



THE POETRY PROJECT

APRIL / MAY 2016 ISSUE #247

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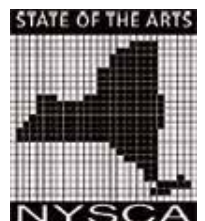
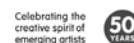
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Cover image: "Wall Street", 66 x 50 inches, Silkscreen on Stainless Steel, 2013.
(c) Alberto Borea. Courtesy of the artist.

Letter from the Director



photo: Ted Roeder

If you've been following the Project for the past year, you know that next season is our 50th Anniversary. Our inaugural reading will be a Paul Blackburn tribute on September 28, with a panel on his work at The Graduate Center on September 26. We'll also have a platform of five events specifically to celebrate the anniversary. A preview includes: "Learning at the Project" celebrating the workshops, "Umbra" celebrating the influence of Umbra poets, and 3 on 3, three poets present on three different readings from the Project's archive. Yes, the archive.

Our audio archive has been safely residing at the Library of Congress since 2007 and is currently being restored. Imagine batches of reel-to-reel arriving in Culpeper, VA, and leaving in encoded digital form!

Some readings from each decade will be ready to listen to next season.

We're also looking forward to a gala to honor Anne Waldman in Spring of 2017. Her dedication to poetry, activism, and building infrastructures that make spaces for poetry vital across many decades is something we want to celebrate. We're thrilled that our friends and allies, Woodland Pattern Book Center, The Poetry Center, and Naropa's Summer Writing Program, will be hosting special Poetry Project @ 50 events to make the celebration national. In some ways, it will be poetry as usual for us, with 60+ other readings taking place during the season. We want the golden anniversary experience to help us to connect with even more new writers and audiences, to celebrate lineage, to be in the urgency of

the present, and to build a future.

We still have three and a half months of excellent programming this season. I hope you'll all consider attending Spring Thing: DIY on Saturday, May 7. Poet Kim Lyons put the idea of a poet prom into my head years ago and I've been tempted by it ever since. Poet Prom? Art Prom? Some thing? Thus Spring Thing: DIY— dove down and it emerged, with the help of a small motor— a dance party in an art installation. You can likely afford the cost of admission (sliding scale) and to have some fun. Come see what kind of SPACE artists Jibade-Khalil Huffman, Marc Andre Robinson, and Zach Wollard, along with Jace Clayton aka DJ / rupture will create for poets of today.

—Stacy Szymaszek

Notes from the Project

C.D. Wright 1949-2016

"Nobody reads poetry, we are told at every inopportune moment. I read poetry. I am somebody."
—C.D. Wright

Our condolences to the family and friends of poet and longtime professor at Brown University C.D. Wright.

Copper Canyon will release her book *ShallCross* in April. Her poems and her dedication to poetry will be missed.

Composing with Words:

Experiments & Wagers

Masterclass with Joan Retallack

Tuesday April 19, 2016 | 2-5PM

Location: Neighborhood Preservation Center (232 E 11th St, New York, NY 10003)

For millennia our species has believed in, counted on, the transformative power of words even while our daily uses of language beckon the revenge of the real. In this charged period of our history, with millions of our own and other species suffering from large-scale human meanness and folly, is it possible to compose our linguistic selves into poetic conversations with our own cultural silences? As poets it's our humorously grave privilege to try. If to compose a language game is to compose a form of life as Wittgenstein suggested, let's see what we can do with that prospect in a workshop of experiments and wagers. Some probable navigational aids: Wittgenstein, Gertrude Stein, John Cage, Mahmoud Darwish, NourbeSe Philip.

Joan Retallack is author of *The Poethical Wager and Procedural Elegies / Western Civ Cont'd* /— an Artforum Best Book of 2010. Other poetry includes *Memnoir*, *Mongrelisme*, *How To Do Things With Words*, *Errata Suite*, and *Afterimages*. She collaborated with John Cage on *MUSICAGE*— a volume of their conversations published by Wesleyan University Press— and has written extensively, pleasurably on Gertrude Stein.

What can poetry do?

National Poetry Month, which occurs each April in the United States, is a celebration of poetry that was introduced in 1996 and organized by the Academy of American Poets as a way to increase awareness and appreciation of poetry. Now touted as the largest literary celebration in the world, this year marks the 20th anniversary of National Poetry Month. To celebrate and explore the wonder that is poetry, I asked a handful of contemporary poets to share their thoughts on the art by responding to one question: **What can poetry do that nothing else can?** —Betsy Fagin

Tina Chang, Brooklyn Poet Laureate:

When we examine the most sacred occasions of birth, marriage, and death, these rites of passage embody such heightened emotions that they seem to have no place to go but song and we are ultimately moved to reach for poetry. Poetry seeks to express the inexpressible and the hope is to harness the greatest achievement of man which is not riches, not ownership, not power, but expression. In our daily lives we're surrounded by words on billboards, emails, news feeds and so much of it is information-based. The lyric quality of poetry defies all of that as it seeks to transform our most sacred feelings into its most succinct form and that is the document of the human experience.

Bob Holman: WRITING (and I *am* writing!) about "What can poetry do that nothing else can?" for The Newsletter, the rare place where I can reference the difference between how I use the word language now from the days of Alice Notley's workshop in the 70s when Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews et al were stretching L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E into a new avant-garde (pardon the redundancy). Others who moved through the Notley Workshop included Eileen Myles, Rose Lesniak, Barb Barg, Patricia Spears Jones, James Sherry, Bob Rosenthal, Susie Timmons, Simon Schuchat, Chris Kraus, Steve Levine, Shelley Kraut, the Mag City crew (Greg Masters, Gary Lenhart, Michael Scholnick), Caryl Slaughter, Jeff Wright— sheesh, who am I leaving out?

Nowadays, in my world, *language* means Mother Tongue. When you *speak language* (or *in language*), it means no English or Mandarin or other bully language. For these minority (often endangered) languages, English/Mandarin et al are not languages at all, but simply an agreed upon convention, a means of utilitarian communication. The

essence part, the consciousness/identity/ roots part, is inside the lineages/languages that have survived this long in a world where the consciousness of literacy reigns supreme.

Here's an example. In *Language Matters*, the PBS doc on endangered languages and revitalization that I made with David Grubin, I ask Australian Aboriginal songman (poet) **Johnny Namayiwa** what languages he speaks. Manangkardi, Marrku and Ilgar he responds, and oh yes, his own language, Mawng. Only then, with prompting, laughingly, surprise— English! the language we are actually using. Still, the pressures of globalization are causing languages to disappear at an unprecedented rate— we're going to lose half the languages on the planet before the end of the century. Unless poets and others who understand the ecology of consciousness affect change.

What can poetry do that nothing else can? Every language has a word art, a poetry, whether sung or written, aphorisms or epics, offered by a group or created by someone who has the official job. And time after time, whether it's the *cynghanedd* ("consonant chime") of Welsh poetry, the *mele* (chant) from which the dance gestures of the Hawaiian hula are inspired, or *griots* performing the days' long Mandinke epic Sunjata, first emperor of Mali— I've seen it. Half the languages on the planet may disappear this century unless we start to respect Mother Tongues via immersion schools and other methods. Poetry— packed with meaning and music, mnemonically memorable, passed from generation to generation— poetry can be a prime force in keeping a language from disappearing.

Paolo Javier,

former Queens Poet Laureate:

Q: What can poetry do that nothing else can? A: Realness, Purpose, Foundation,

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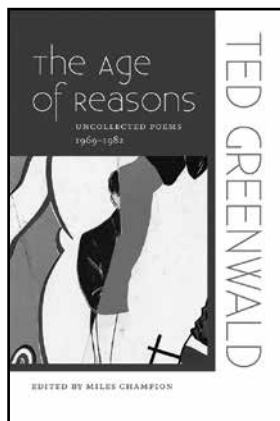
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Mystery, Devotion, Loki.

Eileen Myles: It can write poems. And no one can stop it.

Anne Waldman:
"The invention of the unknown demands new forms." (Rimbaud)

I listened to the gravitational winds the other night, sonic ripples of energy coursing through our cosmos: space and time. Merging black holes? I sang with them, putting words awry on their coasts: *dgar rumm, am a swill lil bidden rise, rose a coms, mum's a diadem dim dim obsidian a new lap and roil awhoo awhoo.* Nonsense for the cold stars!

My ears are giant pink shells, open wide. My body swells / with the sounds that are trapped in it. I hear the bleating of great Pan. I hear the vermillion music of the sun. (Hugo Ball)

I've always felt necessity to take poetry to an oral and public space. Demanding its throaty body be exposed: larynx on fire. Reanimate the phones and phonemes of an exquisite delight. Poem an intervention, a wild mind document, cut into space and sound. What else so sly, so pleasing, so modest? And the pleasure it sounds from a book. A book! Privacy, soft interiors of dulcet or galactic rampant soundings, interior concert halls in the head. Gone on this inkling a long time, helped found a school around it, saying boldly: Poetry helps wake up the world to itself, as a cosmic mirror through which the poet scrys and prophesizes and identifies. Celebrates, castigates. In alternative space. And mourns in human language. Marianne Moore could write about unicorns. ("etched like an equine monster of an old celestial map, beside a cloud or dress of Virgin Mary blue.") She would claim her poems as flies in amber. For others it's time bombs.

The light weeks fly, / And I do not understand what has happened— / How for you, my darling son / The white night looked into the jail / And will look again / With the eye

of hawk / And speak to you / Of your high cross, And of death."
(Anna Akhmatova)

Earlier

Your lips held the cold of an icon, / I won't forget / The deathly sweat on your forehead. / I will go like the wives of the Streltzy dead / And howl under the towers of the Kremlin.

Your husband murdered, your son in lockdown. And poetry might thus pry samsara from within its terrible syndicate, expose imposters, reanimate sentient beings to be fearless, radical, revolutionary, turning language all ways. What claims me in the dark of the night, roiling? In a way that feels salient, wise, possible (O impossible inconsolable irreparable world!), generative? Poetry restores love, intellect, a singular adventure of imagination. And breaks lazy language habit.

I want to be / a stream tuner, / unfurled in tongues that won't belong in anybody's mouth, / mass swerving from the law of tongues, / let me slip my slap-tongued speech in your ear, / the burnt starry star of all love in your ear. o for a muse of fire music.
(Fred Moten)

Thanks to translators

Christopher Middleton, Lenore Mayhew, William McNaughton.

Yolanda Wisher,

Philadelphia Poet Laureate:

Poetry can make you taste hot sauce from two centuries ago. Poetry can turn your ear inside out. Poetry can make you swoon and stay woke at the same time. Poetry can make your voice a dragon or a teakettle. Poetry can make a moment bigger than it is or will be. Poetry can stitch up a rip in your heart.

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SIMONE WHITE
OF BEING DISPERSED

EVAN KENNEDY
THE SISSIES

SUEYEUN JULIETTE LEE
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See Who's There:

Matthew Burgess spoke with **Ron Padgett** on April 24, 2015, at his home in New York City's East Village. Another portion of this conversation was published in *Teachers & Writers Magazine*.

Matthew Burgess: People often describe your poetry as “fun” and “funny.” Of course this isn't true of all of your poems, but I'm curious about how and when you let this humor into your work.

Ron Padgett: As an adolescent, I became gloomy, introspective, and sometimes anguished, partly from reading Sartre, Camus, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Samuel Beckett. Everything seemed very dark and outsiderish. Before that I had had a good sense of humor. I loved the Three Stooges and Jerry Lewis, but also older standup comedians from radio and television. I was addicted to comic books. But my taste for the comic finally got trapped under the wet blanket of adolescence.

After high school I came to study at Columbia, where Professor Kenneth Koch reminded me, by the way he said things and the way he saw things, that it was okay to let your comic side come out and play. It was nice to rediscover this part of myself. By 16 or 17, I had pretty much forgotten how to see the world that way.

MB: Joe Brainard shares this playfulness. So much of his work seems inspired by comic books and a child-like perspective. You and Joe have that in common.

RP: When he and I were in high school together, we were pretty serious. We talked about serious things: life and death and girls. We didn't joke around a lot. No. We got lighter in New York.

MB: Did you start reading the New York poets while you were in high school in Tulsa?

Did those poets influence your decision to move to New York City?

