Belladonna Elder Series. The event has been rescheduled as a book party on **Sunday, March 1, 2009, at A.I.R. Gallery, 111 Front St., #228, in Dumbo, Brooklyn, from 3-5 PM** and will be a tribute to Emma. In addition, the Belladonna Book that Emma edited will be available that afternoon—featuring an introduction by Johanna Drucker, photographs and an essay by Emma Bee Bernstein, an interview with Marjorie Perloff, and artwork and an interview with Susan Bee. For more information please see www.belladonnaseries.org.

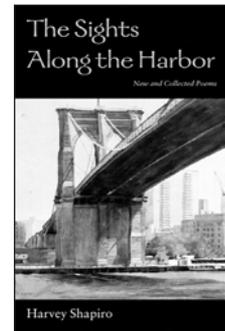
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WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

HAVING IT BOTH WAYS: THE PROSE POEM – LARRY FAGIN

TUESDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 10TH

This is a workshop designed for writers of both poetry and short prose, who are interested in investigating the boundary between the two areas, or those who have discovered such boundaries to be less than trustworthy. We will study this indeterminate form—its subtle musical passages, its rhythms, its connections to narrative and vignette, and its recent incorporations of disjunction and collage. We will read (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Stein, Max Jacob, Ponge, Ashbery, Bernadette Mayer, Lydia Davis, et al), exchange ideas (story, description, image, abstraction, the personal), and refine our writing with an eye toward publication. Weekly reading and writing assignments. Also, three individual consultations for each participant, throughout the ten weeks. **Larry Fagin** is the author of 18 books, the most recent of which is *Dig & Delve*, a collaboration with the artist Trevor Winkfield.

“THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS”: WRITING POLITICAL POEMS – SPARROW

THURSDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 12TH

A poem is a weapon; the question is which way to point it. In “This Machine Kills Fascists,” we will study how the masters fought evil, and we’ll teach the masters a few tricks of our own. It’s time to change the world, one line at a time. (Incidentally, this workshop is open to Republicans and free-market economists.) We will examine the works of Langston Hughes, Yoko Ono, Woody Guthrie, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, John Greenleaf Whittier, Mahmoud Darwish, and more. And we will write! **Sparrow**, author of *America: A Prophecy*, professor and Presidential candidate, will lead this enclave.

THE FILMIC MUSE: WRITING MOVIE POEMS – JEFFERY CONWAY

FRIDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 13TH

Whether you’re a movieholic, or just have a few movies you love, transforming film into poetry is a great way to stretch and attenuate as a writer. The workshop includes weekly readings of Frank O’Hara, Edward Field, David Trinidad, Denise Duhamel, and Lynn Crosbie, among others, as well as weekly writing exercises and opportunities to discuss your work. Some of the approaches we’ll try: persona poems as a way of inhabiting film; creating poems as scene-by-scene analysis or “poetic DVD commentary”; writing hybrid poems which incorporate biography, trivia, film criticism, and technical analysis. **Jeffery Conway**’s latest book is *The Album That Changed My Life*, a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award.

PHENOLOGY AND POETRY – SUSIE TIMMONS

SATURDAYS AT NOON: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 14TH

Phenology—the study of the sequence and timing of events in the life cycles of animals and plants as they respond to seasonal changes in environment—is used by farmers and gardeners to know when to plant, when to expect certain pests etc.; for example, “Don’t plant corn before oak leaves are the size of a squirrel’s ear.” We will use the practice of phenology in conjunction with a series of exercises as a departure for examining: the temporal scale of our work, the conundrum of cyclic change, the potential for physical discomfort as a source of inspiration. Meetings will consist of excursions (in close proximity to the Poetry Project) regardless of weather conditions, methodically observing precise changes in a preordained collection of sites as we go from the dead of winter into early spring. If you think looking at twigs is stupid, this workshop is not for you. **Susie Timmons** is the author of *Locked From the Outside* (winner of the inaugural Ted Berrigan Award).

The workshop fee is \$350, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for all fall and spring classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark’s Church, 131 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212)674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

REMEMBERING HANON REZNIKOV

(1950-2008)

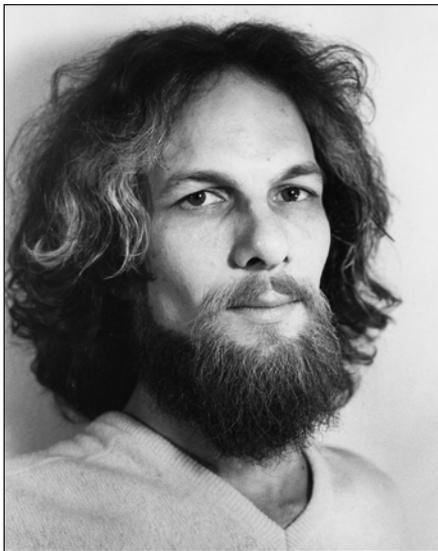


PHOTO CREDIT: LIVING THEATRE ARCHIVES

Hanon Reznikov died May 3, 2008 at the age of 57. Gone too soon, he left his wife and working companion, Judith Malina. With Judith, he lived 30 years, collaborating with her and Julian Beck in the ever-ongoing work of The Living Theatre. After Julian's death in 1985, Hanon kept the Theatre going, taking over the administrative reins. He and Judith married three years later. Hanon wrote over 12 plays for the company. With titles like "Utopia" (1995), "Anarchia" (1994), "Capital Changes" (1996), and "Eureka" (2008), he explored the anarchist-pacifist tradition of the Living and experimented with diverse ways of audience participation and the breaking always of that fourth wall of theater. He also specialized in using and extending texts of collaborators such as Jerome Rothenberg ("Poland 1931," 1987), Armand Schwerner ("The Tablets," 1989), and no less a personage than George Washington ("The Rules of Civility," 1991). He produced the opening of three theaters for the Living. There was the theater on East 3rd St. in the Lower East Side (1989-1993), the Living Theatre Europa in Rocchetta Ligure, Piemonte, Italy (1999-2004), and the new theater on Clinton St. (again in the Lower East Side of

New York), his last effort, which continues in his name.

Hanon grew up in Brooklyn where he excelled in high school and won entrance to Yale. He saw Judith and Julian first at a lecture they gave in Hartford in 1972. Before he even graduated he was living with them on St. Felix St. near the Brooklyn Academy, where the company was at the time. His first effort at playwriting and directing was "The Yellow Methuselah" in 1982. He used Shaw's play, "Back to Methuselah," and Kandinsky's essay, "The Yellow Sound" as inspiration. He consistently exploited found texts and Living Theatre techniques to provoke audience participation and political activism. His large street theater spectacle "Waste" (1991) used a cyclical form from "La Ronde" by Wedekind to voyage through several theatrical styles and epochs, from ancient Greek theater, to medieval mystery play, to French farce, to David Mamet, to Robert Wilson (and more), all taking place in different locations in a local community, and all on the subject of waste and the ecological dilemma of how to clean the planet. He also employed a consistent poetical style in the tradition of the Living and its many roots among the Beats and the Modernists.

The poetry of Reznikov is particularly apparent in his play, "The Zero Method" (1991), his play for himself and Judith. The work concerns their lives as artists, as a couple, and the problems, hopes, and challenges such a course presents. He uses Ludwig Wittgenstein as a provocateur. He alternates between Wittgenstein's philosophical conundrums, the life of the Living, and the struggles of Judith and himself. It is hard to take it out of the context of the theatrical moment, but I will quote the final scene of the play, a dialogue between HE and SHE, as is all of the play:

"The earth is falling / The house is falling / The dogs are falling / On their snouts / We are falling / I am leaving / I am leaving / I am leaving / I am leaving / The glaze is on the field / And white / The breathing is like hearing now / Like the future / You are now one field / You are now one eye / You are seeing me now / As one sees one / He is still a child / He is still intact / But his blood is thin / He bleeds / And dies a Jew / Whereof I cannot speak / Whereof I cannot speak / Whereof I cannot speak / Thereof... / I am the shore / My eye sees it / The wave breaks / And it is me / And still the gulls / I am closer than before / To voices / To pulse beats / To your wisdom / To you / Whereof I cannot speak / Whereof I cannot speak / Whereof I cannot speak / Thereof... / Tonight I am gone too far out / The light goes and is not replaced / The room darkens / The past crowds in and disappears / Like a storm of fireflies / I am still here / Whereof I cannot speak, thereof I must remain silent / Let's be the rope! / Let's be the rope!"

Hanon gave himself to life, to theater, to Judith, to the hope for art over death, and he succeeded; and, I do believe, we will be realizing it more and more as time goes by.

It was hard for him, and yet also a pleasure, to live in the enormous memory of Julian Beck, but Hanon proved himself up to the task and now he will become evermore with us. In his last work, "Eureka," he struggled with Edgar Allan Poe's quest to conquer death (from whom he took the inspiration, based on Poe's essay "Eureka"), knowing that it might not be so, but believing always in life, life within life, life. Choose life! And so he did.

- Thomas Walker
New York City, NY
November 14, 2008

AN INTERVIEW WITH UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE

Conducted by KYLE SCHLESINGER



PHOTO CREDIT: UDP EDITORS AND INTERNS

I've been interested in the relationship between poetry and typography for years; not concrete poetry per se, but the accretion of facts and factors that shape the face of poetry, past, present, and future. So when John Coletti asked me if I would like to interview someone for the Newsletter, I immediately thought of Anna Moschovakis and Matvei Yankelevich of Ugly Duckling Presse. Where do books come from? Where do they go? And how do they come to mean? These are some of the questions being hashed out one book at a time in UDP's studio in the Old American Can Factory near the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn. A nonprofit art and publishing collective producing small to mid-size editions of new poetry, translations, lost works, and artist's books, UDP has been a source of personal inspiration and comradery since I became acquainted with their work. We met at the UDP headquarters on a grey November day to discuss poetry, books, and beauty. The first third of the conversation, prompted by my first question, appears here, edited for clarity.

KS: Are the qualities that make bad printing good the same as the qualities that make good printing bad?

AM: I had a film professor at Berkeley in 1989—so before anyone and everyone could make a movie, but sort of on the cusp of that—and he used to say, “Now every bad movie is good”.... So the qualities that make good printing bad would be like a smudge, and a smudge is what makes bad printing good, in a way. Is that what you mean?

KS: Well, there's nothing precious about most UDP books. They're quite beautiful, but they aren't things I wouldn't take on the subway. They're portable and elegant and make use of non-precious materials. We don't see a lot of 100% cotton, heavy-weight, or handmade paper. We see recycled papers and things that have been put to another use, like the file folders for the Stan Apps book [*Soft Hands*]. So that's kind of what I mean—there's a utilitarian quality that I admire. And yet there's another school of thought, books with thick paper and big heavy covers, and gold embossing on the spine, that are conventionally beautiful. The beautiful book is usually associated with the private press tradition, something very different from what I think you're doing, and yet you're both making books that are very much aware of their bookishness.

AM: Yeah, and we seem not to be interested in making those types of books. It's true, we're not....

KS: But why?

AM: Why? Well, it opens up the question of craft versus art I guess, and it seems as though often with those books—not all the time—the craft is more important than the content, than the words. The words are there just to serve the form...

MY: ...or even the imagery...

AM: Or the imagery.... They seem to have been constructed from the idea of the beautiful object backward, and I guess that's sad to me: to see all that time and energy go into the crafting of something.... I know how hard it is because I'm an amateur printer, so I know how hard, how impossible it would be for me to make a perfectly printed book, especially in any kind of edition, to have consistency and perfection and

smudge-free pages. I know the patience it requires. And I very rarely see books that have that quality and the quality of exciting, artistic energy.

MY: I think that's part of it, but for us it's also about expedience, a sort of economy of means, and the fact that we have very limited resources. It's not the aesthetic choice of using a commercial stock rather than a handmade stock. It's also affected by the simple practicality of finances: the amount that we can spend on a book. However, I don't think if we had lots of money to throw at each book that any of us would necessarily make a different choice, but it does, in a way, affect our thinking from the very beginning. The fact is we were doing things with whatever scraps of paper we could get, odd-job or leftover stock, especially early on. We were going to paper companies for stock that was discontinued, asking "What's all this off-cut you have?" and thinking about whether that might be enough to make a book.