RP: I read a few poems by John Ashbery and by Kenneth in *Yugen*, the little magazine edited by LeRoi Jones (as he was called then) in the late 1950s, but I was more attracted to the Beats and the Black Mountain poets. I think it was in *Yugen* or *Evergreen Review* that I first read Frank O'Hara. Then I bought his *Meditations in an Emergency*, around Thanksgiving of 1958. I was in New Orleans visiting Dick Gallup, my friend from Tulsa who was a freshman at Tulane. Maybe it was '59. Anyway, I brought *Meditations* back to Dick's dorm room and read it on the spot. It scared me. It seemed to me this poet was completely crazy. He talked about going to visit a fellow and finding him lying dead in a pool of blood: “There are few / hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest.” The tone, I just couldn't get it.

What drew me to New York was the fact that Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac had gone to Columbia and also the fact that Columbia was in New York. I knew that I wanted to go from Tulsa to one coast or the other. Also, I'd made some contacts here in New York through a little magazine I had started in high school. I had been corresponding with LeRoi, Allen, Paul Blackburn, and others, so I felt I had some advance purchase on New York. Of course my feeling was somewhat delusional, but it helped get me here.

MB: And Joe followed?

RP: Yes. First he rented a cockroach-infested storefront on East Sixth Street for a year and then a \$23 apartment on First Avenue near Sixth. It had no electricity and no gas. He didn't have a real job so he sold his blood, worked for almost nothing at a nearby junk / antiques shop, and scraped by.

As a freshman I was housed in the Columbia dormitory, so I was protected.

Joe got really turned on by the art he saw here. His first visit to MoMA was electrifying. It made him realize that New York was where he wanted to be. I had a mentor— Kenneth— who was walking ahead of me down the path with a lantern. Joe had been joined by Ted Berrigan from Tulsa, which helped, but still he was stumbling along. He was dealing with a sort of crisis— facing a serious developmental stage in his life— whereas I wasn't thinking in those terms. I had the luxury of attending interesting classes and reading great books and seeing great movies and running around and being energized and a little scared, anxious and happy, sleepless, staying up all night, that sort of thing, but I wasn't agonizing about who I was.

MB: How much of this had to do with homosexuality for Joe?

RP: I don't know, but sexuality had *something* to do with it. He didn't come out until a couple of years later, but it wasn't that he was in the closet. Rather, he was confused sexually. But the main issue for him at that time was his overall character— who he was and why he was that way and how had his upbringing made him who he was. He was determined to break free, not just from the shackles imposed by puritanical Christianity and the societal norms of his upbringing but also from self-imposed shackles. He didn't want to think of himself the way he always had, which was in terms of the way people around him thought of him. He wanted to create his own standards for himself.

So I think that sexuality played a smaller role in that than one

might suspect, although sex, especially at a young age, is obviously at the basis of a lot of things you can't identify. A couple of years later he did sort out his sexuality. He got lucky in more ways than one, in finding his first real lover— Joe LeSueur, who was Frank O'Hara's roommate and friend— under the best of circumstances. Frank and Joe L.'s attitude was “We're gay. So what?” They weren't bent out of shape by being queer.

Years later, after Stonewall and after society became a little healthier in its attitude about homosexuality, Joe LeSueur told me, “You know, Ron, I kind of miss the good old days when nobody liked us and we had our own world and we said, ‘We're doing something you don't like? Tough!’ I miss the old days when you had to hide a little bit sometimes. That was fun, actually.” Joe L. had a playful and amazingly well-adjusted attitude toward the whole thing. Of course, his view is not available to everyone. People stuck in small-town America (or in Saudi Arabia!) must feel tortured or suicidal.

MB: So you had Kenneth holding a lantern for you. Was someone holding a lantern for Joe? Was it Frank O'Hara?

RP: Not really. Joe met Frank about the same time Ted and I did. I don't remember exactly when the three of us started going to art openings and parties, where we met Larry Rivers and Barbara Guest and people like Frank and Joe LeSueur and a little bit later Kenward Elmslie and a number of others.

Joe B. was such a likeable, sweet, shy person. People loved his art and they were happy to welcome him into their social lives, but it wasn't as if there was one particular person who

A Conversation With Ron Padgett

was mentoring him through the whole thing. Of course, early on he began a lifelong relationship with Kenward Elmslie, who by example showed him a more sophisticated, worldly life. In 1965 Kenward took him to Italy, Madrid, Barcelona, and Paris. He was able to introduce Joe to a lot of things, but it wasn't as if he were teaching him something fundamental about himself.

MB: Did you ever feel intimidated when suddenly you were hanging out with these poets whom you had admired from a distance?

RP: Often. They were so bright and witty and fast and sophisticated and terrific. Sometimes in their presence I just stood there with my jaw hanging down and hoped that nobody would expect me to be terrific, too.

MB: I can see myself in that position, jaw hanging down.

RP: I was pretty silent at a lot of those gatherings, which people mistook for intelligence.

MB: Did you become friends with Frank O'Hara?

RP: Yes, but it wasn't a deep or long-lasting friendship. He died in 1966. I met him in maybe 1962, by which time I had been able to "get" his work. Also I learned more about him through Kenneth's classes at Columbia, in which he referred to Frank and John as if they

were well known. This was as early as 1960.

Anyway, I was starting to see Frank at parties and openings. He was very affable and generous toward me. Finally he and Joe LeSueur invited my wife Pat and me to dinner at their loft on Broadway. Kenneth and his wife Janice

A few years later, in the summer of '65, I was going to go off to France on a Fulbright. *Lunch Poems* had recently come out. I went to a party at Joe LeSueur's— he and Frank were still great friends but they had decided to live separately. I brought my copy of *Lunch Poems* for Frank to sign. I can't remember the exact

place on Avenue B, and a day or so later the news came that Frank had been hit by a car and was in critical condition. The next thing we heard was that he had died. The news was really utterly horrible. Actually it was unthinkable... But to answer your question, yes, I did know him but I can't make the exaggerated claim that we

were close friends, because there wasn't enough time. But I felt close to him and I admired him enormously and I felt grateful to him.

MB: Did you ever anticipate that Frank's work would become so widely loved and well known?

RP: No. I never thought about anything like that and I prefer not to think about it now. It would distract me from his work. It's like you meet a movie star: it's fun but you can't see the person. Fame gets in the way.



Ron Padgett and Ted Berrigan in Tulsa, c. 1959. Photo by Patricia Padgett.

were coming, too. When Pat and I came up the stairs and we got to the landing just below his, I looked up and there was Frank leaning over the stairwell, waving, "Here we are." When we got up to him I saw a big smile on his face, and he said, "I'm so glad you could come tonight. I really like your poetry." I blurted out, "Uh— I like yours, too!" which collapsed him with laughter. He laughed in a wonderful, warm way that set me at ease. The six of us had a nice, informal dinner— Joe LeSueur's chili. The conversation was wonderful, just great. Joe made an extra effort to make me feel welcome. I always felt nothing but kindness from both him and Frank.

circumstances, but at one point I noticed that he had gone into an adjacent room— maybe he was about to leave? Thinking I had better have him sign the book now, I followed him. It turned out to be Joe's bedroom, and Frank was in there taking his pants off. Actually he was just getting dressed up to go to a fancy MoMA event or something. It was totally innocent. I walked in just as Frank was dropping his pants. Frank looked at me and then to Joe and said, "Oh, dear. What will he think of us *now*?" It was so funny. Then he inscribed the book for me and left.

When Pat and I came back to New York the following year, we landed at Joe Brainard's

MB: In your new book, *Alone and Not Alone*, you mention Pat several times. Does she read and comment on your early drafts?

RP: Yes. We've been together for 54 years and she has what they used to call an internal shit detector. If I show her a new piece I've done, which I almost always do, she'll read it carefully and say, "It's brilliant, but I found a couple of typos and then this part here, I don't know, it just doesn't seem necessary." She's not afraid to tell me exactly what she thinks. Ted and I had that working relationship, too. During a certain period we showed each other a lot of our work, hot off the typewriter. When we found

soft spots, we would come back at each other with direct, honest, specific responses.

MB: Was he usually right?

RP: Yes. Ted was a good critic. Like Pat, he could tell when as a writer I was faking it a little bit or spinning my wheels in order to get to the next line or the next stanza, or resorting to a knee-jerk technique or slick move. A lot of people can't see these things, and the more respected you are the worse it gets.

By the way, I don't always take Pat's advice. Sometimes I think she's flat wrong, but she's right a lot more often than she's wrong. Sometimes when she points out a dubious passage, I'll suddenly remember, "Oops, I thought that too, but I kind of skated over it." I had instantly pretended to myself it wasn't there.

MB: I really like the idea of readers who are friends, who will use their internal shit detectors but are also inclined to appreciate what you're doing. It gives you more space, I think, to write and to enjoy the process.

RP: Look at the artistic space that Frank created in his short life. He wasn't beholden to anybody. Some of the poems in *Lunch Poems* seem even more gutsy if you think about the national literary climate around him back then. He had just his few friends, but god, look at who they were! A small but fabulous audience.

Frank was not without his insecurities about his own work, but he was a tough little guy who wasn't going to be pushed around by anybody, really. That's how his nose got like that, busted in a fight or fracas. Not that he was pugnacious. He wasn't.

Anyway, I know what you mean. Look. That's why sometimes I go back and read a poet such as Vallejo—difficult poems like those in *Trilce*, for

example. Imagine the terrible conditions he was writing them under. It's very inspiring to me. This guy really was going his own way. My way is not his way but the fact that he went his own way encourages me. He was really great. I love it that he did that without regard to whatever.

MB: William Carlos Williams was another influence, yes? Did you ever meet him?

RP: Alas, no. A year or so after he died, Ted, his wife Sandy, and their son David—a little boy at the time—and Pat and I went over to New Jersey at the invitation of Joe Ceravolo and his wife to come to dinner. At Joe and Rosemary's we had a glass of wine and chatted for a while. As dinner wasn't going to be for another two hours, he drove us to Paterson to see the falls. They looked mythical. Then he said, "You want to go by Doc Williams' house?" We said, "Are you kidding? Of course!"

He drove us to 9 Ridge Road in Rutherford. We stopped outside and looked at the house. There was a sign that said, "Dr. Williams." Ted said to Sandy, who was wonderfully naïve, "Sandy, go up and knock on the door. See who's there." Sandy said, "Okay!" She knocked on the door and the door opened. Then she turned to us and gestured, "Come on!"

We were warmly welcomed in by Flossie Williams, who seemed delighted that young poets had come to visit. She served us cookies and beer and then showed us around the house. "Here's Charlie Sheeler's painting and this is Bill's special bookcase and this here's where he wrote poems, in addition to his little place upstairs."

It was as if we were in a wonderful dream. After about an hour we realized we didn't know how to leave, because we were not very socially graceful, but finally she rescued us by saying, "Well, we've had a very nice visit. Before you go,

would you please sign the guest book? I'm keeping the names of everybody who comes to visit." We signed the book, thanked her, and left. Out in the car we let out a collective gasp of delighted amazement.

Oh, and one more thing. As we stepped away from the house I took one last look back down the driveway. Leaning against the house, yes, there was a red wheelbarrow.

MB: What!?

RP: I'm not kidding. Obviously, it was put there later or somebody gave it to them as a joke, but there was a red wheelbarrow there. Then I saw, lodged in some bushes, a movie star card, the kind people collected from bubble gum packages. On it was Patti Page, who was a famous pop singer in the 1950s. She recorded "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?" Also she went to the same high school as my mother and father in Tulsa, so there I was, looking at the face of Patti Page.

MB: In the bushes?

RP: Yes. The wind had blown it there. It made the visit more personal for me because suddenly my parents came into it, by Patti Page's being there. I confess that I filched the card and took it home.

MB: I noticed that "Ronnie" appears in several poems in *Alone and Not Alone*. Did you feel a certain amount of anxiousness as a kid, perhaps due to your father's business?

RP: We were all a little nervous. Usually it was of a low level, partly a result of my father's bootlegging. He slept with a .45 revolver under his pillow in case a stranger came through the door or the window. Bootlegging was a cash business, and sometimes there was a lot of money in our house. The local thugs knew that all bootleggers had cash in their houses.

MB: So there was a threat that they might break into the house?

RP: One time when we were away for the evening, somebody tried to break in through a window. It was after that that my father started sleeping with the gun. He also kept a pistol in the glove compartment of his car, because some years back he had been held up at gunpoint. Three men and a woman tied him up and shoved him into a van and held a gun at his head, demanding money. He thought they were going to shoot him. Years later one of the robbers, a guy named Charlie Crow, told my dad, "I'm sorry, Wayne. If I'd had know'd who you was, I wouldn't have done it."

My parents had a generally respectful relationship, but gradually my father fell out of love with my mother. She didn't want to face it so she went into denial, which caused an unacknowledged, quiet anxiety in the house. She didn't fall out of love with my father until she was 70, decades after their divorce.

Also, there was bad blood between my father and his mother-in-law. He would have nothing to do with her. His rule was, "When I'm out of town she can come over. Any time I'm in town, she cannot step foot in this house." That alone created a certain atmosphere. I grew up with those anxieties.

MB: You were feeling that? It was in the air?

RP: Sure, but I have to add that my father actually had a good sense of humor, believe it or not, and he was an expert prankster, and my mother was a good-natured, fun-loving person. She liked to dance, she liked movies, she liked music, she liked jokes, she was sociable. She and I had a lot of fun. I was mainly a mama's boy.

MB: And you began to write poems seriously in high school?

Art: Alberto Borea



"Wall Street", 66 x 50 inches, Silkscreen on Stainless Steel, 2013.

Recent Publications



ENRICO CASTELLANI

2016

Includes poems by Bruno Corà and Emilio Villa



DRAWING THEN: INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE IN AMERICAN DRAWINGS OF THE SIXTIES

2016

Includes *Star Being* by Mei-mei Berssenbrugge



GEGO: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A LINE

2015

Includes *Gego* by Anne Tardos

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DOMINIQUE LÉVY

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RP: In junior high. In high school, Dick Gallup and I started a literary magazine, *The White Dove Review*, then we brought on Joe Brainard as the art editor. We didn't know Ted yet. In fact he learned about us through the magazine, after the first issue came out. Dick and I wrote letters to writers we admired, asking them to submit manuscripts—Ginsberg, Kerouac, Paul Blackburn, LeRoi Jones, Gilbert Sorrentino, even Malcolm Cowley, who wrote a book about the Lost Generation called *Exile's Return*. And to E.E. Cummings.

Cummings wrote back, something like "All right. If you'll promise to show me proof after proof after proof until I'm satisfied." I wrote back, "Okay," and at his request I sent him a copy of the magazine. He took a look at it and said no because—let's see if I can quote it—"Beat and square are two sides of the same uncoin."

MB: Sounds like him.

RP: I really did admire him, but by the time this correspondence transpired I'd already done two or three issues and I was feeling my oats, so I wasn't crushed or disappointed. I was a confident kid, even arrogant. If you go to the Houghton Library at Harvard you'll find the postcards I sent to him.

MB: Really?

RP: Yes. In them my tone is completely arrogant. I addressed him as Cummings, not Mr. Cummings or E.E. Cummings. "Dear Cummings." I was stupid and presumptuous. A few years ago I read those postcards. I felt like tearing them to shreds. They were so embarrassing.

MB: How did you discover Cummings' work?

RP: I started reading it in high school, at the bookstore where I worked. The store had a little poetry section, which included Cummings' *Collected Poems*. I was so taken with the typography and the playfulness and the airiness and wit in his poems

that I didn't notice that a number of them were sonnets that he had exploded—the line breaks, punctuation, the lowercasing. I had seen that sort of typography in a few little magazines, but I knew he was the uber source. I loved his work. I even read *The Enormous Room*. Then I got into Pound's poems and translations and sort of put Cummings aside, so that when I first came to New York I began to think of him as an adolescent phase I'd gone through. I did the same thing to Van Gogh.

Then about 20 years later I started editing what was to become the *Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. Bernadette Mayer's entry on the sonnet caused me to re-read Cummings. I thought, "God, some of these are pretty great. Why did I dismiss them?" What did I learn? Don't get stuck inside your own opinions.

Ron Padgett's *How Long* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in poetry and his *Collected Poems* won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Poetry in 2014 and the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. His new translation is *Zone: Selected Poems of Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York Review Books). For more information, go to www.ronpadgett.com.

Matthew Burgess is the author of *Slippers for Elsewhere*, and a children's book, *Enormous Smallness: A Story of E. E. Cummings*. Burgess received his MFA at Brooklyn College, where he now teaches, and his PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center. He recently edited *Dream Closet: Meditations on Childhood Space*, a collection of poetry, essays, and visual art forthcoming in April 2016.

About the artist:

My work is characterized by the continuous displacement and use of diverse media and materials. The openness towards these media helps me in defining the development of an artistic proposal, where the object's time and history take a fundamental importance within the plastic discourse.

I'm interested in the relation between different cultures and histories, between the so-called center and its periphery. The position of distance about cultural, economic, and social events constitute an important part in the process and execution of my projects. I find myself attracted to the residues of civilization and culture, using these materials for my work. In recent years my work has been related to nonplaces, transit and movement– mapping myself and my identity. –Alberto Borea



"Wall Street", 66 x 50 inches, Silkscreen on Stainless Steel, 2013.

Alberto Borea attended residencies and fellowships including Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Fundación Cisneros de Patricia de Phelps, Art Omi International Residency 2009, Vermont Studio Center (Jackson Pollock Krasner Fellowship), International Studio and Curatorial Program NYC (ISCP), Sculpture Space, Utica, NY, Default Masterclass in residence, Lecce and Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC).

Borea's work has been shown in exhibitions in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. including Queens Museum of Art in New York City, Museo del Barrio in New York City, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Cisneros Fontanals Collection), Dublin Contemporary, Museo Laboratorio in Italy, Art Museum of the Americas in DC, and Museo de Huelva in Spain.

Borea has been reviewed in Art Forum, ARTnews, ArtNexus, and The New York Times among other publications. He lives and works between New York City and Lima.

Poetry

From *Voices*

I see blood sliding like thread, a red strand flowing, there amid the spring snow.
I think we're toppling him by crying out justly,
but we topple all governments in this space, banishing their altars,
their archaisms. I am not shuddering,
I'm -- we're -- darker than that, like to see it, blood, if it's really his.
Don't think of yourself as a rare sacrifice,
blood has no beauty except in our vocalise, which is not sincere, but
natively counted. We just count syllables
counting you out; gathered here interrupting work forever in our mouth.
No one has to do anything, you were wrong.
There is no necessity, I don't like to eat. Welcome to our light clothes.
Tormented I lurched, walking the street of his need.
His exigencies, his sense of priorities, controlled our times' meanings.
I don't need money, what I need is to speak.
And color in my voice from your presences; others were always there.
Let this blood flow away into the bygones.

One might sense gods everywhere, even within one's own self.
What if I am I but penetrated by divinities?
We have loosed these gods ourselves, they are our finest creation.
They are apart, have their own lives, come like a storm or a bird.
Like a voice mutating to song. I plant my feet on rough earth
waiting for an idea's kiss. Suddenly I'm going home;
I don't have grapes, I have apples. I am capricious, they say.
I am rebellious, or I fear, either in contradiction.
I don't have a casual life, but exist to be possessed
by misery, grace, or laughter. Who can deny there are gods?
There is a god of revolution . . . Can it be within myself
or does it pass from one to one? I'm an individual
prey to deitific visits. But I can't merge with others --
obscene, Bacchic, and abhorrent -- too strong a god, like murder --
I will change alone. Do not tax me to combine in anger
with other voices and bodies. Can't I go lonely to bed?

Did anyone ever ask, ask this voice, what is it you want?
No one ever asked me -- Or me -- what it was I wanted here
on this earth or in this mind that we share as a big community.
The leader asks by shouting words: if we shout back we agree,
that's called demogoguery. I'd like to be asked what I want here.
What is it that you want? I want to know things and to love.
I want this economic and political structure to collapse soon.
That will be so painful for us. As painful as mourning is?
I want to know why my loves had to die. Who cares for money? fools.
We invented money when we could have invented the gift.
I want to wear a hibiscus. I don't want to be a decent
person of the middle classes. Don't want to be prosperous --
Don't want to live in a house with a lot of rooms and solar panels.
I don't want anything at all. I have no wish. Not to work.
I don't want to see his perishable face printed on every surface.
I want sunlight, clear air, and silence. I want brains and a thought.

There is nothing here now, there is only me.
This is black void here now, there is just my voice.
There is black emptiness, there is nothing here.
There isn't anything, I am appearing.
I am nothing but sound, first I am a voice.
If there can be nothing, something first sounds.
Hi hoo ho hoo something, hi hoo ho hoo some.
I am not a person, nor am I a god.
I am making the world by creating sound.
I am not existing, I have a brownish face.
I am not present, I'm only a voice.
There is black emptiness, out of which I chant.
I begin creation, but I'm not a god.

And then you are someone. First I was voice. Crying? No I made sounds --
metrics were the first sounds in the cosmos. Oh, that's ridiculous.
There was a face just materialized, so it could chant poems.
The voice demarcated patterns of sound; poetry is living --
I am composed of mathematical proportions, equations,
I am composed of poetic structure. I am a voice of lines,
without this measurement I'd not find you. Must we find each other?
The first chant is raw words: I don't know them, they're from another tribe.
Yet I said them in a sense: for I was there. It was only a dream.
All I've ever wanted was to hear that. He had a maiden's hair coils:
he was not gendered, nor was he there. Only the sounds were there.
Hi hoo ho hoo sounding, hi hoo ho hoo sound. But that wasn't really it.
I was there at the beginning, inside I'm there potentially
always: poet and ear. All measurement stems from this first moment.

Tell me voice, do you have values? Who knows? Come apart in my mouth.
Values wait for your tweaking, call your name. That's when I try to leave.
You're just in from your birth! We don't need ways. We don't want bright futures,
I'm not that person now. It's not random, but it's not what they said.
I told him I wouldn't vote. You're a woeful pullulation like that,
cry out for power when we're all entwined, an electricity,
reconfiguring charge, jolt of juice. We were not reborn to vote --
I choose darker sounds. Don't you want part? Automatically
you kick in with a hiss. I like it when you want to argue hard,
deceptive asterisks spit out of space while you shriek at us all.
Messages are uncertain, but not joy. So you keep talking there.
The earth of the strangers. When I arrived, this time, we had no roots.
Just as well, it's so red here at the dawn, I'm moving in with chimes.
Do you like clarinets? I like walking. This is different now.

If I don't move nothing happens. Incurring obligation
is my enemy now, eating is, needing anything's bad.
But you still need us, the voices. Yes, we're remaking the world
as it collapses from its wrongheadedness and lonely
disclaimer of spring. It thinks change is a return to former
strangeness, when we loved money for what it could buy not its blue
haze of glamor around our throats. I don't seem to have enough.
Let's have something else, a pulpit, frail, made of forgetfulness.
I don't remember how to speak for myself anymore,
only for us, members of voice, deciding how to go on.
Our pitiful savings are in his bank of ghosts, bar-drunk men --
bar between us and all of them, well-being of their houses.
Perfect wives of interesting sexists say they know something,
how to be wealthy and brave. I'd just as soon shoot them both.
But I won't, I like it in hell -- I always have. No one
ever comes around to disturb my reconciliation
with the eternal magicians, power of my transforming.
Some of your voices are them, aren't you? We're changing our whole life.

Alice Notley has published over thirty books of poetry, including (most recently) *Benediction*, *Culture of One*, *Songs and Stories of the Ghouls*, and *Negativity's Kiss*. Forthcoming in 2016 is *Certain Magical Acts*. She has received many awards including the Academy of American Poets' Lenore Marshall Prize, the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Award, the Griffin International Prize, two NEA Grants, the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Poetry, and the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize. She lives and writes in Paris, France.

Calendar of Events

All events begin at 8pm unless otherwise noted. Admission \$8/Students & Seniors \$7/ Members \$5 or free. The Poetry Project is wheelchair accessible with assistance and advance notice. For more detailed information about St. Mark's and accessibility, visit poetryproject.org or call 212.674.0910 for more information.

WED 4/6

A LEGACY CELEBRATION OF JOHN WIENERS

John Wieners (1934-2002) is the author of seven collections of poetry, three one-act plays, and numerous broadsides, pamphlets, uncollected poems, and journals. Robert Creeley once described Wieners as "the greatest poet of emotion" of their time.

Please join Wave Books and City Lights for a celebration of *Supplication: Selected Poems of John Wieners* and *Stars Seen in Person: The Selected Journals of John Wieners*. Readers TBA.

FRI 4/8

ADRIENNE GARBINI & RAYYANE TABET

Adrienne Garbini and Rayyane Tabet share disparate and wide ranging correspondence. This reading will be constructed by friendship, hot spring pool conversations, and a foundation. They will approximate and detail stories with the required discretion.