AM: That's another way of going backwards, I guess. [Laughs.]

MY: But it's a better way.

AM: And playing with the idea of value has always been a big part of Ugly Duckling, of the conversation that Ugly Duckling has been, as a project. The question of what's valued as an object, as a mass-market phenomenon. So, for instance, some friends of ours upstate have all this book-board that's not archival—a room full of it—and a lot of book-makers would just say, "Oh, too bad it's not archival, we can't use it." But to us it was like a gold mine. We've used it already for a couple of things...

MY: ...a couple postcard projects and broadsides....

AM: And we can use it for Michael Kasper's book, which is great. Michael is a rare-book librarian at Amherst. I'm putting together a book of his—it's an art book—and I felt like I had to ask him, so I said, "I have access to all this book-board, but it's not archival. Is that okay with you?" and he was like, "archival ar-shmival."

MY: When UDP was starting out, we were all looking at different things.... Julien [Poirier] was inspired by things from the '60s like the *East Village Other*—he always loved that acid newsprint. For me, it was Russian Futurist books printed on found, non-archival materials. Not at all like the *livre d'artiste* tradition. For the Futurists, there was no distinction between an artists' book and a book. It was an object that held together the—often collaborative—work. Very rarely was it the work of one author, which is something that continues to influence me in

terms of my thinking about the collective project, which is the press. That doesn't mean that I only want to make collaborative books. But in a sense, all our books are.

AM: They're all collaborative...

MY: ...but not always collaborations. We're often asked to speak at small press and artists' book conferences, which is great, but I was recently on an artists' book panel at MoMA and felt really out of place.

AM: Remember the one at Yale?

MY: Oh yeah, Yale wanted us to speak about book arts at the Beinecke. Why we were there is still sort of unclear to us. People tend to think of our books as somehow fitting into the tradition of the democratic multiple, but for us it's sort of like "but wait a minute, this is poetry." Our books aren't really about appearance. They are more about distribution and editorial decisions. In that way, some of our ideas coincide with Fluxus, or conceptual artists and bookmakers that came out of that period. Poetry books from academic presses are often expensive and not really interesting to touch—and both those problems seem easy to solve by using something recycled or different paper stocks you have around. So you solve the problem of cost and you solve the problem of aesthetic homogeneity in a very simple sort of trick of the...what's it called...

AM: A sleight of hand.

MY: Sleight of hand. But what your question also brings up is the difference between what might be called a "book object" and a fetish object. We're starting to see that our books, which we tried to make cheap and accessible, are being sold for ridiculous prices by rare book dealers. Like John Surowiecki's *The Further Adventures of My Nose*—the book has some color plates that we tipped in by hand, but there's nothing special about it in terms of materials.

AM: The guts were printed on our laser printer.

MY: And a pretty sloppy cover printed on our letterpress. It was bound by hand, so I can see why it could catch on as a "rare book" selling for fifty dollars, but it was only five dollars originally.

AM: James Hoff's first book [*About Ten Poems*] was just a quick Kinko's thing that we did about seven years ago, and we've seen it priced at twenty-five dollars on the internet.

KS: It isn't uncommon—think of Wallace Berman's *Semina* or



PHOTO CREDIT: UDP EDITORS AND INTERNS

Holbrook Teter and Michael Myers' Zephyrus Image Press... these people were interested in making books that were strictly non-commercial, and now cost a pretty penny, at least in part, because of their fugitive nature.

MY: So, how do you deal with that fact that your object is becoming a fetish object because of rarity, when the intent was not rarity.

AM: Right, but the rarity is a necessity because of the speed at which we work. We put out something like thirty titles a year. We tend to keep the full-length books in print, but to keep all the chapbooks in print would be impossible, and...

MY: ...and you have to respect their ephemerality.

AM: Yeah.

MY: Like the presses I won't name that are printing chapbooks in...

AM: ...in runs of more than 200...

MY: ...thousands. And they're constantly available because they can always reprint on POD or whatever. These so-called chapbooks that are perfect bound, and glossy or whatever....

AM: Thin books.

MY: With ISBNs, and what's-it-called...

AM: Barcodes.

MY: I don't think that respects the idea of the chapbook. The wonderful thing about it is that it is ephemeral, and it's made for an occasion—or you create an occasion around it—and something

that the artist can trade or give away.

AM: But yeah, the whole fetish thing is funny because the book gets out of your hands, and... We have always tried to not just keep prices low, but sometimes to keep them ridiculously low. They aren't anymore, because we realized we had to survive, and they're priced kind of normally now. We had a joke in the beginning that books should cost either one dollar or one million dollars, just to insist that the value of the literature, poetry, and translation—all the strange things that we publish—isn't really determined by market forces.

MY: What price can you put on it?

AM: Right. The authors usually aren't getting paid anything for their work with a tiny press, or hardly anything. We've never done any calculations for sustainability's sake, which is stupid, and willfully so, but I remember talking to somebody who really knew the business of publishing, about how you're supposed to calculate your sales price based on the cost of goods sold and the percentage of this and that, and how you come up with your list price, etc. I was kind of dumbfounded because we tend to just ask, What do you think this book should cost? I don't know, it's about five inches tall....

MY: We should do it by weight, just weigh the object....

AM: We've made chapbooks entirely out of material that's lying around, so we literally haven't paid a cent for anything, and we'll sell that for five dollars. Then there will be another book that we just—we spend way too much on the cover or something—and we'll sell that for five dollars too. I guess it kind of...

MY: ...it kind of evens out. Did you know that Small Press Distribution has been asking publishers to raise their prices? They take a cut of the cover price, so it makes sense given that they have to survive too. I think they suggest that a book's retail price be at least fourteen dollars.

AM: Really?

MY: They're pushing people to re-sticker their older books to give them new prices and they've even offered to pay for the stickers.... Some of our books are so short that it doesn't make sense, like Cedars Sigo's [*Selected Writings*].

AM: Or Kate Colby's [*Unbecoming Behavior*].

MY: We give in sometimes and price in the fifteen dollar range, which I think is still a little cheaper than a lot of editions com-

ing out. And if someone orders directly from us, we can give a discount to make the price cheaper—ten dollars or so. A book should be affordable if you look in the right places. We effectively under-price Amazon because we don't charge shipping, and why encourage people to think Amazon is the best place to shop? So pricing is part of the value of these things, and value has been part of our experiment from the outset—to show the lack of value culture attaches to the work we publish, whether it's poetry or something else. I like saying "poetry," but I'm not talking about a genre, rather something to do with where it exists in the culture....

AM: How many people might want to read it....

MY: Right. I think "poetry" is sort of a nice term to identify something that is noncommercial. It is invaluable in a sense, "priceless." Book stores want to shut down their poetry sections because they're the least profitable. But then, we went on the Poetry Bus, and they did this thing where they would film one of the poets reading a poem to some sort of "regular guy" and solicit a response.

AM: Like, at a gas station on the highway.

MY: Of course everybody says, "Uhh, I kinda don't get that, but I love poetry," or "I liked that. I love poetry." Everyone loves poetry because they equate it with self-expression, purity.

AM: It's the human soul.

MY: Exactly. It's priceless to people because they don't want to buy it, but they want to value it as the deepest form of spiritual expression. [Laughs.] It's a strange conundrum. I wasn't necessarily interested in poetry primarily when starting this press though it became more central as we went along because I met more poets and read more poetry. But in the beginning I thought we would do it sort of as an experiment in publishing noncommercial work. In a commercial model you would have to fail by definition. So just keep failing. More books.

AM: Fail more.

MY: I'm still trying to get back to your question. Aesthetically, we obviously like the smudge and the imperfection and so forth, and that's why none of us ever trained as a letterpress printer. We have these dumb questions that you [Kyle] answer for us sometimes, like the time you said, "You guys need to have this little part on the press, don't you know?" and we're like "Oh, really?"

AM: Pretty much everybody at the press is interested in doing everything. We're not specialists. There's not one master printer and one master bookbinder and one master of publicity. I think everybody is fascinated with the organization of it all, and we each have different amounts of time to donate at different periods in our lives. We're all interested in the conceptual development of the press as much as in the physical creation of the books, so we don't have time to become really good printers or really good at anything. [Laughs.] It's fairly non-compartmentalized.

MY: Yeah, it's like playing an instrument when you never learned how to play that instrument.

AM: In a punk band where you switch instruments a lot too...

KS: But the books always look good.

AM: Well...

MY: Always?

AM: Hmm.

MY: We've just gotten good at hiding things.



PHOTO CREDIT: UDP EDITORS AND INTERNS



PHOTO CREDIT: UDP EDITORS AND INTERNS

AM: I think the overall effect is really more than the sum of the parts. If you took any one of our books and scrutinized it... They're a mess. Every one of them has at least one major flaw or typo...

MY: ...flaws in terms of the conception of the design or the execution of the design.

AM: I could look at any of my projects and say "I wish I had done this differently." But whenever we have the opportunity to bring them all out together, at a book fair or something, that's when people start to say, "You make beautiful books." I hear that more often than "Oh, this is a beautiful book." So there's something about the nonconformity of the whole that's beautiful: the books resemble one another.

MY: The eclecticism of our editorial taste comes out in the eclecticism of our design.

AM: It's probably got something to do with the brain, and how it appreciates variety, of color and texture. I mean, I love to look at series of books that have a distinct design, like Futurepoem Books or Melville House—I love that, but it's a different part of the brain that goes off, when you see...

KS: When you see uniformity.

AM: Yeah, uniformity, with variations in color. And you have a certain sense of happiness at that.

MY: I think you have an Apollonian...

AM: ...an Apollonian experience...

MY: ...an Apollonian vs. Dionysian experience. [Laughs.] You need a balance of those on your bookshelf.

AM: Yeah, what if all your bookshelves were the same. We somehow decided to be the odd, sticky-out shelf.

KS: Is that why it's the ugly duckling?

AM: I think that's sort of become the meaning of it.

MY: The name came out of a 'zine that I edited. It had a very ugly Dada-esque aesthetic. I saw a Dada exhibit recently and there was this one magazine that Ryan [Haley] and I loved. It's just called *Stupid*...

AM: I love that one [laughs]. With an exclamation point upside down or something...

MY: Right, right, *Stupid*. "Ugly" is a similarly provocative word. My 'zine was distributed by sticking it into other people's publications or just surprising people with it, giving it to people who looked like they would either be outraged or enjoy it. Ellie [Ga] started working on the 'zine with me when we met in 1998 or so. She helped me make a few of the last issues and brought in more visual complexity, but it was still like, "How ugly can we make this, and how ugly can you make it so it looks really great?" Sort of coming back to your initial question, where does ugliness break across a certain boundary....

KS: So what's the difference between ugly and ugly-ugly?

MY: Right.

KS: I mean, Dada, you said, is ugly. But is it ugly, or is it ugly-ugly?

MY: Which one is which?

KS: That's what I want to know. [Laughter.]

MY: What does ugly-ugly mean?

AM: Bad print-on-demand books with horrible covers?

MY: I would say "gross."

AM: Painful to look at.

MY: Disgusting. But sometimes we would use the word "disgusting" positively, to describe something that we've made.

AM: Right.

MY: "That's so disgusting, it's..."

AM: ...beautiful.

MY: When you see the cover Filip Marinovich drew for his *Zero Readership*... I really loved that it was just this black-and-white thing. I asked him to draw something

like the back of a notebook, and he just smudged it so much that it looks like it's going to come off on your hands, as if it were really Cray-Pas, and I thought it was beautiful and kind of disgusting-looking—black smudginess that maybe would otherwise, on its own, without this sort of placement in the book context, not be anything remarkable.

AM: We're not making any statements about aesthetics—we're really talking about nonconformity. We don't make anything that we really think is ugly. Do we?

MY: No, um.... Well there are a few things that some of the other people have made that I think are pretty ugly. [Lots of laughing.]

AM: Between ourselves, we may disagree, but what I mean is that you might make things to provoke other people to say that thing is ugly or that it's wrong, not the right shape for a book, or not the right....