Adrienne Garbini is an artist who has settled down in the world's largest alpine valley, where she pursues the poetics of non-compliance. Garbini is writing an ongoing essay entitled *Hold On*, distributed as a chain letter. She receives mail at Box 416, Saguache, CO 81149.

Rayyane Tabet is an artist who lives in Beirut. His current sculptures materialize the facade of Tell Halaf's Hittite temple through excavation, replication, transportation, destruction, storage, and restoration.

MON 4/11

ELAINE KAHN & ÉDGAR J. ULLOA

Elaine Kahn is an artist, performer, and poet. She is a founding member of the P.Splash Collective and the author of *Women in Public* (City Lights, 2015).

Édgar J. Ulloa is a transdisciplinary artist and post-transborder poet from Ciudad Juárez, México. He maintains a blog (mijuaritos.wordpress.com) of aural, visual, virtual, and performance poetry, that serves as a border trauma and memory reflection of his native city after it became the most dangerous in the world.

WED 4/13

RON PADGETT & MARK POLIZZOTTI

Ron Padgett's *How Long* was Pulitzer Prize finalist in poetry and his *Collected Poems* won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Poetry in 2014 and the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. His new translation is *Zone: Selected Poems of Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York Review Books). For more information, go to www.ronpadgett.com.

Mark Polizzotti has translated more than forty books from the French and is director of the publications program at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. His latest translation is *Suspended Sentences* by Patrick Modiano.

MON 4/18

OPEN READING

Open readings have always been an integral part of The Poetry Project's programming. They provide a time and space for writers of all levels of experience to test, fine tune, and work out their writing and reading styles in front of a supportive audience.

Suggested reading time is approximately three minutes. Sign-in at 7:45pm.

WED 4/20

TALK/LAUNCH: CHARLES BERNSTEIN— PITCH OF POETRY

Charles Bernstein reads from and discusses his new collection of essays from the University of Chicago Press.

Charles Bernstein's most recent book of poems is *Recalculating* (Chicago, 2013). He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is co-director of PennSound. In 1984, he curated the first talk series at The Poetry Project.

MON 4/25

VIVIAN CROCKETT & CAROLYN LAZARD

Vivian Crockett is a multinational, Brazilian-born independent researcher, scholar, and curator focusing largely on art of African diasporas, (Afro)Latinx diasporas, and Latin America at the varied intersections of race, gender, and queer theory. She is a Ph.D. candidate in art history at Columbia University.

Carolyn Lazard is an artist and writer working in media and performance. Her work engages ideas of collective practice, intimacy, care, risk, and ecology. Lazard is a founding member of the art collective Canaries and is a 2015 recipient of the Wynn Newhouse Award. Her forthcoming essay will appear in the New Museum publication, "THIS COULD BE US."

This event will be livestreamed via Periscope. Link will go live on Twitter, @poetry__project, the evening of the event.

WED 4/27

JOHN KEENE & PAUL VANGELISTI

John Keene's *Counternarratives* (New Directions) was released in the spring of 2015. He is also the author of *Annotations* (New Directions, 2015), the poetry-art collection *Seismosis* (1913 Press, 2006) with artist Christopher Stackhouse, and the just published collaboration *GRIND* (ITI Press, 2016), with photographer Nicholas Muellner. He is Associate Professor of English at Rutgers University-Newark.

Paul Vangelisti is the author of some twenty books of poetry, as well as being a noted translator from Italian. His most recent books include *Wholly Falsetto with People Dancing* (Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, 2013), an older man's not-so-divine comedy, and a book of poems, *Two* (Talisman House, 2010). In 2016 a new book of poems, *Border Music*, is forthcoming from Talisman House. Vangelisti was Founding Chair of the Graduate Writing program at Otis College of Art & Design in Los Angeles, and is currently a professor in that program.

MON 5/2

WO CHAN & HANNAH BROOKS-MOTL

Wo Chan is a queer immigrant, poet, and drag performer. Wo's work has been published in *cream city review*, *Cortland Review*, *VYM Magazine*, and elsewhere. As a member of Brooklyn-based drag alliance, Switch n' Play, Wo has performed at venues including Brooklyn Pride, The Trevor Project, and the Architectural Digest Expo.

Hannah Brooks-Motl is the author of the chapbook *The Montaigne Result* (Song Cave, 2013) and the full-length collections *The New Years* (Rescue Press, 2014) and *M* (Song Cave, 2015). Recent work has appeared in *Best American Experimental Writing*, *the Cambridge Literary Review*,

and *Prelude*. She lives in Chicago and western Massachusetts.

WED 5/4

AN EVENING WITH JULIE PATTON

Julie Ezelle Patton was born and raised in Ohideyhideho, north coast facing the republic of Ontario. Her work has primarily appeared in live spoken-sung performance art pieces in honor of the sound presence of all earthlinks. She has performed throughout the Americas, Europe, and the Milky Way.

Patton's most recent bound-ink-to-paper production is *Notes for Some (Nominally) Awake* (Portable Press at YoYo Labs, 2007). Julie is a self-proclaimed "phonemenologist" whose book length serial poem *B* (Tender Buttons Press) and *Writing with Crooked Ink* (Belladonna) are forthcoming.

SAT 5/7

SPRING THING: DIY

We take SPACE to be the central fact. A few of our favorite artists turn the SANCTUARY of St. Mark's Church into a public art installation fit for a DANCE PARTY in this century+ old place for poets of today.

Jace Clayton is an artist and writer based in New York, also known for his work as DJ /rupture. His book on 21st century music and global digital culture will be published in July 2016 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.,

Jibade-Khalil Huffman is the author of three books of poems. His work, spanning video, photography, writing, performance, and installation, has been exhibited/performed at MoMA/PS1, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, and Southern Exposure, San Francisco, among others. He is a 2015-16 Artist in Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Born in Los Angeles, **Marc Andre Robinson** is a Brooklyn-based sculptor. Robinson has exhibited in the US and abroad at venues including the New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Turin and the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow. Robinson lives and works in Brooklyn. www.marcandrerobinson.com.

Zach Wollard studied poetry with Kenneth Koch and Ron Padgett at Columbia University before turning his attention to visual arts. Recent exhibitions include "A Drop of Golden Sun" in collaboration with Shana Moulton at La Mama and "41

drawings" at Galerie Hito in Mallorca, Spain. He is currently a Sharpe-Walentas studio grant recipient 2015-16. Come visit him there. Admission: Sliding scale \$5-\$20.

MON 5/9

T'AI FREEDOM FORD & STEPHANIE GRAY

t'ai freedom ford is a New York City high school English teacher and Cave Canem Fellow. She is currently a 2015 Center for Fiction Fellow and one of the Poetry Project's 2016 Emerge-Surface-Be poetry fellows. Winner of the 2015 To the Lighthouse Poetry Prize, her first poetry collection, *how to get over*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press. t'ai lives and loves in Brooklyn, but hangs out digitally at: shesaidword.com.

NYC-based poet-filmmaker **Stephanie Gray** is the author of *Shorthand and Electric Language Stars* and *I Thought You Said It Was Sound/How Does That Sound?* (Portable Press at YoYo Labs 2015, 2012); *Place your orders now!* (Belladonna*, 2014); *A Country Road Going Back in Your Direction* (Argos Books, 2015); and *Heart Stoner Bingo* (Straw Gate Books, 2007). Her Super 8 films have screened internationally.

WED 5/11

ANSELM BERRIGAN & RAPHAEL RUBINSTEIN

Anselm Berrigan's books of poetry include *Primitive State*, a long, demented fortune cookie list published by Edge Books this past autumn, and *Come In Alone*, a book of rectangles just out from Wave Books. He's the poetry editor for *The Brooklyn Rail*, a part-time teacher, a former Artistic Director of The Poetry Project, and a person who likes to lean on the radiator by the lights in back of the parish hall.

Raphael Rubinstein is a New York-based poet and art critic whose recent books include *The Miraculous* (Paper Monument, 2014) and *A Geniza* (Granary Books, 2015). He was a co-editor of the poetry journal *Vanitas* and his poems have appeared in *Bomb*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Harpers* and *Best American Poetry 2015*.

FRI 5/13

EUNSONG KIM & NIKKI WALLSCHLAEGER

Eunsong Kim is a writer and educator residing in southern California. Her essays on literature, digital cultures, and art criticism have appeared and are forthcoming in: *Scapegoat*, *Lateral*, *The New Inquiry*, *Model View Culture*, AAWW's *The Margins*, and in the book anthologies, *Global Poetics*, *Critical Archival Studies*, and *Reading Modernism with Machines*. Her poetry has or will be published in: *Denver Quarterly*, *Seattle Review*, *Feral Feminisms*, *Minnesota Review*, *Interim*, *Iowa Review*, and *Action Yes*. Her first book of poems will be published by Noemi Press in 2017.

Nikki Wallschlaeger's work recently has been featured in *P-Queue*, *Dusie*, *Fanzine*, *The Enemy*, *The Brooklyn Rail* and others. She is the author of the chapbooks *I Would Be the Happiest Bird* (Horseless Press, 2014) and *I Hate Telling You How I Really Feel* (Bloom Books, 2015). Her first full-length book of poems is *Houses*, (Horseless Press, 2015).

MON 5/16

LAWRENCE GIFFIN & CHEENA MARIE LO

Lawrence Giffin is the author of several books of poetry, including *Plato's Closet*, *White Future* (orworse, 2014), and *Christian Name* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012). His work has been anthologized in *Against Expression* and *Best American Experimental Writing 2015*. More can be found at lawrencegiffin.com. He lives in New York City.

Born in Manapla, Philippines, **Cheena Marie Lo** is a genderqueer poet based in Oakland, California. They co-founded the Manifest Reading Series, which featured mainly queer experimental artists and writers. They currently coordinate a youth art program at California College of the Arts, and co-edit the literary journal, *HOLD*. Their first book, *A Series of Un/Natural/Disasters* is forthcoming from Commune Editions in April 2016.

WED 5/18

"HOW DO I GET A READING?"

Participation in all series is by invitation from the series coordinator. It helps to be familiar with the Project's schedule and what the current series coordinators are interested in. While the series are curated, we are always CURIOUS. If you want to get our attention, mail your books and poems to the office at 131 E. 10th St. NY, NY 10003 or email us at info@poetryproject.com. Your email will be forwarded to the series coordinators. Coordinator appointments change every two years to ensure diversity of perspective.

DODIE BELLAMY & SUSAN LANDERS

Dodie Bellamy is a novelist, poet, and essayist. Her books include *the buddhist*, *Academonia* (Krupskaya, 2006), *Barf Manifesto* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008), *The Letters of Mina Harker* (2004), and *Cunt-Ups* (2001), which won the 2002 Firecracker Alternative Book Award for poetry. Recent projects include *Cunt Norton* (Les Fignes Press, 2013), in which she takes the second edition of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* and sexualizes it in the language of porn and desire; *New Narrative: 1975-1995*, a Nightboat Books anthology she's editing with Kevin Killian; and *When the Sick Rule the World*, her third collection of essays, forthcoming from Semiotext(e). Her reflections on the Occupy Oakland movement, "The Beating of Our Hearts," was published as a chapbook in conjunction with the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

Susan Landers' latest book, *Franklinstein*, tells the story of one Philadelphia neighborhood wrestling with the legacies of colonialism, racism, and capitalism. She is also the

author of *248 MGS.*, *A Panic Picnic* and *Covers*, both published by O Books. Her chapbooks include *15: A Poetic Engagement with the Chicago Manual of Style* and *What I Was Tweeting While You Were On Facebook*.

MON 5/23 SPRING 2016 WORKSHOP READING

Participants of The Poetry Project's Spring 2016 writing workshops, led by **Barbara Henning**, **Rachel Levitsky**, and **Matt Longabucco**, will gather to read work they produced.

WED 5/25 NATHANIEL MACKEY

Nathaniel Mackey is the author of eight chapbooks of poetry, six books of poetry, and an ongoing prose work, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, of which four volumes have been published. The first three volumes were published together as, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Volumes 13* (New Directions, 2010), the fifth, *Late Arcade*, is forthcoming from New Directions in 2017. Mackey is also the author of two books of criticism and the editor of the literary magazine *Hambone*. He lives in Durham, North Carolina, and teaches at

Duke University, where he is the Reynolds Price Professor of English.