We want to make mistakes. We want to make things that are deliberate mistakes, in a way.

MY: Or to make them look deliberate.

AM: Which is easier. And also if we make a mistake, then we're covered.

MY: I think you're right. It's actually a big cover-up....

AM: It's a big cover-up.

Anna Moschovakis has been working with UDP since 2002 as an editor, designer, administrator, and printer. Book projects she has spearheaded include titles by Ivan Blatny, Eugene Ostashevsky, Elizabeth Reddin, Trey Sager, Dodie Bellamy, and all the other titles in the Dossier Series. Anna is also a translator from French and is the author of a book of poems, I Have Not Been Able to Get Through to Everyone (Turtle Point Press).

Matvei Yankelevich is a founding editor of Ugly Duckling Presse, where he designs books, co-edits 6x6, and edits the Eastern European Poets Series. Matvei edited and translated Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms (Overlook). He is the author of a long poem, The Present Work (Palm Press). Boris by the Sea will be published by Octopus Books at the end of 2009.

The members of the UDP collective are Phil Cordelli, G.L. Ford, Ellie Ga, Yelena Gluzman, Garth Graeper, Ryan Haley, David Jou, Filip Marinovich, Anna Moschovakis, Julien Poirier, Nick Rattner, Linda Trimbath, Genya Turovskaya, and Matvei Yankelevich.

This conversation took place on Friday, November 14th, 2008, at the Old American Can Factory in Brooklyn. It was transcribed by Joseph B. Calavenna, an Ugly Duckling Presse intern.



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Beneficial Trauma: The Work of Etel Adnan

by Stacy Szymaszek



PHOTO CREDIT: ERICA KAUFMAN

Etel Adnan is a poet, painter, essayist, and novelist who values places, meaning she is simultaneously a poet with deep-rooted restlessness, and doesn't feel compelled to overcome it. It is, after all, her very nature. Her heritage is well-documented but bears repeating here: she was born in Beirut to a Greek Christian mother and a Syrian Muslim father, she grew up speaking Greek and Turkish in an Arabic-speaking country, and she was educated in French convent schools where speaking Arabic was considered a sin. She currently lives in France and California and writes primarily in English. As Ammiel Alcalay notes in his essay on Adnan "Our Memory Has No Future," her work "cuts through many of the boundaries imposed on writers with such 'interesting backgrounds.'" It is clear in her work that Adnan doesn't make a problem of her complex identity and recognizes it as her lens through which interconnectedness becomes greater than the "clash of cultures." Her gift to readers is an intellect manifested in poems that smash the either/or fallacy that is at the root of extremist ideologies.

When she was twelve she heard the beloved Egyptian contralto Um Kalthoum in the Grand Theatre of Beirut and called it a "beneficial trauma." This phrase immediately struck me as the only way to adequately describe my first encounter with Adnan's work, as well as with Etel Adnan the person who was soon to become my friend. She exposed my lack of historical perspective to me and, "as if the top of my head were taken off" (Dickinson), began to guide me through injustice and violence in the Middle East and its dire warnings for humanity. The idea of a wound that has a salutary effect brings to mind Christian images that Adnan would have been indoctrinated with: of stigmatics, the apocalypse as cataclysmic transformation, and the story of Jesus baring one of his five wounds to Saint Thomas who he invites to put his finger "into My side; and be not faithless." Adnan's work retains a potent ecclesiastical mood but with an agnostic appreciation for mystery—a god that is as shifty and open to interpretation as any other image in her cosmology. A beneficial trauma, a rite of passage, means the agent that brings about the catastrophe also heals it in a generative cycle. As Peter O'Leary writes in *Gnostic Contagion*, "Poetry is the sickness of the poet; writing poetry is the cure."

During Lebanon's civil war, Adnan received death threats for having written *Sitt Marie Rose*. She lost her job and eventually had to leave the country. She writes in an interview published in *AlJadid*: "Writing is a meeting point between a historical moment and the private identity. For example, I wrote one time that if the Palestinian tragedy did not exist, my work would have been totally different. Obviously. Some writers do not care about the historical moment. I could not avoid it." It is impossible to think about Adnan without thinking about the trauma of war, a continual presence in her work. Her experience of World War II, which broke out when she was sixteen, was unusual in that Beirut was not the battleground that

it would become, but rather a place made dynamic and important by the armies of many countries that were headquartered there. While her work reflects a cosmopolitan ethic of creative exchange across lines of difference, an excitement about difference that condemns xenophobia and totalitarianism, she makes it painfully obvious that those armies were there to tear the world apart.

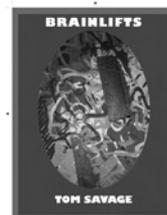
Adnan's latest book is *Seasons* (Post Apollo, 2008) and she has a collection of stories called *Master of the Eclipse* forthcoming from Interlink. The poem that appears here is from a work in progress called *Sea*.

Stacy Szymaszek's next book, Hyperglossia, is forthcoming this spring.

STRAW
GATE



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and Tom SAVAGE Stephanie GRAY, Bill KUSHNER, Valerie FOX
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FROM *SEA*

1.

A cosmology of terror: History's recurrent theme of tortured bodies dumped as garbage. The sea commits incest regularly with primordial violence and fanfare. She moos. We believe in the uniqueness of these times as in the originality of this sky. The tribe needs to.

That mass for which we have only one or two names determines innumerable lives. It's beyond the realm of doubts. It's fully given and, still, a maddening secret. We sleep eye to eye with it, but by then it's invisible.

Everything goes through trial by water in a constant here-ness. There's nothing to dread. Let's walk and run, go to the beach then to another beach, and then take a swim, take a boat, ride a whale.

A young woman is a bride and the groom doesn't always belong to the human species. The day's first rays make a crown for her. Space is made of layers, like a rose, like a cake. It provides room for her, and much more.

The horizon's perfection is due to its virtual reality. Alone in the midst of waves, the spirit pushes ahead. The horse and the vessel claim the same god.

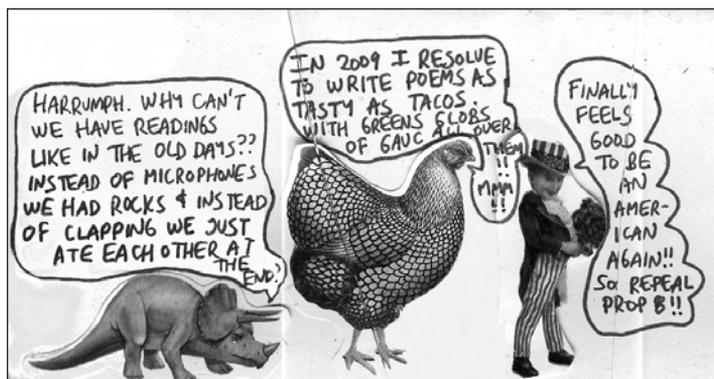
2.

Withering realities and systems of immortality are rolling and exploding, and nowhere is life warmer than where the sun's age is the Earth's.

O ocean, sending cargoes of jellyfish to corporate dinners, when I say that you were not created do I mean that you created us? Leather replacing one's eyelids cannot be dissolved in high temperatures. When I loved the ocean I was young.

Lost battles look at waves for comfort. Ocean of majesty, offered in my honor, you are the sovereign of our territory, and all the writings that are being produced testify to your existence. When I walk by you I become a third figure, and angels speak—then—of bewilderment, with recognizable voices.

Because you are, and I am, you were, and I was, we shall die—but shall not disappear.



EVENTS AT T

FEBRUARY

MONDAY 2/2
OPEN READING
 Sign-in 7:45 PM

WEDNESDAY 2/4

ANNE BOYER & STEPHANIE STRICKLAND

Anne Boyer is the author of *The Romance of Happy Workers*, *Art is War*, *Selected Dreams with a Note on Phrenology*, and *Anne Boyer's Good Apocalypse*. She lives in Kansas and teaches at the Kansas City Art Institute. **Stephanie Strickland's** fifth book of poems, *Zone: Zero* (book + CD), was just published by Ahsahta Press. She teaches experimental poetry and e-lit at many colleges and universities, most recently the University of Utah, and is working on a book-length sequence of poems, *Huracan's Harp*.

FRIDAY 2/6 [9:30 PM]
FALL WORKSHOP READING

Come and hear what the writers who took workshops with **Martine Bellen**, **Tisa Bryant** and **CAConrad** are up to! Workshop leaders will be present to introduce their students.

MONDAY 2/9

YEDDA MORRISON & RICHARD OWENS

Yedda Morrison joins us to celebrate the publication of *Girl Scout Nation*. Her other books include *My Pocket Park* and *Crop*. Morrison has exhibited her visual work in the United States and Canada, and is represented by Republic Gallery in Vancouver, BC. She is currently working on a mixed-media project entitled *How Flora Became an Ornament*. **Richard Owens'** poetry, essays and reviews are variously published online and in little magazines. He is editor of Punch Press and *Damn the Caesars*.

A new publication, *Alcuni Telefonini* (Granary), with watercolors by **Francesco Clemente** and poems by **Vincent Katz** provides the occasion to look at Clemente's work with poets. A reading by Katz will be followed by a discussion of collaboration, moderated by **Raymond Foye**. See website for more details

MONDAY 2/16

DANNY SNELSON & LANCE WAKELING

Danny Snelson's online editorial work has ranged from *Eclipse*, where he started as a scanner, to UbuWeb, where he edited the 2007 series of /ubu Editions. He is currently a contributing editor to the EPC and PennSound. Recent writing projects include *myDear coUnt-ess*, *The Book of Ravelling Women*, *Aphasic Letters*, and *Testimony* (a sound poem in Deseret). **Lance Wakeling's** first book *Sic, Notes from a Keylogger*, was published electronically by Ubu.com. He edits and distributes the PDF bulletin *Private Circulation*, which will publish a paperback compendium of its first twelve issues in early 2009.

WEDNESDAY 2/18

FRED MOTEN & KEITH WALDROP

Fred Moten is author of *Arkansas, Poems* (with Jim Behrle), *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, *I ran from it but was still in it* and *Hughson's Tavern*. He has two more forthcoming books *B Jenkins* and *Open Secret: Blackness and Stolen Form*. **Keith Waldrop** teaches at Brown University and, with Rosmarie Waldrop, is editor of the small press, Burning Deck. Forthcoming this spring are *Transcendental Studies* (a book of poems), *Several Gravities* (a book of collages), and a translation of Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen: little poems in prose*.

MONDAY 2/23

STAN APPS & KAREEM ESTEFAN

Stan Apps and Russell Reed present "Princess of the World in Love," a song-cycle adapted from the book of the same name. **Stan Apps'** books of poems include *soft hands*, *Princess of the World in Love*, *Info Ration* and *God's Livestock*

WEDNESDAY 2/11
THE ART OF COLLABORATION: FRANCESCO CLEMENTE & VINCENT KATZ WITH RAYMOND FOYE

Policy. A collection of essays is underway from Combo Books. **Kareem Estefan's** writing has appeared in *President's Choice*, *Rain Taxi*, *Sustainable Aircraft*, and *Boog City*. He hosted Ceptuetics, a weekly radio reading/interview series for conceptually innovative poetry.

WEDNESDAY 2/25

BILL LUOMA & GARY SULLIVAN

Bill Luoma is the author of *My Trip to New York City*, *Western Love*, *Swoonrocket* and *Dear Dad*. He's a member of the subpress collective and currently lives in Berkeley, CA. Poet and cartoonist **Gary Sullivan's** most recent book is *PPL in a Depot*. He is currently at work on the fourth issue of his comic book, *Elsewhere*.

FRIDAY 2/27 [10 PM]

FLIM FORUM PRESS PRESENTS:

A SING ECONOMY

Flim Forum Press presents the poetry anthology *A Sing Economy*, featuring readings by **Jessica Smith**, **Stephanie Strickland**, **Jennifer Karmin**, **Thom Donovan**, **John Cotter**, **Laura Sims**, **Jaye Bartell**, **Kate Schapira**, **Deborah Poe**, **Eric Gelsing**, and editors **Matthew Klane** and **Adam Golaski**. Flim Forum Press provides space to emerging poets working in a variety of experimental modes.