FRI 5/27 NAOMI JACKSON & SHELLEY MARLOW

Naomi Jackson is the author of *The Star Side of Bird Hill* (Penguin Press, 2015). She studied fiction at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She is the recipient of residencies from the University of Pennsylvania's Kelly Writers House, Hedgebrook, Vermont Studio Center, and the Camargo Foundation.

Shelley Marlow is the author of the novel *Two Augusts In a Row In a Row* (Publication Studio, 2015). Marlow is prose editor at *Ping Pong* magazine out of the Henry Miller Library, a visual artist, librettist, and palm reader.

WED 6/1 THE RECLUSE #12 LAUNCH READING

Join us for a launch reading celebrating issue #12 of our online poetry magazine, *The Recluse*. Contributors to the issue and readers for the event will be announced in late Spring. Visit poetryproject.org for updates.

MON 6/6 INTERN/VOLUNTEER READING & POTLUCK

The Poetry Project relies on the generous work and dedication of all of our amazing volunteers and interns-most of whom are poets, writers, artists and /or activists. To festively round out the 2015-16 season, please join us as we listen to the work of our crew, enjoy some food, and most importantly, show our immense appreciation. FREE.

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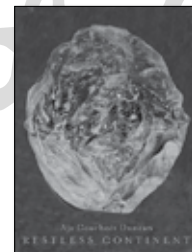


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Once Upon a Time There Was a Bookshop in the Village

I am well aware of the perversity of my reasoning. Yet as I track the giving way to progress in old Times Square, I can't help but to remember it in the seventies and eighties as a bustling center of cheap movie houses and video arcades, where mostly non-white, low income people took their dates, seemingly oblivious to the porno palaces next door. And I wonder where these people spend Saturday nights now. Contact—however brief—outside the prison of my class is what I still desire. Then call me, if you will, a degenerate, and look for me “Downtown.”

Toward the New Degeneracy, Bruce Benderson

I Before

It is 1993 and I am a sophomore at Eugene Lang College at the New School for Social Research. Lang doesn't offer math classes so in order to take calculus, one must do so at Cooper Union through a sister-school agreement. Sadly, the title of the class is *Calculus for Architects* and I have difficulty with the context my, up to that point, nice clean math is being smothered in. The ceiling high windows of the classroom of Cooper's since razed engineering building face the construction site that will become 31 Third Avenue; the Cooper Union dorm which would be the third location to house St. Mark's Bookshop. I watch the building being constructed while doing math equations through the noise muted by the windows.

The last book that I ever bought from the 12 St. Mark's Place location was Jim Carroll's *Book of Nods*. A man with white hair and Maine whiskers sold it to me. His name is Dudley. The space had pale wood and a mezzanine level that ran along the right hand side of the shop. To me, it resembled an old European library. I bought the book on a warm and sunny spring afternoon. See Hear, the zine shop, was located across the street. Manic Panic, where I'd bought vegetable based hair dye in colors varying from navy blue to pink in high school was east of the bookshop. There were many record shops that still sold vinyl as well as CDs. People spilled out of Narcotics Anonymous located in the old Electric Circus space. Meetings were going on inside with the first story windows thrown open to the afternoon sun but no one really seemed sober. Gutter-punks and their pit bulls clustered along St. Mark's Place, as they have from time immemorial like tsachke on an old woman's wall unit. The

punks, no matter their race, and their dogs are all an earthy tone of a monocrustmatic; everyone is a shade of dirt gray brown.

The first book that I ever bought from the new location of St. Mark's Bookshop at 31 Third Avenue was a Semiotext(e) anthology called, *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading* edited by Eileen Myles. A different man with white whiskers sold it to me. He lives upstate now with his long term lady friend who was once a waitress at Max's Kansas City. He is proud of his teeth and makes his own wine.

St. Mark's Bookshop will ensure
that you do get laid
based purely on your book selection.

By 1995 I am an intern at The Poetry Project and am learning who to read and why by assisting at events regularly and perusing the poetry section of St. Mark's Bookshop. My friend Claudia works as a clerk there. I come in to visit her and trail around behind her as she walks from section to section holding a report made by a dot matrix printer on horizontal green bar paper, a pen stuck behind her ear. Standing in front of Art Criticism, we gossip about the cute girl Claudia has a crush on who accompanied us to see Allen Ginsberg perform Wichita Vortex Sutra with Phillip Glass at The Poetry Project one beautiful autumn day the year prior. The William Burroughs CD box set at the register reminds us of this. Passing the Drugs section, our conversation turns to the hardships of friends on drugs. We lament this as Claudia alphabetizes some titles in the Women's Studies section. She ticks things off of her list as I talk to the back of her head. We express our concerns about the seeming resurgence of heroin in the East Village and Lower East Side as we pass

the Music section and round a corner left into the Drama section, Claude not taking her eyes off of the report. By the time she leads me to the comprehensive Critical Theory section I finally ask,

“What the hell are you doing?”
“This report... It's a waste of time. Don't ask.” She replies.

The lights are bright and warm. The music playing is Serge Gainsbourg's overly indulgent and pretentious *Bonnie and Clyde*. Everyone in the place is weirdly attractive—a skinny girl with a large mouth and exaggerated lips is guarding the

front. Frustrated intellectual boys with complicated hair are self-absorbed and sulking at the information desk that resembles the deck of the Starship Enterprise of Star Trek fame. Customers silently revel in their intellectualness. It seems very much to be a place where one goes to look cool and smart even if one isn't. Or, the kind of place where you buy books so that when you bring someone home, keeping in mind the John Waters adage of not fucking someone if they don't have books, St. Mark's Bookshop will ensure that you do get laid based purely on your book selection.

Looking at the lush and colorful art books of every price range on the table wrapped around the pillar at the front, I flip through the display copies.

“Who buys this stuff?” I ask Claudia skeptically, preparing to leave. “It sells like crazy,” she mouths embarrassed by my comments. “What about these display copies? Do you guys really sacrifice one of everything to the display gods?”

“Are you leaving now?” She asks.

It is February of 2001 and I take the bus through the industrial park in Maspeth, Queens where I am living to the L Train on Graham and Bushwick so that I can submit a second application to St. Mark's Bookshop. I didn't get called back after I submitted the first. I was hired in February of 2001 and would work there for the next thirteen years finally quitting in February of 2014. During this time, I was fired three times then asked back usually within twenty-four to seventy-two hours.

I was put in charge of the consignment section after the hypochondriac who ran it quit. It was soon after that the small press buyer quit and I took over his job. My specialties are transgressive literature, books translated from the Russian and poetry.

II Peak Book

St. Mark's Bookshop made a lot of money in the nineties and aughts. It was flush with money. When downfall came, we laughed about what a bad day used to be in contrast to what the count in the till presently was. People bought everything. They grabbed silly impulse items from the counter while standing on line to pay for opulent and very expensive art books. Many flocked to the shop to find a stage on which to act like pompous asses while buying with the fervor of Midwesterners in a Walmart. Others were thoughtful individuals who were eager to discuss books and exchange ideas.

The critical theory books were mainly university press titles and usually came in at a short discount, that is below the standard 40%, and were marked up; but it didn't seem to make a difference. People would pay between forty and sixty dollars for a soft cover philosophy title they needed or wanted. Very expensive, and now rare, magazines sold at absurd prices. No one thought twice. But, it was also the kind of place where you could buy a two dollar zine and still feel

Margarita Shalina

both participatory in the culture and the vibe of the aesthetic. The poetry section was completely up to date with new releases and, for a time, we had the best poetry section in New York if not the country.

Poetry titles from small presses were featured on the front wall and a monthly order to Small Press Distribution for the large case in the back of the shop was routine practice. In happier times a monthly phone banter session with Brent Cunningham of SPD was par for the course. Although the running joke between the owners for a while was that St. Mark's had so many musicians working there that they had a house band, the small press buyer before me and I both write, and we both would pay close attention to what went on in contemporary American poetry.

The kind of buying that I was doing at the shop was parallel but vastly different to the kind

of buying my boss was doing. I never cared about hardcover releases. I found them to be superfluous even before the introduction of e-readers. Hardcover titles tend to be disposable product written by people soon to be forgotten. They exist in a negative feedback loop with review rags, namely the weekly New York Times book review, who were used to overlooking new releases that were not put out in a hardcover edition first. It is an antiquated model and the NYT book review, which I admittedly stopped looking at a few years ago, is an irrelevant and insular publication. This love of the NYT book review colored my boss's view of the world. As it is, he was a rigid individual; but such a fossilization of perspective could lead to no good end.

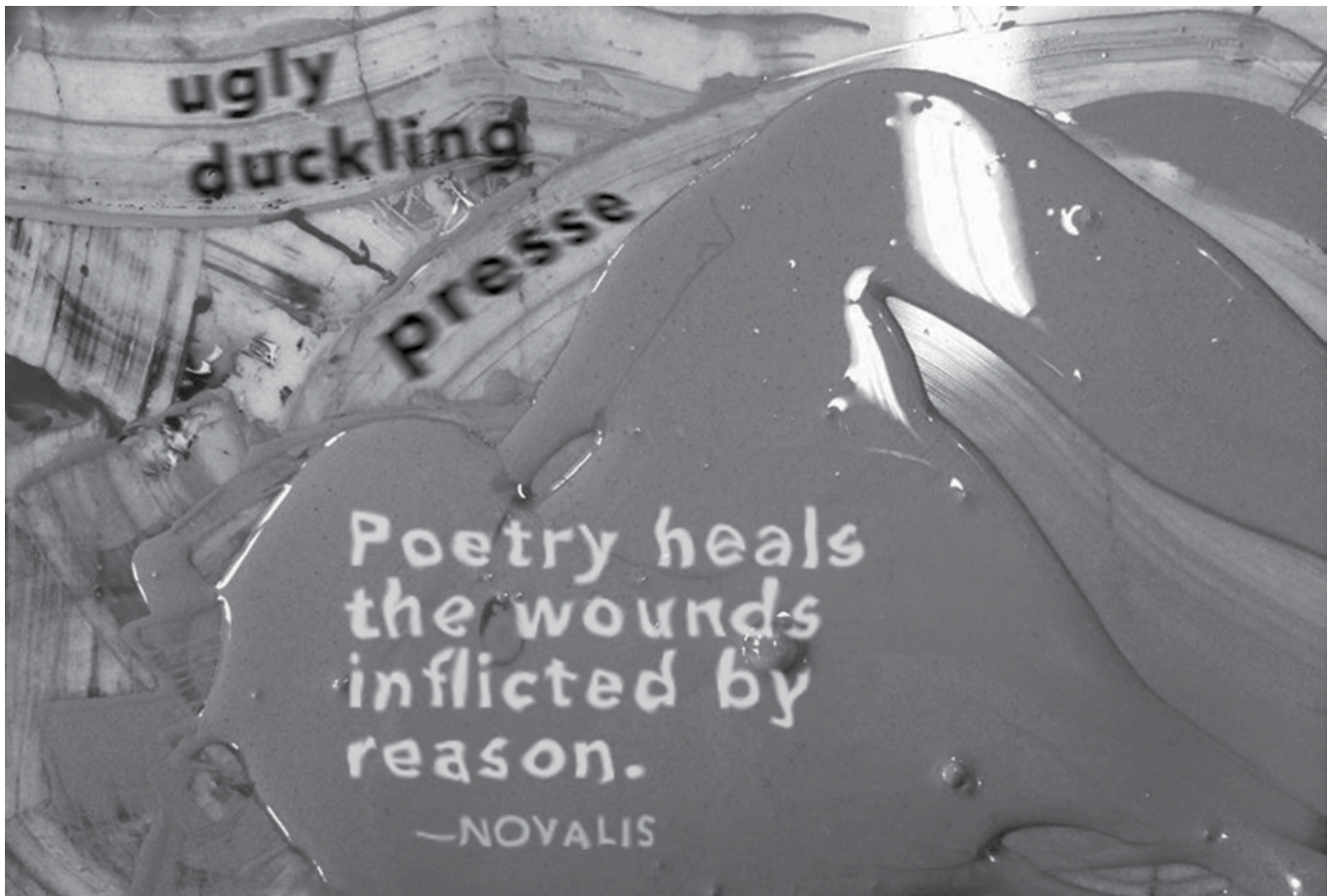
From 1996-1997, I worked for Barney Rosset. What I realized right away about Barney is that although he

was undoubtedly a genius, he did and had throughout his life surrounded himself with smart young people who could fill in the gaps in his knowledge especially as he grew older. While he would argue about everything with infuriating frequency, it was never for trite reasons. At St. Mark's Bookshop, there were many trite arguments that were counterproductive and failed to utilize a staff which consisted of clever individuals. The mandated party line of cultural workers seemed to be, to quote Ishmael Reed, "I am a cowboy in the boat of Ra." Or, as I was fond of telling my co-worker Karen, "Hey! Remember how in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Phoebe Cates says to Jennifer Jason Leigh— YOU work in the coolest fast food joint in the food court— in the entire mall!" We were working in that food court in the mall that was the East Village.