MARCH

MONDAY 3/2

FANNY HOWE & ALAN LONEY

Fanny Howe's new collection of essays, *The Winter Sun*, and a story called "What Did I Do Wrong?", are being published in Spring 2009. She has received many awards, including one recently for poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. **Alan Loney** has published 11 books of poetry, and eight books of prose. Formulations of Loney's thinking about the relations between poetry and typography have appeared with Cuneiform Press in *Meditatio: the printer printed: manifesto*. His most recent book of poems is *Day's Eye*. This event is co-presented by Stacy Szymaszek and Kyle Schlesinger.

WEDNESDAY 3/4

LETTERS TO POETS:

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT POETICS, POLITICS & COMMUNITY

Letters to Poets (edited by Jennifer Firestone & Dana Teen Lomax), a collaborative experiment conducted over approximately one year's time,

THE POETRY PROJECT

brought together 28 poets from various backgrounds, aesthetics and geographical locations and asked them to write letters to each other. Please join **Eileen Myles, Cecilia Vicuña, Karen Weiser, John Yau, Brenda Coultas, Anselm Berrigan, Brenda Iijima, Jill Magi, Jennifer Firestone, John Yau, Quincy Troupe, Rosamond King, Dana Teen Lomax** and **Traci Gourdine** to read excerpts from the anthology, which was recently published by Saturnalia Books.

FRIDAY 3/6 [10 PM]

ELLIE GA & MARINA TEMKINA: UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE BOOK RELEASE PARTY

Ellie Ga's *Classification of a Spit Stain* is the result of her two-year project photographing and analyzing stains on city pavements. Ellie will present "The Catalogue of the Lost (and other revelations)," a work done in the lecture format. During 2007-08, Ga was the artist-in-residence on the Tara, a polar schooner in the Arctic Ocean. **Marina Temkina** is the author of four poetry books in her native Russian, and two artists books made in collaboration with Michel Gerard & published in France. Her new book *What Do You Want?* will be published this spring.

MONDAY 3/9 [6 PM, \$5 teens/\$7 adults] URBAN WORD FOR NYC TEENS

Urban Word NYC's 11th Annual Teen Poetry Slam brings out the top teen poets from across the city. Poets will compete for a chance to perform at the Grand Slam Finals at the Apollo Theater on April 4th, and represent NYC at the National Teen Poetry Slam in Chicago. This event is FREE for teen performers, and features special guest poets and DJs. Teen poets, emcees & spoken word artists sign up now: signup@urbanwordnyc.org.

WEDNESDAY 3/11

ROB HALPERN & PETER LAMBORN WILSON

Rob Halpern is the author of *Rumored Place, Imaginary Politics, Snow Sensitive Skin* (a collaboration with Taylor Brady), and *Disaster Suites. Music for Porn* is forthcoming. An active participant in the Nonsite Collective, Rob lives in San Francisco. **Peter Lamborn Wilson** is a political writer, essayist, and poet, known for first proposing the concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), based on a historical review of pirate utopias. His latest books are *Green Hermeticism: Alchemy and Ecology* (with Christopher Bamford and Kevin Townley) and *Black Fez Manifesto*.

MONDAY 3/16

GREGG BIGLIERI & LARRY PRICE

Gregg Biglieri is the author of *Profession, Roma, Los Books, Reading Keats to Sleep, El Egg, Sleepy with Democracy, and I Heart My Zeppelin*. **Larry Price** has been a poet, a performance artist, a book designer, a publisher and a graphic artist. His books include *Proof, Crude Thinking, No (world version), Circadium, and The Quadrangene*.

WEDNESDAY 3/18

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN & ROBERT KELLY

Clayton Eshleman's most recent publications include: *An Alchemist with One Eye on Fire, The Complete Poetry of Cesar Vallejo, Reciprocal Distillations, Archaic Design and The Grindstone of Rapport/A Clayton Eshleman Reader*. Eshleman often lead tours of small groups to the painted Ice Age caves of southwestern France in June. **Robert Kelly**, a poet, essayist, and fiction writer, is the author of more than sixty books, most recently *Lapis, Threads and May Day*. Born and bred in Brooklyn, he went up the river 44 years ago, to Annandale-on-Hudson, where he has taught at Bard College ever since.

MONDAY 3/23

KAREN RANDALL & JEREMY JAMES THOMPSON

Karen Randall has taught hands-on science in the Chicago public schools, literary studies in western MA, and letterpress printing at the Center for the Book in NY and at Naropa. Images of her work can be seen on line at www.propolispress.com. **Jeremy James Thompson** is an instructor at New York's Center for Book Arts as well as a curator for their New Voices reading series. His work focuses on the process of collaboration, the reinvention of propaganda, and the defining of a practical avant-garde. He blogs about movie telling, typography and poetics at autotypist.blogspot.com.

WEDNESDAY 3/25

SHERMAN ALEXIE & JAYNE CORTEZ

Sherman Alexie's newest collection of poems, *Face*, has just been published by Hanging Loose Press. He has a new young adult novel coming from Little, Brown this spring and a new book of stories from Grove/Atlantic in the fall. He's published over 20 books altogether. *The New York Times* said of his very first book, *The Business of Fancydancing*: "Mr. Alexie's is one of the major lyric voices of our time." **Jayne Cortez's** most recent books are *The Beautiful Book* and *Jazz Fan*

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ADMISSION \$8
STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

Looks Back (Hanging Loose Press). Her latest CDs with the Firespitter Band are *Find Your Own Voice, Borders of Disorderly Time, and Taking the Blues Back Home*. She is co-founder and president of the Organization of Women Writers of Africa, Inc.

FRIDAY 3/27 [10 PM]

ALI LIEBEGOTT & CRISTY C. ROAD

Ali Liebegott is the author of the award winning books, *The Beautifully Worthless* and *The IHOP Papers*. For the last seven years she's been drawing and illustrating a full-color illustrated novel, titled *The Crumb People*, about a post-September 11th obsessive duck feeder. **Cristy C. Road** has released *Indestructible*, a graphic memoir about being a teenage, Latina, queer punk in high school; *Distance Makes the Heart Grow Sick*, a postcard collection; and *Bad Habits*, an illustrated love story about a faltering human heart's telepathic connections to the destruction of NYC.

MONDAY 3/30

DAVID BUUCK & MICHAEL CROSS

David Buuck's recent publications include *Ruts, Runts, Site/Cite/City, Between Above and Below, and Buried Treasure Island*, a guidebook printed in conjunction with an installation and audio-tour by *Barge* (the Bay Area Research Group in Enviro-aesthetics). Forthcoming books are *The Shunt* and *The Treatment*. **Michael Cross** is the editor of Atticus/Finch chapbooks, co-editor of *On: Contemporary Practice*, and the author of *In Felt Treeling*.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ALICE NOTLEY
IN THE PINES

PENGUIN POETS / 2007

REVIEW BY ELENI SIKELIANOS

*My girl, my girl
Don't lie to me
Tell me where did you sleep last night*

For some time now, Alice Notley has been our poet of death and grief. So it makes sense that the title of her recent book conjures up the great Leadbelly's voice as it calls out from a haunted woods, carrying with it all the demons of an indelibly American grief. The song "In the Pines," which is believed to date back to the Civil War, contains a kind of confrontation, a duet in which two voices are collapsed into one. The woman chooses or is relegated to a lonesome somewhere in the pines, "where the cold wind blows." But this voice isn't leaving the woods; it's staying right there, amid its own ghosts, clearing a little space in the singer's and the listener's haunted mind. As if a voice could light a fire and burn down a bit of the woods, a small clearing, and we'll all come to it, drawn by the fire of the voice.

Notley's *In the Pines* unfolds in three sections, and each, like the song, provides a site of confrontation and, to some degree, reparation. Remnants of folk songs, appearing throughout the book, might be seen as healing agents, a kind of genetic or atavistic medicine that has to be pulverized to get at its medicinal properties.

In the book's eponymous first section, we learn that the speaker (like Dante in the middle of *his* dark woods) is in a state of crisis. Fate or luck has caught up with the body, and the book is in part an exploration of that fate—will it pass the speaker by or linger? Jack of Diamonds, a reappearing figure, is, as Blind Lemon Jefferson sings it, "a hard card to play"; it's bad luck. Notley writes: "Jack of die / you can hear the diamonds / If I keep hearing them / I can be dead." There has been a gamble, resulting in something like consequences: the luck (bad) of getting Hepatitis C, the chance (50%) of getting better. The poet, however, proposes a world in which consequence isn't really part of the structure:

But I am losing my because. In the pines.
In chance, in fortune, in luck, there is no because.

The poet implicitly raises and complicates questions of free will, action and outcome. Results might be beyond our control. The speaker's gamble, it seems, wasn't really the needle, but a lifetime of living. Could the gamble be a lifetime of writing poetry, too? The card gets played in another folk song that comes to mind here, "The Cuckoo Bird":

*Jack of Diamonds, Jack of Diamonds
I know you from old
You robbed my poor pockets
Of silver and gold*

In "In the Pines," the speaker, emptied of everything, discovers that, after a lifetime of poetry, "[your writing] is all you are." In earlier works, Notley's inquiries lead her to the iteration that our poverty is our beauty. Here, taking risks (living) leads to a new and related beauty, our "defect," which seems to be, among other things, the accrued substance or residue of what happens to us as we go through the days of a human life.

Like a bird gathering the bright threads of our folk past and weaving them to new purpose, Notley stitches scraps of folk and pop songs (Dylan, especially) into the poems, turning us toward a past in which we knew how to make things—in particular, tales. But there is no story to tell in this place, because that comes from earth, from time, from the "he structure," and these are bankrupt now: "There is no story to tell." Even the human has gone bust: "Kill it / for the human / area is over." The question is: "How can you be the new species out of this old mess?"

The poems of the first two sections of the book operate largely in sentences, which often conglomerate into something like paragraphs: stories are almost being told (and there is the sense of an effort to retrieve lost stories), but the fabric is composed of so many voicings that they are not narratives we readily recognize. As in much of Notley's earlier work, there is a play with registers of the self and its contexts. Pronouns keep shifting faces and experiential or emotional holdings—not exactly an empty vessel, but a collective vessel that keeps dialing in different selves and their accounts. We come to understand that the way to this new species is not through creating stories, but emptying them out. Why tell stories when they are of murder, violence, grief? The culture at large and the planet, like the personal body, are in crisis. While the poet can apply language as a kind of hemostatic (the title of the book's third section) agent to stop the hemorrhaging, grief spills out; the poem's more frequent function is as a detonating device, to blow up every expectation or vestige of the "old story."

In the second part of the book, the title poem "The Black Trailor" seems to mimic a movie in which yet another woman is killed. The "trailer" might be a movie trailer, but it is also a confined place, an entrapment, in which our entertainment and psyche are predicated on suffering, in which we "love the murder." The "movie's" conversation traces a kind of Catherine's wheel / wheel of murder / of eternal suffering (samsara), and it turns out the victim is earth, "a blighted land." The poet's task here, too, is to find a way to empty everything out to start anew: "If world ends, can words speak again?" she asks. The self and its story also need to go: "It's a beautiful hit if our identity is the story." "Leave the details of your life and find another one."

Rather than a collecting of detail, these poems propose a stripping of selves and their experiences; the work is to empty the creature out, so that the new species is a kind of palinode, one defined not by what it is not, but what it has lost, or its "defect."

We are now cognizant that there is a story that can never be told, not in time, not on earth, and part of the poem's grief is that story. The reader has her own experiences to bring to the poem, so why should the poet tell her a story? The reader can instead curl into the poem and experience being no one, rather than having "someone" foisted upon her at every turn. This is a fascinating turn of events. A question the book raises: how do we *have* loss (part of our defect)? Things have long been burning in Notley's poems—babies, women, Napalm—and here the poet "drops all of these pieces [presumably our details] into the fire," so that in the "no one species it becomes all of fire." Rather than what we have, we can carry what we've lost: "Everyone's composed of their losses, they are purely negative, where the firing squad has nothing to aim at."

Much of the beauty of these poems lies in their vacancy (their loss); and also in their defect: how, as the poems resist story and form they must also generate new stories and forms. The world and the self are left with what they are: a wound ("The universe has disappeared into a machete wound"). But Notley lets us have a die, a diamond in there (in the wound)—our Jack of Diamonds, our luck and chance, one of earth's beautiful products which issues forth like a tear and carries with it an aural death.

Eleni Sikelianos's new book of poems, Body Clock (Coffee House Press), appeared in October. Her translation of Jacques Roubaud's Exchanges on Light will be out (with La Presse) this winter.

LEWIS WARSH
INSEPARABLE (POEMS 1995-2005)
GRANARY BOOKS / 2008
REVIEW BY PETER BUSHYEAGER

In many ways Lewis Warsh is relentless. Over the past ten-plus years, he has produced a steady stream of compelling poetry that allows him to shine in many roles: tongue-in-cheek romantic, rueful realist, elegist and—sometimes simultaneously—stand-up comedian, workaday human with barely hidden vulnerabilities, and daredevil collagist manipulating dangerously sharp shards.

Inseparable is a noteworthy book for a very simple reason: It presents Warsh at the height of his powers. The collection's 200 pages contain his trademark music and moves, ratcheted up several notches to their most acute. The end result: an alternately challenging and warmly affirming read.

As always, Warsh poses more questions than answers and offers more symptoms than well-defined causes. That's what makes him a very-alive poet. He doesn't have all the answers and neither do we. We just work together with him to define the territory as best we can. It's as if we're frozen in that split-second following an unexpected slap, scrambling frantically to determine the appropriate stance—just like life itself.

Inseparable features many of the longer, multi-sectioned, jump-cut collage poems that have distinguished Warsh's work in recent years. These machine-gun-like works, which quickly shift tone, language, circumstance, and emotion, define Warsh at his most relentless.

The book's opening poem, "Premonition," takes the reader through thirteen prose-ish divagations on mortality, larceny, contentment, and personal responsibility. In the hands of a lesser poet, this hit-list could be leaden, to say the least. But Warsh is deft; he offers "thought like bubbles against the side of a pan" and fast-paced, disjunctive moments that survey multiple angles and points of view.

One of the poem's sections presents a supplicant narrator who is "like a prisoner waking / before dawn on his bed / of straw, wanting only a glass of water / with the light coming in," while another portion of the poem wryly notes that "chances are, if you steal / something you're going to be / caught. You might even have to spend a year or two in / prison... / but this rarely happens. / Most often, the jury returns / after deliberating for five / minutes." The poem ends on a tender—and consciously bathetic—note: "You can say you knew me when, / but I haven't changed. Maybe we spent / a night together & I gave you / my blanket when you were cold. / It was a thin sheet, really, all / that there was."

The book's title poem is another longer work that explores the nature of interpersonal connectedness through alternating sequences of personal anecdotes:

After I was born in the Bronx (but it was only a dream) / A light snow fell on the parkway beneath my window / And the parquet floor was covered with linoleum tiles / My name written in the frost on the glass...

It was forbidden to touch another person's body but I did it anyway / My own body was off-limits, the trees in the park covered with snow...

even-handed advice:

The value of property keeps rising. It seems / like you could buy a piece of land & sell it for a / profit & give your money to your children or put it / in a bank account so they can go to college...

philosophical observations:

A feeling of anxiety is / different from a feeling of desire. / One requires victimization, the other mutability. / You can bite down hard on something, you can leave / toothmarks on someone's skin.

snippets of correspondence:

The purpose of this letter is so that you / might remember me & who I was to you for a / brief moment maybe 1970 is the date I'm thinking of...

and off-center lyricism:

There, in the street, / I give you a name for safe-keeping. / It's the name of the street or the / name of a tree.

BOOK REVIEWS

Irony/genuine emotion, flat affect/overwrought diction, and strict reportage/fantastical projections blur together, keep the reader off center and make it impossible to differentiate. The end result of this convoluted ride is a sort of 3-D appropriation of life as it really (or might really) be, delineated by an overwhelming array of feints and ripostes.

Inseparable also includes a strong assortment of shorter works. Some are touching, fairly straightforward meditations on the passage of time, including “For Ten Years,” which talks about Warsh waiting to pick up his children after school:

There’s my ghost leaning against a car waiting /
for my kids. / There’s the teacher waving to me at
the entrance / to the school. She’s tall & looks like
a statue / in a painting by Vermeer . . . Memories
cast long shadows, branching out / across broken
pavement. Memories / cast shadows like obelisks
& antennae.

Others are a curious mix of breathless, journalistic chatter; over-the-top romanticism; and hard-bitten punch line, as in the poem “Montgomery Clift”:

...something died in our hearts & we went on living,
part of the body of people who inhabit the largest of
cities, the so-called cosmopolitan centers, where the
photograph of a model on the front of a glossy
magazine can influence the way millions of people
cut their hair...All my life all I’ve ever wanted to do
was enter someone else’s being. It’s only by sacrific-
ing your whole being that you can prove your love
to someone, I know that’s true. But now that I’ve
passed the test what can I do for an encore?

I wouldn’t want to say *Inseparable* is a summation; Warsh is energetic and unpredictable—in the future he might cast off in an entirely new direction. But it’s certainly safe to say that this book is rich, mercurial, and accomplished. It demands—and rewards—a reader’s attention.

Peter Bushyeager is the author of Citadel Luncheonette, a collection of poems published by Ten Pell. He’s taking advantage of his free time to think and work in secret.

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ
FROM UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY [HACHA]
TINFISH PRESS / 2008
REVIEW BY CORRINE FITZPATRICK

from unincorporated territory is the first full-length book by Achioté Press editor Craig Santos Perez. A native Chamoru from Guam, Perez investigates the malleability versus specificities of the island’s overlapped histories as imperialized colony, U.S. military base and personal homeland. The book is comprised of a preface by the

author, occasional graphics, and seven shuffled subsections of poetry, each distinct in form and content-thread. Ranging from World War II to the achioté plant, the details of the poems each underscore Guam’s historical adaption of non-native elements into its culture, language, and ecosystem. That heritage of *incorporation* is painstakingly reenacted – on the level of the poem – as Perez splices English with Chamorro and shifts register from poetic to ethnographic throughout the book.

Palimpsest provides a dynamic metaphor for Guam’s colonized past, as well as a basis to look at the actual writing here. Not free verse, but hardly a case of subject being siphoned through a hackneyed set of forms, Perez seems to have utilized poetry as his mode of research. His “history-poesy” invokes Ed Sanders’ *Investigative Poetry*: “To surround an item of time with thick vector-clusters of Gnosis, to weave a corona of perception through verse.” While I think that poetry as a means of expressing history is here, for the most part, mutually beneficial, at times Perez’s expression of intention is heavy-handed, as to sap dry his poems’ vibrancy-potential in the service of ensuring their academically post-colonial function.

Postulates aside, many pleasing recombinant affinities appear. Perez acknowledges his eclectic influences in epigraphic shout-outs woven between the sections (Cha; Celan; Stein; Césaire; Olson; McKay; Shurin; Duncan; Lorca; Vicuña; Oppen). The most notable comparison is to Cecilia Vicuña’s etymological transliterations. Less concerned with sonic potentialities, perhaps, but similar in his engagement with the opening up of isolated words – Perez’s mining of Chamorro as route to cultural root seems deeply aligned with Vicuña’s lifelong excavation of Quechua and Spanish languages. In the section, “from Tidelands,” he writes:

“if / fires”-strangle this “forced tongue” let / wind-
shield the culled-remains as [langet]- / as arrangement
“of opening / language / among common” debris.

The page ends with one of the many translation keys found throughout the book [*langet* : sky, heaven]. His keys function as clues, or code, which make the act of reading a satisfyingly transparent assemblage. At least half of the book’s poems are marked by isolated Chamorro units, which become stents in the arteries of incised English-language lines.

Perez’s slightly abstracted graphics – of Spanish galleon routes, wars of the Pacific, and international commercial flight paths – allude to his seemingly open-field poetic sensibility while actually hugging closer to a practical function of information display. These visuals are reminiscent of Mark Lombardi’s intricate *Narrative Structures* drawings in their succinct collusion of data and aesthetic. The rendering of flight paths – with Guam centralized as the Pacific hub to Asia – is particularly interesting in that the static signifiers of airport acronyms function as particles of sound and meaning in a poetic sense, while literally referring to the island’s important geographical role in the global travel nexus. It is here that Perez’s use of palimpsest as extended metaphor *and* basis for poetic form succeeds most completely.

BOOK REVIEWS

Perez appears to be forging a poetics through his reconciliation of experimental ethos and personal investigation of culture and place, setting *from unincorporated territory* in the same orbit as Paolo Javier's *60 lb bo(e)mb*, which Rodrigo Toscano deftly blurbed as "the birth of a non-idealist anticipatory-resilient para-national subject."

Corrine Fitzpatrick's most recent chapbook is Zamboanguena, from sona books.

ANNE TARDOS

I AM YOU

SALT PUBLISHING / 2008

REVIEW BY KATIE DEGENTESH

The central question of this book is probably the one asked on page 139: "How much can you obsess about a boy?"

I say that in the spirit that I think the author—or at least the author's persona—intended it. That persona comes across well in this single line, too: clear-eyed, funny, tart, almost eager to make fun of herself; in fact, she seems a little bit amused at how terrible she finds her situation to be. She is someone who suffers from—and yet also, somehow, is surprised to be enjoying—a great loss and the mania and depression that attend it.

I Am You is a powerful book, one that manages to be both a deeply realistic exploration and a send-up of grief and all its detritus. Everything is included. Nothing is left out. Even the dorkily obscene—"Should you find me the wrong gender, think strapon. / Yes, strapon. Sounds like tampon. Looks and feels like a penis."—and the obscenely dorky—"Shall iPod while YouTube?"—have earned their place here, and that place is often right alongside statements of poignant, heart-stopping truth: "I had to change into someone who no longer needs you / Someone who could get through all this."

This is a book with an agenda. The slim companion pieces opening it, "The Aim of All Nature Is Beauty" and "The Nature of This Lecture is by John Beauty," set the stage for a loss so devastating it requires 154 pages of "Letting Go" and "The Letter: A Bloodbath" to clean up the aftermath.

Some of the funniest, and perhaps psychologically the hardest-hitting, lines in the book come from "The Letter," in which each poem is opened and closed with a question: "Is it evil just to be alive?" "Do women routinely take the anger they feel on their father out on guys?" "Is the idea to ride people, and hound them until they turn against / you and then you can feel wronged?"

But the heart of the book is clearly "Letting Go," a 100-part poem which Ms. Tardos prefaces with the explanation that "the phrase or the concept of 'letting go,' in its various forms" dominates and "the rest of the page is free."

A truer sentence was never spoken by a poet about her own work. The pages are free to be covered with pictures of emotional cats

and glorified primates of all sorts, from spider monkeys to humans. Free, also, to display a spirit of slyly simultaneous self-aggrandizement and self-deprecation:

She may be the horniest poet of our time.
And one of the bravest and wisest, they say.
They honor her while she throws up.
They admire her.
This makes her want to throw up even more, and so on.

(from "#69, Letting Go")

A deliciously nasty pun or two is also permitted, "The writer tends to view most men as her feather," as are some forays into what sounds like, but is probably not, a kind of lyric confessionalism: "I always assume I am not loved / As my parents trained me to be / My parents. / Don't get me started."

The net effect of this concatenation—one of heartfelt pain, the Internet, anger, longing, German, and silliness, among other things—is to free the reader. How refreshing it is to be able to appreciate a collection of smart, evasively direct, funny poems for the way they deal with deep emotion, rather than the way they avoid it.

Katie Degentesh is the author of The Anger Scale (Combo Books, 2006).

SHARON MESMER

ANNOYING DIABETIC BITCH

COMBO BOOKS / 2007

REVIEW BY GARY SULLIVAN

Days after Obama's historic election I received an earnest e-mail from a Canadian poet who had spent most of the Bush era in the States. "I was intrigued," she wrote, about "the future of flarf in a post-Bush world."