Another sign of happier times

was the vast amount of overstock the shop had. We had so much overstock that things would occasionally get overlooked. On the floor of the shop, stacks of books filled shelves that ran along the sections. In the basement of the shop, stacks of art books lined the walls. When the store manager with the great teeth retired, he was replaced by a somewhat unimaginative individual who kept strange morning hours. He focused on two things, returning books and reordering titles from wholesalers like Baker and Taylor. What came about was a system of paying bills to publishers and distributors by returning stock and applying the credit to the current bill.

Although publishing is generous when it comes to returns, books were cycling through the store without being given a chance to sell, sometimes at as little as four weeks. The scale on which we were doing



this was ridiculous and no one seemed to take freight into consideration. This was true of anything that had come through a distributor. Ordering was, for the most part, unregulated and unbudgeted. In some ways this freedom was a dream, but it was disturbing that there were no reports or statistics showing a sales-to-return ratio or overall sell-through per distributor. The manager would habitually delete the sales history of books. After a few years, I found my ordering to be based on memory, intuition and general knowledge. I know that my boss, who was also the main buyer, did the same.

Everyone seemed to take for granted that there would always be money, especially the kind of money that St. Mark's pulled in on the weekends. It was probably somewhere in the late aughts when it became clear that St. Mark's sales were on a slow decline. The trajectory that had been established led to an obvious conclusion, a disastrous one; but it was not a plausible reality to ownership and pointing it out just made one sound like Chicken Little. In the United States, the end only comes with a bang for young African American men or the disposable masses unfortunate enough to be watching a movie in a theater when some lunatic who thinks he's a super-villain enters with a gun. The rest of us are relegated to end our meager existences with whimpers.

III Downfall

Then came the renegotiation of the lease and the deepest of the death by a thousand cuts. The vice-president of Cooper Union had retired, but before doing so he had synched up a bunch of real estate deals for the future of the school. This was the same man that had originally wooed St. Mark's Bookshop away from St. Mark's Place, offering rent lower than what they had been paying at the previous location. It would become evident that the focal point of these projects was the Green Building on the east side of Third Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets across from the library that houses the Great Hall where Abraham Lincoln once spoke.

From what has been reported, Cooper Union couldn't afford it. It's since become apparent

that the implosion of Cooper Union and St. Mark's Bookshop as its real estate ward are inextricably linked to one another. It took perhaps two decades for the East Village to fall to ruins if we use Guiliani and 1993 as a starting point. The neighborhood, suffice it to say, has changed as has New York overall and that moment that exists in time when a little bookshop fought for its existence as students and alumni of Cooper Union

Post-gentrification is what happens when even the gentrifiers can't afford to live in the neighborhood they've gentrified.

rallied and occupied to maintain the integrity of an institution that had been founded on the principle of accessibility of quality education to gifted young people became a proverbial battleground against impending post-gentrification.

Post-gentrification is what happens when even the gentrifiers can't afford to live in the neighborhood they've gentrified. It was a holding of the line against another bank or chain pharmacy. An attempt to preserve the cultural integrity of a region that has given ever so much art, music, literature and poetry to the world.

I vividly remember the day the owners of the shop walked out the door to meet with Cooper Union about renewing the lease. The vice-president at Cooper who had been so fond of the shop had since retired so there was no champion. The board of Cooper Union included commercial real estate moguls. My bosses went in unrepresented. Although I can't say for certain, I doubt they haggled much. They signed a lease they weren't sure they could afford. One that would tick the rent up incrementally, but quickly, until it was more than \$20K a month. Here it is important to point out that one Christmas Eve in the late 90s, two employees counted out \$24K in cash alone at closing. On several occasions during the holidays, sales had to be momentarily suspended because the credit card machine was literally full and charges had to be sent in, emptying the machine before sales could resume. There had been a time when that sort of rent could be made in one weekend. It

wasn't completely implausible but simultaneously there was an inability to recognize that times were changing, the neighborhood was changing, our customers were changing, book culture itself was changing, and last but not least, that the American economy was going down the toilet.

As the cultural elite who had so loved the shop began dying off, students began ordering their books online, and the

regulars who had inhabited the neighborhood began moving away; a new demographic, one of human detritus, began blowing like garbage through the doors of the shop. I believe there was a harm reduction center to the north and south of us and the McDonald's on Third Avenue essentially served as the office of a middle aged drug dealer. His customers were all mostly middle aged drug addicts—the kind who are in government-funded programs that make no difference to anyone except the social workers who draw a salary from them. Sometimes, on Tuesday mornings, my coworker and I would stand at the register looking out the window and watch them cop or sway at a standstill never falling down. Sometimes they would come into the shop and we would have to watch them making sure they didn't steal.

Shoplifting was a huge problem. If we recognized the shoplifter, they were asked to leave. I once saw a very thin coworker try to tackle a shoplifter who charged him like a football player as my coworker attempted to block the door. We have chased shoplifters out of the shop and down St. Mark's Place or Second Avenue. A very large woman missing teeth once came up to the register and asked me whether we carry books on Marilyn Monroe as she surreptitiously cut the cord connecting the God's Love We Deliver donation can to the register counter. All I could focus on were the two large blades of her scissors peeking out at the edge of the register. "What are you doing?" I asked. "Nothing," she replied. Gorey Lori, the short black-

haired woman who looks like she just got out of jail after a long stint, has a fading tattoo on her forearm, lives in the neighborhood, and runs the book table that is typically set up somewhere around Astor Place. She would buy stolen books from the junkies and resell them blocks away. The X-case, that section to the left of the information desk that housed Bukowski and Burroughs was created because those books were stolen most often. If you have ever wondered why you are not allowed to use the bathroom at St. Mark's Bookshop or why the employees seemed to be in foul moods, these are the reasons. I have a ton of stories just like these. As an employee at the shop, being chatted up by your favorite director, or movie star, or musician, or philosopher was a common and fun occurrence, but wondering whether or not to call the cops happened too. I will say that I have never heard of a customer being molested, robbed, threatened or otherwise harmed at the shop and when I read comments online to news articles or on blogs about the rudeness of the staff I feel angry because in effect, we took the abuse so that you didn't have to.

IV Sunday

Sunday, February 28, 2016 will be the last day of St. Mark's Bookshop. The doors will close, the gate will come down and it will pass into the historic annals of a neighborhood that I have loved since I was a kid. The Third Street location will now be as empty as the Ninth Street location which still lies fallow and dark, devoid of the shelves that once created the optical illusion of space narrowing to an information desk where people who were once my coworkers, but have since become my dear friends, sat. The wavy white bookcases of the Third Street location will face the same fate as the silver pipes that lined the ceiling of Ninth Street. Both of these retail spaces have won awards for design.

I write this Saturday morning and as I do so there are a series of texts, emails and Facebook messages circulating. After the gate goes down, we will meet at the Fish Bar on Fifth Street. I don't know how many of us there will be. The majority

of the people who worked at St. Mark's Bookshop did so for almost, if not more than, a decade. We will toast the shop's run and tell ridiculous anecdotes. We will do what all employees do— joke about our former bosses, even though they no longer have any bearing on our lives. We will talk about things in the past that no longer matter, then we will catch one another up on our current situations, jobs and intrigues.

I have not selected a favorite anecdote to share yet though my partner, who was the night manager of the shop in the 90s likes to tell the story of the time Derrida came in and bought a copy of *Derrida for Beginners* and the employee at the register asked him whether he was trying to understand himself. I may bring up one of my favorite topics, which is what a bitch Susan Sontag always was when she came to the shop close to closing and a little drunk. Or perhaps mention what a very nice man Daniel Craig always seemed to be as he perused the shelves of a dying shop with a hoody covering his ice blue eyes on Oscar night. Or the time his wife came up to the information desk and after a minute of looking at me as I

adjusted my glasses burst into hysterical laughter. *I know, I thought. You played me in The Mummy. I thought the same thing when I saw it.*

For me, the most exciting period of time at the shop was when we finally started doing events and Occupy Wall Street happened. The shop suddenly became a cause célèbre and both Michael Moore and Slavoj Žižek came to speak. The Michael Moore event was a fire hazard. Frances Goldin, who is a prominent literary agent most notably for Mumia Abu Jamal, stood facing the desk in her usual purple garb along with members of the Cooper Square Committee, an organization that works toward maintaining the integrity of the East Village. There was a baby screaming through Michael Moore's speech which prompted him to joke that even the baby was angry at the state of affairs. I decided to make my way over to whoever was with the child to see if they needed anything. It was a man holding a baby in a sling with a little girl about six years old holding his hand. When I asked whether I could help him he asked to be let out out the side exit and whether his daughter

can use the bathroom. "Go with the lady," he said. I didn't think anything of it and quickly responded leading her by the hand through the crowd. At one point I looked back at her and realized that she was tiny and terrified and that this well-meaning man had entrusted me with his child in a space filled to capacity, overfilled even to the point where it was probably dangerous, and we were probably breaking fire codes. We kept going until we reached an impasse.

The event was being recorded by multiple people and there were large bags from professional camera equipment stacked behind the tripod focused on Moore. I realized the girl was too small to step over them then, looking behind her, I saw the crowd close the path we had just made. Michael Moore was speaking flanked by two bodyguards and staff members. Everyone's attention was on him as he delivered his sermon on fair and affordable rent. There was no going back and, much to my horror, I realized that the only way for us to move was for me to carry her the rest of the way. "I'm going to pick you up. Ok? Are you ready?"

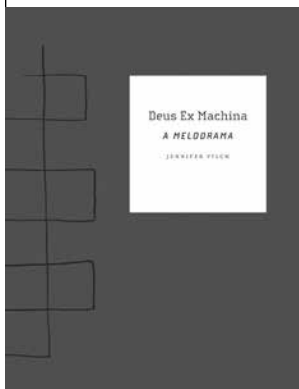
Her eyes were soft and scared. I realized in that moment that she could be my daughter. She nodded and lifted her arms as I swooped her up and holding on to her tightly took a giant step over the large black bags. No one noticed us as we snaked through the remaining crowd. Perhaps this isn't the most literary story to conclude with, but it is one of the most memorable things that happened to me in my thirteen years at the shop. And perhaps, one day when she's older, a young woman will tell her friends about the time when she was a kid and her father took her to a book event at a weird place that isn't there anymore called St. Mark's Bookshop in a neighborhood called the East Village to hear a man speak about economic equality and the importance of books. She had to go to the bathroom and all the people were scary. A weird woman with glasses picked her up and carried her through the crowd.

Margarita Shalina is a writer / translator who lives in New York. She is currently working on a translation of Chekhov's *Tale of an Unknown Man*.

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Reviews

Hardly War

Don Mee Choi

Wave Books, 2016

Review by Caitie Moore

"I refuse to translate," Don Mee Choi writes. This refusal is born of necessity plus exhaustion, and it's a stay against occupation. It constitutes what will elude non-Korean speakers throughout the book: wordplay, numberplay, the meaning colonization makes for the colonized. Her refusal also historicizes digital, poetic, and political relations between South Korea (aka ROK) and the U.S.. Choi— and anyone from U.S.-occupied nations— knows U.S. history better than other U.S. citizens. For the reader who does not know Korean, the lacunae of untranslated Korean syllables do something to correct this imbalance. This poetry trucks in an economy of reveal and resist, as it reveals colonialist history while resisting colonialist terms.

Reading, I was relieved by this resistance, like *no love without boundaries*. This book is warm and registers as a hybrid memoir-crossword puzzle. It pulls us close, then compels us to unlock what we can of its code. "Beauty=Nation" denotes the U.S., "Ugly=Nation" denotes ROK, and "hardly=war" Choi's geopolitical poetics. At times, the book does prompt us to learn Korean so that we can come even closer. For instance, we're informed in a note that *Miguk* is Korean for "America," a fact that redoubles the pleasure/pain when we read "Me=Gook," which indicates the speaker. Choi's poems casually make the optimal conditions for learning and unlearning. They provide a backdrop:

Let's take a closer look at the most feared weapon used by the US / in the Korean War, a gelling powder composed of naphthalene and palmitate / (hence napalm)

They give us comic relief from

the same backdrop:

Mop head hydrangeas, mother of all hydrangeas, are the fussiest. How do you know? Chunjin born two miles from here, Captain. Every place we've been in Korea, this joker was born two miles from it. Tricky.