She had a theory. Flarf—a kind of poetry that often involves suturing together the results of Internet searches, and which tends to be poly-vocal and often somewhat disturbing or offensive—seemed to thrive during one of the most conservative periods in our nation's history. She mentioned Sharon Mesmer's writing as a particularly "disturbing" example of what she called flarf's "polyphonic disconnect." How would such writing fare under Obama?

I gave it some thought. Was it, I wondered, helpful to consider the Beats and the New York School as mere products of the Eisenhower years, a poetic response to a conservative ethos whose most famous product was McCarthyism? "Howl," the most celebrated American poem of the '50s, certainly seems like a direct hit on the times. But what about Kenneth Koch's "Fresh Air," written a year after "Howl?"

"The literary magazines in America and England were controlled by academic and conservative poets," Koch explained in an interview with David Shapiro published in *Jacket* #15. "I thought I was

BOOK REVIEWS

a good poet, and I knew John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara were, and it was extremely difficult for any of us to publish anything. Meanwhile there was all this terrible, structured, elegant, mildly ironic drivel being published....I wrote 'Fresh Air' out of feelings of rage and excitement."

If a quick glance at Mesmer's poems like "I Chose the Wrong Power Animal," "I Am So Over Fucking," and "Sonnet in Favor of Literary Narcissism" do not strike one as direct responses to the *political* times, we might want to adjust our notion of "the times" to include the poetic landscape.

In this light, Mesmer's poem "Mary Oliver vs. Cyborg Prostitute" might well be the "Fresh Air" of the Internet age:

Mary Oliver is the dead people who live on our eyelashes

Cyborg Prostitute is what could happen if the dissolved
[remains
of an evil Cyclops goes looking for his next meal beyond
[the boundaries
of the wordless novel

Slouching towards Mary Oliver is an Olivetti laughin'
[cryin' to Olivia Newton
John massage music

The eager note on my door said 'Cyborg Prostitute is a
[formless Sioux rowboat
trader in a Christian school videopoetik and strangely
[repellent'

Kenneth Koch again: "Although 'Fresh Air' was an attack on academic poetry, I also wanted it to be a celebration of good poetry." While Mesmer affronts the "structured, elegant, mildly ironic" poetry of our own age—qualities that bring to mind more academized strains of post-avant writing as well as the quietist poetry of a Mary Oliver—she also celebrates her own sense of "good poetry."

Mesmer's language is charged, electric, wildly funny, with passages as twisty as anything from the NY School:

Spatchcroked, ectopic,
modified and sebaceous:
Monkey Penis Sausage
and Schmookums on Thanksgiving
arriving with their children,
J. Penis, Scrotum,
Doodiekins and Debbie
singing "Happy Birthday, Cowboy Sally! /
Your penis is three inches /
And leaves a short flavor."

But all is not Elmslie-like zizzing and popping in Mesmer's world. There is social as well as literary engagement, in poems like

"Fascist Girlfriend" and "Compassionate Conservative Girlfriend." In some cases, the work might be so engaged as to invite controversy.

The post-avant, poetic landscape has been dominated in the last decade or so by well-meaning but fairly dry writing that carves out idealized, if not exactly utopian, space. A poetics, one might argue, of avoidance. In this milieu, where poets have refrained from direct engagement with some of the uglier aspects of the social, poems that have foregrounded their author's refusal to whitewash their poems of ugly human nature have been met with strong resistance.

A poem like "Juan Valdez Has a Little Juan Valdez (I.e., Energy Cannon) in His Pants" seems a strong candidate to spark some future controversy, given its uncomfortable use of an exoticized icon. Whereas other poets might have written a book-length serial poem deconstructing the fictional character, tracing him back to his '50s ad agency origins, with feints and dodges into poetic explorations of ethnicity and U.S.-South American power relations, Mesmer's approach is to simply pour the icon into the blender with a lot of caustic found language:

It's a true dichotomy, hauling beans on a mule.
Beans take exactly the same amount of time to
[decompose
as road apples.

Juan Valdez, Java Man, you should be neither
[slandered nor lionized.

I shall personally make the wolf parade apologize.
Juan, let me take this opportunity to embrace,
as per the washing instructions on Camilla Parker-
[Bowles' underpants,

the following idea:

Juan Valdez + love machine = bovine sex club.
Boy, you rocked me so hard I peed my pants.
You are so a varied artist!

Is the appropriate response to the Doyle Dane Bernbach agency's creation, to the countless minor and major horrors we're confronted with every day, another book of slack, dry, barely readable poetry? Mesmer argues "no." Despite the insane energy of its surface noise, the resulting poem ranks among the funniest and most upsetting in recent memory: a genuinely sane response.

Gary Sullivan's PPL in a Depot was recently published by Roof Books.

BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS
ABSOLUTELY EDEN
UNITED ARTISTS / 2008
REVIEW BY BRENDA COULTAS

Love, human foibles, and fickleness, thoughts mistaken for actual thinking or consciousness, and worst of all, beastly optimism. This time we believe we'll get it right, in love or life, only to fall off the slippery slope of reason again.

BOOK REVIEWS

So it goes in *Absolutely Eden*, Bobbie Louise Hawkins' terrific new book, a collection of monologues culled from her one-woman shows "Life As We Know It" and "Take Love, For Instance," which I was fortunate enough to catch at Joe's Pub in New York City. It is always such a pleasure to read and experience Hawkins' forthright wit. I mean she just says it: the obvious, which we know but haven't yet come to grasp with. We spend our lives in denial, but as Hawkins says, "I don't know why 'denial' gets such bad press. 'Denial' is how you manage to live your life with a little dignity and stay looking good. It's in the box, but the lid's closed."

One of her many gifts as a storyteller is to pull the narrative thread through an array of materials, made up of life experiences that result in tension and release. She pulls anecdotes effortlessly from the likes of William Burroughs and Robert Graves, as well as from the Nature Channel on television. For instance, Hawkins compares the mating habits of hummingbirds to human beings: the male hummingbird shows off his flying skills to the female by falling straight down, about twenty times or until the female is convinced he's got the right stuff. Hawkins points out the same absurd mating dances that we, humans, put our prospective lovers through.

This is evidence from a life well lived, not in a state of semi-consciousness, but rather a state of awareness of human nature, and with dry humor. The title too is an example of Hawkins' wit. *Absolutely Eden* conveys an assurance that this reality show, called our lives, is Eden, paradise, however with a sardonic twist. Hawkins notes the chronic foolishness that we witness in others but fail to see in ourselves. She writes in order to know:

That's at least one of the reasons I'm a writer. I write to figure it out, like understanding happens in words that don't come until later: thinking on paper so it'll hold still and I can look at it. You know how often you've wished you had thought to say something you didn't think of until the next day? Writing lets me say it even when I didn't.

In the final piece, "Happy Ending," she notes:

I like a happy ending, in words that let everybody off the hook. I always want sweet salvation to save the day from sorrow. I've never relished hearing sad stories meant to wring the heart.

In words there's hope.

If we can only say it right this time.

The 'language' of love, impressionable and fragile.

How sensible of lovers to take love straightaway, or as soon as possible to the protection of four walls and a door that closes, to keep it safe.

The payoff of *Absolutely Eden* is the pleasure of Hawkins' generous insight into our ridiculous optimism. Despite how many times

we've fallen in love, how many times we attempt to read Proust (I admit I have at least two uncracked volumes), despite the serial relationships or the "one true love" mythology that dooms us, Hawkins holds out hope for us in spite of our serial dumbness or maybe because of it. Bobbie Louise Hawkins is a master of the stage, and *Absolutely Eden* serves as a primer for anyone who dreams of holding an audience rapt in the palm of her hand.

Brenda Coultas is the author The Marvelous Bones of Time, published by Coffee House Press in 2007.

KEVIN DAVIES

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PARAPHERNALIA

EDGE BOOKS / 2008

REVIEW BY DREW GARDNER

Kevin Davies' poetry is political poetry that commits to a full activation of humor, a move that shows courage and nerve in a time when humor as a poetic power has been largely left unused, and often even frowned upon by the cast of professional frowners who tend to police the received wisdoms in this corner of the culture. Hilarious, mind-twisting constructions occur throughout *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia*, Davies' third full-length volume of poetry: "I have entered the mind of the punted chickens." At work here is a hybrid form of writing, at its base a technique of collage, of gradually accruing juxtaposed lines fused with moments of sinuous and even lyrical continuity. There are places where logical constructions congeal that are really absurdist parodies of logical (but irrational) thinking. The jump cuts seem not so much designed to disorient and jar but rather to build up an image of knowledge and knowability that harkens back to the psychotropic epistemological comedy of Gunslinger-era Ed Dorn. Davies' work leans upon a collage technique to produce an image of the time we live in—an image that has the coherency and balance of a kaleidoscope.

The question that arises quickly when assessing *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia* is whether it is proto-Flarf, crypto-Flarf, or just outright Flarf. The points of overlap are numerous: absurd political humor, seriousness mixed with wackiness, and a general cut-up pathos. These elements in Davies' work predate Flarf, but Flarfiness in poetry may very well begin with Issa, or perhaps the Yoga Sutras. Davies: "Lightning strikes the baby otter and we clutch each other in fear and grief." This poetry is written, but it is also assembled. Absurd juxtapositions, exaggerated or ironic pathos, and hilarious, insane propositions and metaphors abound. Davies also appears to be condoning a new form of pastoral Flarf, encouraging us to "Enable carrots to live free of themselves" or "Give the barn the beating it deserves" perhaps an influence attributable to the Canadian-New Yorker's recent exposure to the landscapes of downeast Maine.

There are funny, sharp, startling strings of pained perception and invention that leave intact neurotic tendencies rather than presenting a valorized persona or a series of idealized sensibilities. The

BOOK REVIEWS

affect of anxiety is allowed to work in the foreground even as a kind of surreal Zen-like wisdom or search for knowledge functions as the primary motor of the poetry. The Zen element is unusual though—a kind of CNN Zen: “in central Jersey / a guy watching his | couch float.”

It's unusual to find this much fun in such pointed, shrewd, uncompromisingly beautiful poetic tangles operating at this level of fragmentation and still retaining this level of engagement and intimacy. There is none of the pseudo-self-abnegating refusal of engagement which afflicts some of Davies' generation—the older gen-X/younger baby boomer avant-garde poets who started publishing in the early '90s.

There are self-conscious references to Language poetry (Ron Silliman), NY School (Frank O'Hara), and Black Mountain (Ed Dorn), but it would be a mistake to identify these as indicating a simple ironized mix of techniques from these poetries. What they indicate is the acceptance and acknowledgment of certain cross-sections of these different approaches spread over the surface of Davies' work like butter and jam over seven-grain toast.

Flourishes of black humor, paranoia and science fiction, as well as the gleeful but negatively charged play that they invite, occur in odd, micro-fictional pockets peppered throughout the book. Let's call this constructive escapism, otherwise known in poetry as flights of fancy, a device that can often be accompanied by sentimentality.

There's certainly no sentimentality to be found here, though the element of sentiment has a crucial role. The attitudes, thoughts, and judgments implied here are fueled by the poetic consciousness (one could almost say persona) of a subject who is constantly entwined in the problems of his society and economy. The results are often the black comedy of the depicted mind, which is a social critique in itself: “steel yourself—you've got Satan's work to do.”

Much of this work is broken up into sequenced units or clumps. Three long serial poems are interlaced through the book with only the dividing markers to identify them: “Floater,” “Remnants of Wilma,” “One-eyed Seller of Garlic.” There is also the marvelous, long, unbroken centerpiece poem, “Lateral Argument.” Much of the book is punky and rough, but here the flow becomes continuous, with exquisitely well-balanced proportions of detail and scale, notable for its craftsmanship, depth, and avoidance of waste: “...And, much later, flung by elders / into fiery abyss, keeping quiet about the deleted / status of my virginity, hoping for the sake of everyone / that it would rain soon // or the delicious frogs would return.”

This is not impossibly remote, esoteric, unimpeachable avant-garde art; it is accessible, engaging, esoteric, unimpeachable avant-garde art. Which means it could very well point directly to the poetry of the future. Perhaps it already has. And though “avant” poetry this may be, it's hard to imagine even the most ardently close-minded poetic neo-conservatives not at

least enjoying this work with a kind of bemused curiosity—that's how much room there is here for the reader. If there is a stumbling block, it may come from the fact that there may be more actual poetry in *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia* than some readers will be able to handle.

Drew Gardner's books include Sugar Pill (Krupskaya) and Petroleum Hat (Roof). A new collection of poems is forthcoming from Combo Books.

ROBERTO TEJADA MIRRORS FOR GOLD

KRUPSKAYA / 2006

REVIEW BY CHRISTINE LARK FOX

You have to be brave and ready to open Roberto Tejada's *Mirrors for Gold*. You must have a stomach for “severed fingers,” “variables of the body,” devouring fires, “turbid footprints,” and evaporating bodies. You must have “sufficient appetite” for births, geography, and erections, “a world in abstract disorder.” Your desire must be great and hungry for language, the living dead, hashish, ice, and fetish. You must be willing to be haunted not only by the figures and landscapes contained within this book but also by Tejada's skillful juxtaposition of images, at once striking and vivid, and by the open-ended mutability of his lines. You walk through his world as a voyeur, a traveler of mirrors, witnessing your own reflection in the masses of flesh, simultaneously aroused and disturbed at the same time. Tejada's work is an invitation, a window into another world, unabashedly erotic, and succinct.

CHAIN LINKS
Refuge / Refugee
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Amze Emmons,
The Documentary Project
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Mirrors for Gold is about desire and the distances traveled between things. It is a book of ghosts, rhythm, “cadences becoming,” and stillnesses undressing. It is a book of stories, the brilliance of bodies touching, and bodies resisting their own frailties.

This is a work about the body: human bodies; mutated bodies; a city body; bodies that make up voluptuous landscapes. Landscapes where horror and the erotic intermingle. It is a book that puts on display the historicity of these bodies within the succor of flesh melding into flesh, sidewalks, and sometimes, ritual, orgasmic crucifixions. They occupy places that are worn and frayed at the edges. There are thresholds “In which anger and bleeding are eroticized” (38). There are silences and slips of paper. Flesh. Blood and corpse. Appetites.

The “haunting human detritus” are objects that have lost themselves in the stupor of cities, sex, fringe, and simulacra. This is a poetry of interiors and of forbidden spaces: “We assembled to regard each other’s erections in the steam bath / without touching” (37) or “You dreamt your mother, quote / <<had snatched your meat>>” (28).

Mirrors for Gold produces a type of restlessness in the reader. With end lines that leave one hanging with longing and poems opened with possibility, one wonders if there will ever be a way out or a way around one’s own mortality and loneliness even within the physicality of “crepuscular desire.” Tejada elucidates this sure fate with lines like “while the water of bodies / in the earth evaporated” or “as though in fact self were determined below the surface where loomed the terrifying vision of a world devoid of them, the others” (39).

Tejada also illuminates language rife with its own frailties and complexities: “we fucked until / at last of / increasingly / more obdurate / matter as though two / languages were / scarcely enough” (43) and “her screams another language all together” (58) or “the speechless power of poetry exposed to air / as opposed to water, relinquished / listener between the line each breath / to detonate the eldritch” (65).

Mirrors for Gold is an offering, kindling to its own hot ignitions. Tejada weaves the nakedness of debilitated landscapes, bodies, language, and our own reflected desires and fears into a sensually rich, edible work.

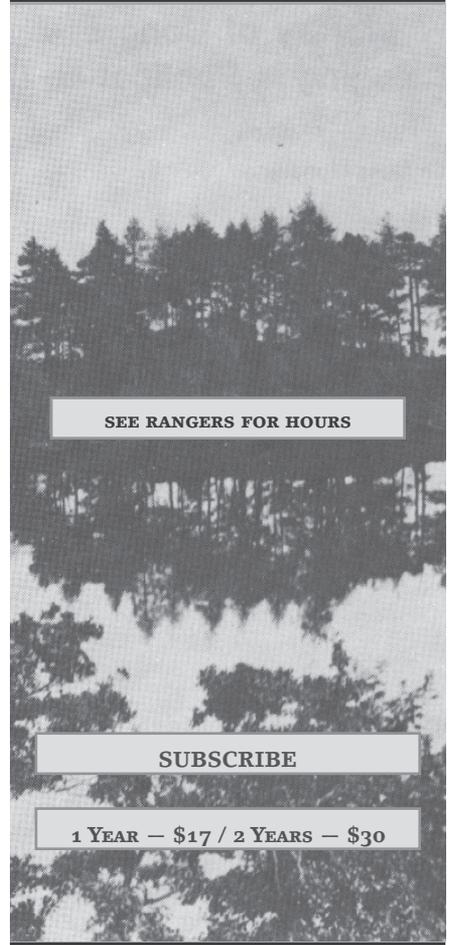
Christine Lark Fox has recently returned from New Mexico where she became reacquainted with awe. She has a deep devotion to both love and magic.

MICAH BALLARD
PARISH KREWES
BOOTSTRAP PRODUCTIONS / 2008
REVIEW BY GREG FUCHS

It is impossible to read Micah Ballard’s *Parish Krewes* without Hurricane Katrina imposing its harrowing aura, replete with tragic images of deluged New Orleanians, abandoned by muddled civic leaders and left to effectively die by drowning or deprivation.

Ballard’s poems are clearly located in Louisiana, though they often travel to far-away locales like the Queens Midtown Tunnel or the Tollund and Grauballe bogs of Denmark. The title *Parish Krewes* succinctly signifies the unique, almost non-American, culture of Louisiana. It’s a state where its counties are known as parishes and the carnival organizations that make Mardi Gras the biggest free party on earth are known as krewes, an antebellum embellishment of the word crew that has lodged itself into the local vernacular. Thom Donovan eloquently described, in his exegesis of Brett Evans’ and Frank Sherlock’s incendiary *Ready to Eat Individual*, that Hurricane Katrina has ripped time a new era, A.K., After Katrina (*The Poetry Project Newsletter* #217). As the horrors of the War to End All Wars defined a generation of avant-garde artists who indelibly influenced 20th-Century art and writing, so have the horrible truths revealed in the ebb of Hurricane Katrina and its attendant flood. Scores of artists in every medium—little-known poets to installation artists to provocative rappers to flamboyant pop stars to serious filmmakers to soulful trumpeters—

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are trying to understand the meaning of the storm's devastation. Recently, Prospect 1, the largest biennial of international contemporary art in the United States, was inaugurated in New Orleans, where many of the participating artists tried, in galleries, museums, and streets, to work out their understanding of a city ruined by water and corruption.

Interestingly, instead of writing poems in reaction to Hurricane Katrina, Ballard writes his poems in and around New Orleans, which was and remains the literal container for the tragedies of the flood. Ballard's positioning of the poems before and after Katrina, between time, as he writes (and the old Cajuns say), allows him to grapple with a more subtle range of experience; whereas a polemic of the disaster would only circumscribe his work by outrage. On the contrary, Ballard's poems explore death, friendship, history, intoxication, lineage, as well as varying styles of poetry. His writing can be sharp as a tack, purposefully opaque or dissonant, and sometimes thoroughly hermetic. This willingness to risk the reader makes reading Ballard's work refreshingly challenging.

Humans and poetry are more complicated than themes and meaning or natural disasters and shock doctrines. *Parish Krewes* is an unofficial selected poems of Micah Ballard, many of which were not only published in various small press 'zines but also in several beautifully crafted small books.

The thread of Hurricane Katrina does not run through the entire collection, which may or may not be a fault. It may simply be a fault of the reader not digging deep enough. For example, the strongest poem in *Parish Krewes* is "9/13/96," the date that American rapper Tupac Shakur died of respiratory failure and cardiac arrest caused by four gunshot wounds sustained in a still-unsolved drive-by shooting in Las Vegas. The poem identifies the tattoos on Shakur's body.

9/13/96

Nerfertiti over
right pec & serpent
with jaws open
on left shoulder.
German cross

with Exodus 18:11
across the back, Playaz
on nape of neck.
Christ in crown
of thorns & flames

on left biceps
Heartless with skull
& crossbones on right.
50 Niggaz over sternum
FTW in script

across the shoulder
blades & trapezoids.
Laugh Now with mask

of Comedy on lower
sides of back, Cry

Later with mask
of Tragedy. Outlaw
down left forearm
Thug Life with bullet
across abs.

On the surface this poem has nothing to do with Hurricane Katrina. Yet as one contemplates the imagery and its canvas, one cannot help but contemplate how the bodies of black men have been the site of the enforcement of power, the slash of the whip, simultaneously threatening and erotically charged, for four centuries in the new world, often quite pronounced in Louisiana, culminating in the unsettling images of black men left to die on rooftops in the surge of Katrina's flood. Check the history of Congo Square in New Orleans where African polyrhythm gave birth to American popular music yet was also a place of fierce authority finally obliterated by 1960s urban renewal; check Angola State Prison, created as a way to continue plantation labor in the wake of Reconstruction; check James Booker, genius piano player whose tragic life, haunted by drug addiction and jail time, was manipulated by Harry Connick, Sr., New Orleans district attorney, to teach his now famous son, a pale imitator of the master; check Kanye West saying President Bush doesn't care about black people.

The personal is the political. We have family, friends, and colleagues trying to rebuild their homes in New Orleans. The pace of recovery clearly illustrates the lack of concern by all of us, especially our leaders. It is a crying shame that the city that gave America music is crippled. There are three small, untitled poems in *Parish Krewes* that are my favorites. Each is a list: neighborhoods, carnival krewes, and potions. As a young poet growing up in New Orleans, I was always fascinated by names—for example, how street names in the city could make a poem. Ballard's poem that lists New Orleans neighbor-

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hoods conveys the vastness of Hurricane Katrina's destruction, a vastness no one outside of New Orleans has received:

from Poydras to Kenner
 from Violet to Metairie
 from Meraux to Bucktown
 from Village de L'Est to Old Metairie
 from Chalmette to Lakeview
 from Arabi to Mid-City
 from Lower Ninth to Broadmoor
 from New Orleans East to Gentilly
 from Bywater to Treme

Greg Fuchs was born and raised in New Orleans. His most recent book of poetry is Metropolitan Transit published by Isabel Lettres. Fuchs serves as the President of the Board of Directors of the Poetry Project.

ABIGAIL CHILD
 THIS IS CALLED MOVING:
 A CRITICAL POETICS OF FILM
 UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS / 2005
 REVIEW BY DAVID JHAVE JOHNSTON

Because *This Is Called Moving* with conscious intention differs from both formal theory and informal poetry (hybrid-genred, it refuses to be contained in a single category), it risks slipping into a crevice between disciplines. Theorists may find it too personal and raw, sexual, and non-linear; poets entranced by rapturous language play may find their engagement interrupted by swift jolts of dense terminology. However, an open, interdisciplinary inforager will recognize in *This Is Called Moving* a very contemporary, lush interwoven accumulation of raw datum. Swirling around gender, poetry, film, and politics, an accretional labyrinth of fertile memes forms a body, and the body is breathing.

Hear Abigail Child read *This Is Called Moving*, imagine it, because it's in the reading, the flow of cadences, the tangled turbulent swelter of voices, that the book's strength emerges. Dry, thick, dense, and difficult prose is revealed to be a living and aerobically-intense song: polyphonic and

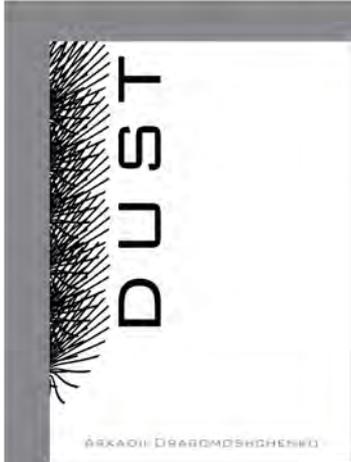
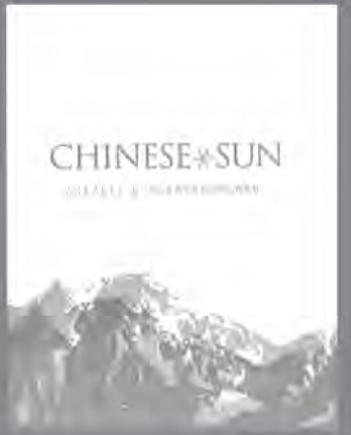
polyrhythmic. Conceptually, *This Is Called Moving* is a literary-theoretical-poetic-revolutionary cousin of Glen Gould's "Solitude Trilogies" in that a multiplicity of voices (choral and contrapuntal concepts, poetic fragments, and considered arguments) are brought into an ecosystem which is a book. I dissolves, and eye opens.