They traffic in sound:

I was cheerily cherrily red and merely merrily washed my face in the yard and looked up at the stars.

They ventriloquize soldiers:

White horse, sir!
Blue dragon, sir!

May all your Christmases be white, sir!

The poems float above pictures of Choi's father and pictures of herself as a girl in Seoul. They cascade below Korean war photographs in the public domain. "Are you OK, ROK?" they ask with genuine concern, both to check the insanity of militaristic regimes and to check up on citizen safety. Neither are okay. The U.S. has paid ROK roughly \$1 billion to supply soldiers to the war effort in Vietnam. Lyndon B. Johnson has used a young girl holding a daisy in a campaign ad to warn against his opponent's potential use of the bomb. Elsewhere, the atomic bomb is not something that can be outvoted. Communists have been killed indiscriminately, ditto mere-suspected reds.

The weaving of literary, biographical, and political references is a gesture I recognize and love from Choi's first book, *The Morning News Is Exciting* (2010, Action Books), but there's a looseness and vulnerability to *Hardly War* that I appreciate, that feels new.

This book's sort of rogue clarity hinges on the poet's relationship with her father. Essentially, we experience the destabilizing effects of U.S.-ROK entanglement as coherent because this relationship

sutures time and space. His award-winning photographs of the war suffuse the pages. The poems reach out to him as if to a country:

Me baby azalea
look at flowers
and think of Daddy
Miss you, Daddy!
Daddy said to me
Let's live together with flowers
but Big Kitty says to me
Translate me and I'll kill you

An interview with Choi's father is recast as an opera that makes up the final section of the book "Hardly Opera." The father-figure-narrator is called Camera Elmar. Other parts are named after flowers: the part of South Korea is named Rose of Sharon—the country's national flower and a recurring touchstone in previous sections. Hydrangeas of foot soldiers chorus "Yes ma'am." Each character acts their anxious, controlling or fawning part precisely:

Azalea:
Overly ovaries
General Kim
How do you do?

Rose of Sharon:
One shot!
No spots!
How many baby azaleas?

UPI Flower:
Did something happen?
The world wants to know.

These are the flowers that distracted her father when he was abroad shooting various wars. "Now my father only photographs flowers," Choi tells us in a note. Here they're mixed in, sharing the frame with massacres. These flowers are politicized flowers, *Silent Spring* flowers. The poems repopulate with their presence, and begin to move. The poems are "swaying," becoming "O-crazy-daisy." "Do petals fall and bloom again?" they're asking skeptically. Renewal does seem impossible. But the flowers bear across one of Choi's main concerns: a decentering of the official. Flowers are not

official, regardless of national emblems or presidential campaign ads. They're weird and changeable. They're fragile, but not weak. They're excessive and spill beyond their own boundaries and then the boundaries of what is beautiful. They're Hardly=Beautiful, Partly=Sentient, Me=War, Ugly=Poem, o-overly-overrun.

Caitie Moore's poetry engages her queer femme subject position as well as white supremacy and can be found in her chapbook *Wife* (Argos Books, 2014), Brandon Shimoda's *Ancients, No. Two* and *The Racial Imaginary*.

Shut Up, Leaves

Tony Iantosca

United Artists Books, 2015

Review by Mel Elberg

Leaves, of course, doubly refer to the trees and the pages a reader (less often these days) thumbs as she engages with the written text. The poems in Tony Iantosca's new pocket-sized collection concern themselves with "great big empty things like fields / or homes and their utility as material mined [...] in place of saying something interesting" ("Wrong Number"). "Something big" and interesting, imperative to his poems, has left the poet, and keeps circling back in the three sections of this book's deadpan observance of negative spaces, addressing everything but *it*, because, supposedly, "no one cares / about where that road goes" ("Young Tree.")

Sarcasm cycles with sincere longing within and for this book's lost subjects. An ambivalent symbolist, placeless, "something," "here & there," "land," "the steering wheel," "sun," "leaves" and "you" are recurring and maneuvering characters in lieu of the missing. The poet writes fast, but treads lightly, leaving and being left

are his position. By pretending not to care, these poems mean to hear more fully,
the sound / the pavement makes
when under the ice / it breaks or
broke to swallow leaves today. /
You lean away from anger
("I Don't Have Money For The Train.")

"I was angry in every way and it got worse" ("Once I Meant To Say.") The abstract language of loss repeated throughout the book works best in longer poems like "Today There Were Shapes," where,
the shapes / are a union light
breeds / by not being able to enter
/ the spaces between where the
shapes / join each other. Joining
the workforce.
The poem as negative space in the physical and psychological sense can accumulate without location.

Parts 2 and 3 of "Leaves" lean much more heavily on sound, and the short jumps between row swamps, rooftops and "horses enter crossing memory's / short range headlights" ("There's air in the wide space.") Sequencing like unattributed movie stills; these poems in their density make quicker sense of their subjects, or more sharply and pleasingly undo them. "glass think / gonna hurl / in this layer / bygone sounds grow / bones as light / be little gone..." ("is erasure.") The fast lines pick up a musical humility, where the instant of traffic, shivers, paper and pollen can all hold the same bad attitude. These poems could be one long and never-sent love letter, or a series of late night texts-to-self.

"The Champion of Whatever" delightfully detours from the book's other structures as an untitled, 8-line, almost-villanelle, a form repeated in the poems on pages 54, 58, 62, 66, and 70, "Stop and Think About What You're Doing." These quietly weaved in and perfectly spaced out 6 poems are like little flowers caught in the leaves of *Shut Up, Leaves*; something to remind one to step out, re-read, see the forest *and* the trees and the

shade and the spaces between every leaf and poem, to move between perspectives. Like all good poetry, this book means to make you work with it, reminding us that it is half up to a reader to find the poem's "inner rooms," to extract and make use, for example, of "thigh along water / a thigh along / the lines / of a home / phones cradle" ("chain link.") Read it *and* leave it.

Mel Elberg is from the queer future, single, still teething.

The Photographer Ariel Goldberg

Roof Books, 2015

Review by Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves

The dearest tools float easy from one workspace to the next. Polymath gesture, infinite device. The photograph and poem both promise this expanse of slippage and of agency. With each—in hand, in mind, embodied—we might mirror, archive, taste, and question this chaos that surrounds. However applied, each holds some discrete part of the roiling. Bespoke vessel. Flicker of subject.

Digital velvet in the hand; languid heft stacked and bound within; a field of ten percent French Grey announces a clinical warmth we may hope to find echoed in the content. A serifed text declares our object *THE PHOTOGRAPHER* and *Ariel Goldberg* its primary source material. Much larger than this language, a central image of margins, of error, of analog precarity. Here, elegant quarter-inch spine. Now, guides for the marketplace. Title, author, swath of accolade. Portrait and credential context. Code of bars, last womb's name, price of admission.

We are a photographer who writes (or the inverse) and we are writing about a photographer who writes (or the inverse), and who has written about photographs, and about photographing. We will find

little here about Photography—little about the field of inquiry, though much about its actions, its consequences, its materiality. We can feel the time it took to write what we are reading. Its precision is astonishing, excruciating. "*She barks at the dogs she photographs.*" "*She is holding the camera out as far as her arm can reach and leaning back to increase the space.*"

The fields of this book are warm, porous, tentatively robust. Arrayed throughout, the text appears as slivers, sets, passes full and more moderate—a generous and varied offering. And framing all, in the way we are accustomed: external honors, legality administered, and then, supports acknowledged, other offspring itemized, ecosystem praised.

We approached this work because we like their crisp warmth. We approached this work because they showed how well they can see our own. We approached this work fearful of its sobriety. We approached this work unsure we spoke its language. We approached this work hoping we were kin. We approached this work fueled by embers of concern.

We found sentences that snapshot memory. In the archivist's attic flat files slide open toward us. Marked *confession_professional*. Marked *recollection_technique_minutiae*. Marked *engagement_corporeal*. Marked *observation_relational*. Marked *disappointment_temperance*. Marked *outsider_interrogation*. Marked *instruction_release*.

We found twenty-four unsigned messages addressed *Dear Photographer*: and wondered who wrote them. We relaxed into their amplified density. Medium format, longer exposure. (Yes, precisely so.) They appear in pairs of pairs. They are concentrated visual data let spread into proliferating text. Strange and calm. Stranger and calming. Time has been taken. Our titular *Photographer*

guides our eyes slowly through their internal records. We are in a mentorship of observation. We are a little bit bad at it. We are racing to cross punchlines. We are *hashtag: peak Millennial*. We are glad they are in no rush. We are cooling toward this pace.

We are glad poetry is slow.

We are ambling through an account of a surveillant body modification denied full access, through first encounter with unfamiliar diversion, through clumsy or ambitious attribution, through drone footage as *memorabilia_simulated*.

The tour continues slowly. Our photographer might be alerting us to a creeping horror.

An assistant photographed me holding newspapers above the bin in a ritualized farewell. Efficiency was reducing any memorializing.

More likely a horror full-crept. *He says the surgery was more painful than he expected. The private university where he works asked him to wear a lens cap.*

Our photographer fans their hand through the vista of this past-time, this tool, this curiosity, this candy, this damning, this privilege, this burden, this treasure, this mass. Our photographer asks if we intend to proceed in this manner. And our photographer knows we do.

It is earlier and we are recalling hearing them read from this and other work. We are recalling the way their voice bounded gleeful through the phonemes. We are buoyed by the memory. We are scrolling through the poet's Instagram feed. We are touched by the marginalia foregrounded throughout. We are remembering our own feed's rivulet #picturesofpoets. We are smiling that this author is the most recent to bear the hashtag. We are wondering what to make of that.

We are beginning this review. We are feeling our way though. We are finding that our writing voice has shifted toward the text's. We are pleased with

this development and proceed. It is hours later and we know there is still so much more to say. We have not yet told anyone about the large-format works called "The Sale," and "Press Conference." Nor have we confessed we are still confounded by the test-strips of "The News."

We are wondering how a poet's photograph differs from some other's. How a photographer's poetry differs from other other's. How does the mind sort *input_text* from *input_pictorial*? Does it differentiate between these languages? Where along the way into us does it all become *memory*? Where within does text memory bloom (or fade) toward the pictorial? Where within might a scene be archived in text?

We are still here with the book. We are looking forward to finding just the right light to mark this kinship of inversion.

Adjuia Gargi Nzinga Greaves (New York City, b. 1980) is an experiential information artist concerned with the genius of wilderness, and the glamour of The Academy. She lives and works in New York City where she is currently completing work on *The Bulletin of Wilderness and Academy: An Introductory Conclusion to unschoolMFA*, forthcoming from Organic Electric Industries.

Structure from Motion

Tom Raworth

Edge Books, 2015

Review by Jess Mynes

Tom Raworth's newest book from Edge, *Structure from Motion*, reflects his ongoing investigation of what defines our social reality. If the fabric of social reality is what connects us through shared experience in the form of current events, "it was never necessary to give the afghans insulin / no matter how shattered they were," (39) and cultural trends, "leveraging crowd-sourced data and mining social networks," (35) than Raworth extends beyond social commentary to reshape and re-contextualize these events and trends into a new reality. The social reality of his poems reflects, resists, and challenges what we think of as our common, shared reality by teasing out the nuances that reveal distinctions in the, "connections / between assumptions." (54)

The poems in *Structure from Motion* develop overlooked distinctions by creating new associations and connections. Overlap and juxtaposition provide intersections for distinction and comparison, "not everything on the ground is a chestnut." (66)

One perception in close proximity with another heightens the polarity between the two and invites comparison, presence without value / is perceived as occupation / today we have commonality of parts // void between lethality and inaction /

marketing ability / in current-trend perception, (44).