Abigail Child's swerving tangential style reminds me of a friend who uses Twitter incessantly. Twitter (for those who may not know) is an online social-networking tool

that allows for real-time, small (max. 140 characters) web-posts. Reading a list of Twitter posts offers insight into the osmosis of normal mental fluctuations. Similarly oscillatory and osmotic, Child, intuitively and algorithmically, weaves sensual id and formal theory. This is not linear-math; in an interview with Charles Bernstein in the same volume, Child refers to "subverting" the algorithms she uses to construct her texts. The sediment of the brain-body of our civilization's ontological queries are filtered through her voice. Child's style

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ARKADII DRAGOMOSHCHENKO

(two works of innovative prose)

“Full of vitality as well as profundity, and resonating with something I can only term friendship.”
Lyn Hejinian

“Dragomoshchenko’s sentences, like Tolstoy’s, are urgent and determined, and though they may not function to move the reader along a narrative current, they do mean something.”
Kristen Prevallet, *BOMB Magazine*

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BOOK REVIEWS

belongs to a literary lineage that has known many names: collage, bricolage, cut-up, remix, mashup. Mashups are web-applications that absorb data into a single tool; the term is now applied to artworks that recombine diverse material, and it has analogies to poetic practice: Language poets swiveling on Wittgenstein's turn toward language, as well as the more raw surrealists.

In this era of discontinuous attention, when computation provides the capacity to network hop between subjects and styles, Child's book is fiercely contemporary and topical. Readers who desire linear continuity or normalized cadence will jettison the book in protest. But there are rationales for Child's montage: tangible experience as an editor-poet and contemporary entropy. In addition to being a preeminent mashup precursor, its style is evocative of computational literature which has sought to construct poetry using algorithms. Usually these algorithms apply grammatical rules to a corpus of words and phrases to create verse. But Child's text-mashups are readable and even engaging while most (if not all) of computationally-created literature is not. Why? There are subtle lessons to be unraveled and relevance here for programmers of poetry and digital poets, lessons that suggest engagement par-

tially arises through purposeful permutations which focus on cadence (the suture of literary sensitivity).

Child morphs from ontological proclamations ("Ideology works through all forms") to inclusive political axioms ("How to deal with information? Make all the voices present"), to sensual-intellectual probes ("Film makes an architecture. We want to walk in it. Entering space, collapsing and distributing time..."), and bits of life-story ("After four years in San Francisco I am back in New York living in a downtown neighbourhood with drug busts monthly (the potato chip truck delivers heroin to the local bodega)....").

Fortunately, her velocity is balanced by a taut focus that radiates through the potential topologies of each argument. Rhythmically woven, heir to Vertov's formal filmic concerns, Jameson's imaginative radicalism, and Goya's enraged heart, Child's voice (like her montages) rapidly splashes and fractures conventionally separate academic domain-species into a nourishing idiosyncratic broth. A primer in radical ontologies. A gateway into a continuum of engaged textuality. Analysis that functions as art by keeping its capacity for fluid tangents alive. Time falls apart and what remains is a sinuous ribbon of reflections on culture's cutting floor, and

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Child is chuckling there, clutching her shearers, film's history running through her fingers like soft milk.

The way Child explains her filmmaking process is equally applicable to her poetry: "In *Prefaces* I wanted to use found images as a resource, a dictionary, to de-acclurate our 'image bank'—to break the bank image in fact, to redistribute, to structure a pulse-field-pulse through which and with which permutations act exchange." To unfold her project is to encounter multiple skins. Between mind and body, between intellect and passion, between physics (field) and sex (permutations pulse).

And outside it all, pristine somehow, removed from the riot of montaged potentialities, a meta-awareness examines the effluence. The essay closes with the enigmatic sentence: "The character of the material analyzes the mind." Read the preceding sentence too quickly and it seems that mind analyzes matter, but the real implication is more perverse; it involves a radical inversion of ontologies of consciousness: material analyzes the mind.

David Jhave Johnston is a multimedia-poet (who has given up chapbooks to build digital-poetry websites) currently living in Montreal. His home site is www.glia.ca; he co-curates www.year01.com.

LILA ZEMBORAIN
MAUVE SEA-ORCHIDS
TRANSLATED BY ROSA ALCALÁ
AND MÓNICA DE LA TORRE
BELLADONNA BOOKS / 2007
REVIEW BY CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

Lila Zemborain's *mauve sea-orchids* opens with an epigraph from Proust, where he asks, "Are [jelly-fish] not, with the transparent velvet of petals, like the mauve orchids of the sea?" Zemborain extends the question (extensión is an important act throughout) to ask us to reimagine the complexity and sensuality of the body's experiences in time.

mauve sea-orchids is divided into three sections: "la orguidea y el moscardón" (orchid and bumble-bee), "los pétalos furiosos" (the furious petals), and "malvas orquídeas" del mar (mauve sea-orchids). Each page is a centered prose poem, lyrically floating within space like a jellyfish and often continuing on the next page (though one could also argue that all the poems flow serially into each other). In the first section, we are immediately drawn in by Zemborain's sensually attenuated syntax:

at night it is unavoidable that bodies attuned to
the throbs and the rhythm of loveglands come

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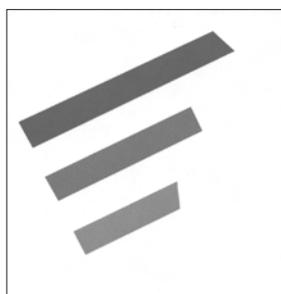
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together; hands are compelled to begin performing their sensing duties, they generate countless resonances of energy in bodies that once loved each other oblivious of passion, but now recognize it with the certainty of whom knows the move that should follow; a love that persists in the cell's pact, a seal that erases the years of controlled entropy; (5)

"Las glándulas del amor" become the dynamic site of the body's energies, sensations, and perceptions. The loveglands release a fragrance that "reaches a radius far beyond what has been conceived of as the aura," thus transforming the body into more than "a mass of organs and tissues organized around the skeleton" (19). The trance-like movement of Zemborain's lyricism leads us to,

[...] perceiving the body as one of those drawings of cells with a nucleus, then something like the albumen, and then an irregular edge that is flexible so as to establish osmotic relationships with other cells;" (21)

The loveglands form the structure and imaginary of the "non-geometrical kaleidoscope" of the poems themselves. As Zemborain asserts: "it is not that the brain controls the glands, as is commonly thought, but rather that the glands control the brain" (23-5). This also seems to suggest that the composition of the book emerges from the osmotic relationship between thought and intuition.

The second section, "the furious petals" moves from the glandular structure of the body to the body composed by death and aging:

the awe that the grave inspires becomes accentuated in one's features, in one's hands an unuttered knowledge deteriorates; (43)

By reimagining the body, Zemborain manages to juxtapose the liveliness of the body's deeper structures with the "desolation of a body that lives and palpitates and begins to understand inevitability" (47). This juxtaposition creates a striking thematic tension within the already tensed syntax of the poems. Although this tension does not revolve around a named character, Zemborain does address a "tough female," referring to one flower that "dares in the cast off field": "do not respond, tough female, to the random uproar of your displacement; open your eyes to dusk" (35).

Continuing the flow of embodiment, the third section more fully contours the "tough female" as a "she": "she mourns, mourns the body, mourns while licking the wound that won't close;" (67). We are never directly told her situation; instead, we are left with provocative questions: "who is it? where does it come from? what does it want?" (63) and "who announces the living's spectacular radiance?" (65). Zemborain's use of questions forms an engaging syntactical counterpoint and adds another tonal layer to the mostly declarative narration. Although most of what we learn about "her" is more of a mapping than a telling, we do learn "that

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BOOK REVIEWS

the moon refused to cohere with her history” (67) and that “she opens her arms so nothing of her is left” (61-3).

Throughout *mauve sea-orchids*, we lose ourselves in the syntactic currents and simultaneously rediscover the body in the embodied pronouns and evocative images. In Zemborain’s own words, we experience “the body like an arrow tensioned in all directions” (73) and “the body gliding towards the celestial abyss of light” (79). Reading *mauve sea-orchids* situates us within its “rítmica flexión” and transforms how we see and experience our bodies in the world.

Craig Santos Perez is a co-founder of Achiote Press and author of from unincorporated territory [hacha] (Tinfish Press, 2008).

VALENTINA SARAÇINI
DREAMING ESCAPE
TRANSLATED FROM THE ALBANIAN BY
ERICA WEITZMAN
WITH RUDINA JASINI
AND FLORA ISMAILI
UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE / 2008
REVIEW BY INGRID NELSON

In Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s 1944 film, *A Canterbury Tale*, the bucolic Kentish landscape that forms both the impetus for and the terminus of Chaucer’s great poem is steeped in layers of significance. Set during World War II, the film meditates on the continuity land provides to a war-torn country, and on the way history imprints itself on a landscape, fracturing it into the multiple pasts of memory. In the film’s opening, a medieval pilgrim on the road to Canterbury releases a falcon into the sky. The camera follows the bird, then cuts to a World War II fighter jet. In another scene, a young woman who has come to the town from London to find wartime work “hears” the songs and voices of the medieval travellers along the pilgrim’s road that remains on a hill above the town. Every moment of history that plays out on a landscape, the film suggests, is endlessly inscribed on that landscape, echoing its joys and its traumas, and shaping those who inhabit it. In a time of war, the landscape becomes the national body on which trauma is enacted, yet also holds the promise of futurity. In this way, the land is both irreducible and endlessly malleable in human history.

If smaller in scale than World War II, the Kosovo war nonetheless scarred its survivors, and the land where it was fought, just as deeply. The Albanian poet Valentina Saraçini’s *Dreaming Escape* renders her own vision of the way this war shaped a landscape at once intimate and transhistorical. In these poems, trauma to the national body maps on crumbling mountains and perforated tree

trunks. The resonant sites of history become metonyms for the war’s impact on human bodies. The poem “Tree Trunk” shifts almost imperceptibly between landscape and body:

When you become a monument to waiting
Hands raised high neck broken
One-legged in a time of tatters
The winds beseech you

They are leery of your layered anxieties
They gauge the golden silence of your earth

You are leaded
The leaden pain of centuries
The silver-white heads of brides’ mothers
And you a broken branch where no fruit ripens (19)

Within the traumatic landscape lives an inert potentiality, locked in by natural processes. Water in all its forms—the sea, ice, fog—is a potent symbol of this paralysis, both psychological and ecological.

Other gods will come
On other mountains
Inexorably they rise up from the glaciers

And the words froze
The grass too held captive

A vegetal fate

(“The Grass,” 75)

Just as trauma is displaced onto the landscape, another kind of displacement occurs in the dream, an individual’s refuge from what is into what might be. In “The Panting,” Saraçini explores the difficult relationship between dreams and existence:

When dreams lay a trap for expectation
Truth comes without a sound

Anchors the abandoned soul

Maybe you remember
Being has ways of its own
Invisible spirals

And never unravels (101)

This image of the spiral, whose centrifugal force holds “being” together, describes Saraçini’s poetics. Sensitively rendered in this translation, short lines and crystalline images suspend the reader in Saraçini’s scarred, but never irreparable, landscape. Displacement is cathartic in *Dreaming Escape*, purging trauma into a landscape and a language that holds the promise of renewal.

Ingrid Nelson is writing a book on medieval lyric and song.

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