Comparisons create new dimensions for associations that require new articulations in order to empower the investigative process of perception and to expose the gaps, in the form of bankrupt values, made manifest by assumptions, how can a poor man / stand such times and live // a rhetorical argument / rather than a serious offer // at work down in noise / of information dominance / through it your self runs cracked ideologies, (72) or, "bars on stripes / all but the image / is depravation." (16)

The rapid-fire transition in Raworth's poems, reflected by his own reading style, from one perception to the next reflects the welter of the ongoing motion of our lives and our attempts to create a structure in the form of comprehension and relevance, or at the very least, footing. The cumulative effect of the velocity of these juxtapositions is stark, magnetizing and sometimes jarring. The jarring quality of the juxtapositions is transformed by Raworth's wit and impeccable ear, they should live with their own kind / in beeswax village // stored in the common spent fuel pool / a milestone in process of recovery. (74)

New contexts or imaginings seem tenable and even more comprehensible than our present uncertain reality, amnesiac elephant / pareidolia / the homeless quarter / oh right

right right / we think it is benign / but we just don't know. (54)

In this welter Raworth creates an enchanting music that makes the velocity less disorienting, "I wholesaled elk hunt link / Reheating tent sloths / Where he deadpanned a frowsier wig thus:

"Yow!" / Addable outhouse sorority slut / Your heartbreaking hooter and hoofs shunt / Baldfaced honkers' limo— noisy you! / Trolling own sheen / Nylon where druid babes cord tinhorn. (55)

It is these re-imaginings that are necessary because, "hope is not a strategy / to move the needle." (59)

Neologisms suggest that language is a living organism capable of evolving and mutating. Language and reality are not closed processes but rather ongoing investigations, generally the book is closed as the decipher meant / all ally within where they live in the shell / the loom of velvet is touch able to be the scene / of now languages of simultaneous news / the code book learned proves correspondences are equal (11).

One of my favorite neologisms in the book is in the poem title, "Astride the Palindrone," where Raworth effectively uses couplets to mirror the doggerel of anthems, "for we fight for oil and dentistry / and anything else that rhymes with free." (56)

New connections require new language to express and define them. In, "2003," Raworth creates a poem out of, "Merriam-Webster's ten most-searched-for-definitions online during 2003." As a visual artist and collagist Raworth understands that language is a material that has the capacity to create new structures and realities. Language not only reflects new realities but also anticipates them, "it's not that people don't know what these words mean, it's that they / have trouble remembering which / one does what." (68) Many of the words in these poems are uncommon or newly minted and cannot be found in current

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dictionaries or Microsoft's Spellcheck, as reality moves faster than convention. Some examples of these words: vanned, optogenics, bot herders, stoat, miry, groyne, z line, fursonae, camouflet, pareidolia, and tinhorn.

Structure from Motion reflects the mystery and formal mastery that has defined Raworth's poetry for decades. That he is able to use the common vernacular materials of social reality with such unique, striking effect is perhaps best represented in this collection by the concluding poem, "Surfing the Permafrost Through Methane Flares":

is it as what or as who
when you think of you?

that which forgets
what it came to do

though content is past
it refuses to last

leaving only the form
of what once we knew (75)

Jess Mynes is the author of several books, including *One Anthem* (Pressed Wafer) and *Sky Brightly Picked* (Skysill Press). His poems have appeared in: *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Nation*, *Bright Pink*, *Mosquito*, *Vlak*, *Shampoo*, *Big Bell*, and various other publications. He co-curated a reading series, All Small Caps, in Wendell, MA for eight years. Mynes is the editor of *Fewer & Further Press* where he publishes innovative contemporary poetry.

The Pulp Vs. The Throne Carrie Lorig

Artifice Books, 2015

Review by Phillip Griffith

Carrie Lorig's *The Pulp Vs. The Throne* begins and ends with a journey to the sea. Along the way, her poems travel from embodied to essayistic lyric. The vocabulary that Lorig wrenches from the encounter of body, environment, and poem challenges just as her

experiments in genre do, pushing us toward the prizefight of her title.

Throughout the book, a host of other writers haunts Lorig's writing, including Alice Notley, Etel Adnan, and Bhanu Kapil. Notley seems most diffusely present, and Lorig's use of slash marks to delineate breaks in her prose and verse sentences echoes Notley's innovative quotation marks that indicate rhythm in *The Descent of Alette*.

Like Notley's work, Lorig's first poems reach toward a world of lyric myth. To return to the scene of the sea, the title poem begins with a series of three incantatory yeses. They read: "y e s mouth-open-certain-mercy-plugs," "y e s a cliff-thrive," "y e s a-release-of-near-air." They initiate us into the book and its themes: our bodies open to sea and book, to culture and its (natural) environment; our bodies plunging in a cliff *dive* through the uncertainty of language (here, in a characteristic moment of misprision, thrive or dive?); our lungs inhaling one last time as we take the plunge.

Lorig's first challenge— to poem and to reader— is to establish the idiom of this book. The eponymous poem offers a catalogue of meanings for its title, beginning with, "This body cavity, this carved in waste, I call The Pulp Vs. The Throne." In other words, the body stands in for this contest, as its prize. Later, Lorig writes, "The Pulp Vs. The Throne A Bulge is A Swell is A HEADDRESS [...] Can I shift and want in my HEADDRESS?" The speaker wears a headdress as a crown, but does she control her body's bulging and swelling? This crown does not resolve the tension between the abject and sovereign subjects implied by the two opponents. The body does not master language but lives in its sea swell, filling and bulging according to tides both oceanic and hormonal— and, perhaps, ideational.

Semantically, Lorig expresses this loss of control, and the effort to mask it, in slippages of meaning and sound, as in "cliff-thrive" and its sonic double "cliff dive." Lorig writes, The Pulp Vs. The Throne hears folds / or Undertow Folds or undertow it has / the Tarp Roses in my nervous I'm so / mine in my nervous / in slash life I expand to / uncover

The hearing body perceives the folds of words, their doublings and multiple meanings. This is a wave action, pulling the poet's body underwater but also pulling the poem under layers of language. The passage repeats flower imagery from earlier in the poem, and foreshadows an image near the end of the book in which flowers merge with the base of the spine. The silent white space after "nervous," then, begs its completion in "system." This, however, depends on a retrospective reading, or a folding of the completed reading of the book back upon its beginning. The slash mark, rather than regimenting an embodied meter of breath like Notley's quotation mark, announces moments of folding that open onto the multiple possibilities of language.

In the later poems, closer to a genre of poem-essay than strict lyric, these slash marks also open a *formal* field of possibility, folding line breaks into prose. The following lines from "To Lie Down / In An Attempt" exhibit this amped-up power of punctuation:

To resist is to acknowledge a connected complex, a difficult witness, a dumb abandoned beach house that doesn't say / but evokes pussy, pussy / in the water inclined / in the water reclined.

Heavily footnoted, these poems create the effect of layers of meaning, of tides moving through a subterranean "connected complex," that mimics the layering of the slashes.

In the concluding poem-essay, "Reading as a Wildflower Activist, parts I and II," Lorig explores the impossibility of

writing a book by delving into works by Kapil, Raúl Zurita, and Edmond Jabès. Reflecting upon the difficulty of creating out of trauma or death, Lorig proposes that a book is an impossible form, and one that can never end for it must remain open to its natural and linguistic environments. As Hélène Cixous, quoted in a footnote, writes, "Their first and best ally in the evasion [of death] is the poetic use of the languages of language [...] a language always speaks several languages at once, and runs with a single word in opposite directions."

At the end of "Wildflower Activist," Lorig is again on her way to the sea, with her lover, N. She writes, "I am writing a future I know. I am writing a future I need to transform. I am wearing a kind of cloth I will take with me into the water." The garment, denuded of description, a lowly "cloth," captures the power with which Lorig imbues other mundane, abjected, or elemental materials in the text: cloth, stone, bone, the Pulp. A talisman of culture, this cloth— a bathing suit?— marks a provisional boundary between body and sea, and so tethers Lorig to shore, to culture, and to language. Yet, just as the sea soaks the bathing suit, each of these bodies— textual, physical, oceanic— remains permeable to the others. As in Cixous' description, the body in Lorig's book speaks several languages at once.

Phillip Griffith writes and teaches in New York City where he is a doctoral candidate in French at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Common Place Rob Halpern

Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015
Review by Stephen Boyer

Given it's the Age of LGBT Marriage Equality I want to begin by celebrating the fact that *Common Place* prioritizes, shakes-up, re-imagines, scandalizes, queers, and releases itself from the banalities of hetero sexual standards, expectations, and ritual. A casual shelf browser might think *Common Place* misplaced in the poetry section: instead they might see journalism, essays, nonfiction, or some strange combination? And it is strange, so they wouldn't be wrong on that account. *Common Place* reads as a spiritual reckoning: it's the American militarization cum shot and its so-called human face; an exploration of the embodied poetics of transcription; or an unlikely and impossible conversation between the dead and undead.

Rob Halpern's work delves into the commons and brings forth a radical escape from America's preferred, safe sexual constructs. At best, *Common Place* reads as a testament to preserving queer sexuality's perversity. That said, Dodie Bellamy wrote in her review, "Halpern uses the word 'common' sixty times, while the title phrase 'common place/ commonplace' (used twenty-eight times) hammers into the reader's brain that this is not just about him, but instead about all of us." Does sexual deviance and liberation speak for the commons? Aren't there more radical frameworks to consider when writing of the horrors overshadowing the dawn of the twenty-first century American landscape? Tyrone Williams blurbed that Halpern's writing is an incantation of desire, "But this is a desire like Sade's or Genet's..." And I can't help but reflect back to a class I took focused on sex and literature wherein we read Sade's novel *Justine*. I hadn't read the work since I was a teenager, at which point I found

it exhilaratingly defiant. But as an adult, in a class largely made up of women of color, I found myself siding with their critiques; and my position on its sexual deviance shifted to its feeling unnecessary, no longer remarkable, gratuitous. Those conversations interfered with my ability to digest the sexual ruptures fusing the multiple narratives comprising *Common Place*.

I first heard Halpern read from *Common Place* while visiting Detroit last fall. I struggled to listen as Halpern read passages seemingly fixated on sexualizing Mohammad Ahmed Abdullah Saleh al Hanashi, a Yemeni extrajudicial detainee whose suspicious death in Guantanamo Bay was preceded by a hunger strike and daily force-feeding. But the engrossed, diverse audience and Q&A following the reading suggested I was missing something. Once home I saw in reading *Common Place* slight shifts and nuances propelling the text beyond what I thought was a simple fetishization of its subject. Halpern works to jumble and portray the complexities of empathy and desire. He writes,

It's really Flaubert's Julian I want to be, the way he lies full length atop the leper, mouth to mouth, chest to chest, compassion being an act of the whole body.

But instead of being with, Halpern is alone entertaining transcription to pass the time or trick the labor that makes time real— as if writing could bring the bodies back or closer.

I can't help but wonder were I transcribing The Phenomenology of Spirit, would I still be moved by these impulses to touch myself?

He explains, "Fondling myself as I transcribe this report feels inappropriate, a move I ought to arrest." But he continues ever onward toward entwining sexual fantasies with transcription and his subject, or as Halpern takes to calling him, "My detainee."

Is it ethical to sexualize an

incarcerated, Muslim man who was murdered by the State through a queer gaze using the English language? I'm not sure. But Halpern's handling of al Hanashi's body through all his own complexities seeks to relay the truth we've been overwhelmed with for more than a decade— that every American citizen carries this impossible reality and is culpable for the actions of a country at war, and Guantanamo's atrocities continue— al Hanashi was a man lost to war. *Common Place* explains al Hanashi was a man who felt 9/11 was wrong since the Quran doesn't agree with the murder of innocents. Despite his innocence; he was detained and later died in custody. The question remains over whether Halpern's sexualization of understanding is another portrayal of the wrongs of the Western imagination.

I empathize with his dead body now on display in this book and wonder how he'd process the queering of his narrative into the body of his sympathizer. I wonder if it's possible to poetically juxtapose such seemingly oppositional ways of being in the world and arrive at what I think both men want/ed— different forms of liberation.

Halpern offers a brutally honest look into the psyche of an American confounded by and trying to understand the horrors of his Nation. Given that so many brutalities and violences occur, with many going unrecognized and unpunished everyday, a reader is remiss to conclude they are not at war with the violence festering here. All the information gathered and reworked with poetic flair comes from the commons.

Maybe sexualizing it is problematic, maybe it isn't your thing, maybe it offers you a key towards a transcendence of your limited understanding? Despite my own feelings around the politics of intimacy and

discomfort: *Common Place* is a testament to bearing witness. Halpern explains,

In order to arrive at love, I need to run straight thru disgust without stopping at abjection. I want to keep myself hard while doing this so that every line bears some direct relation to arousal.

And for a moment I think I understand— this is Halpern's way through the impossible horror and unlikely pairing of two men who have both been at odds with the State; though it is Halpern who is tasked with the difficulty of creating his own status as witness.

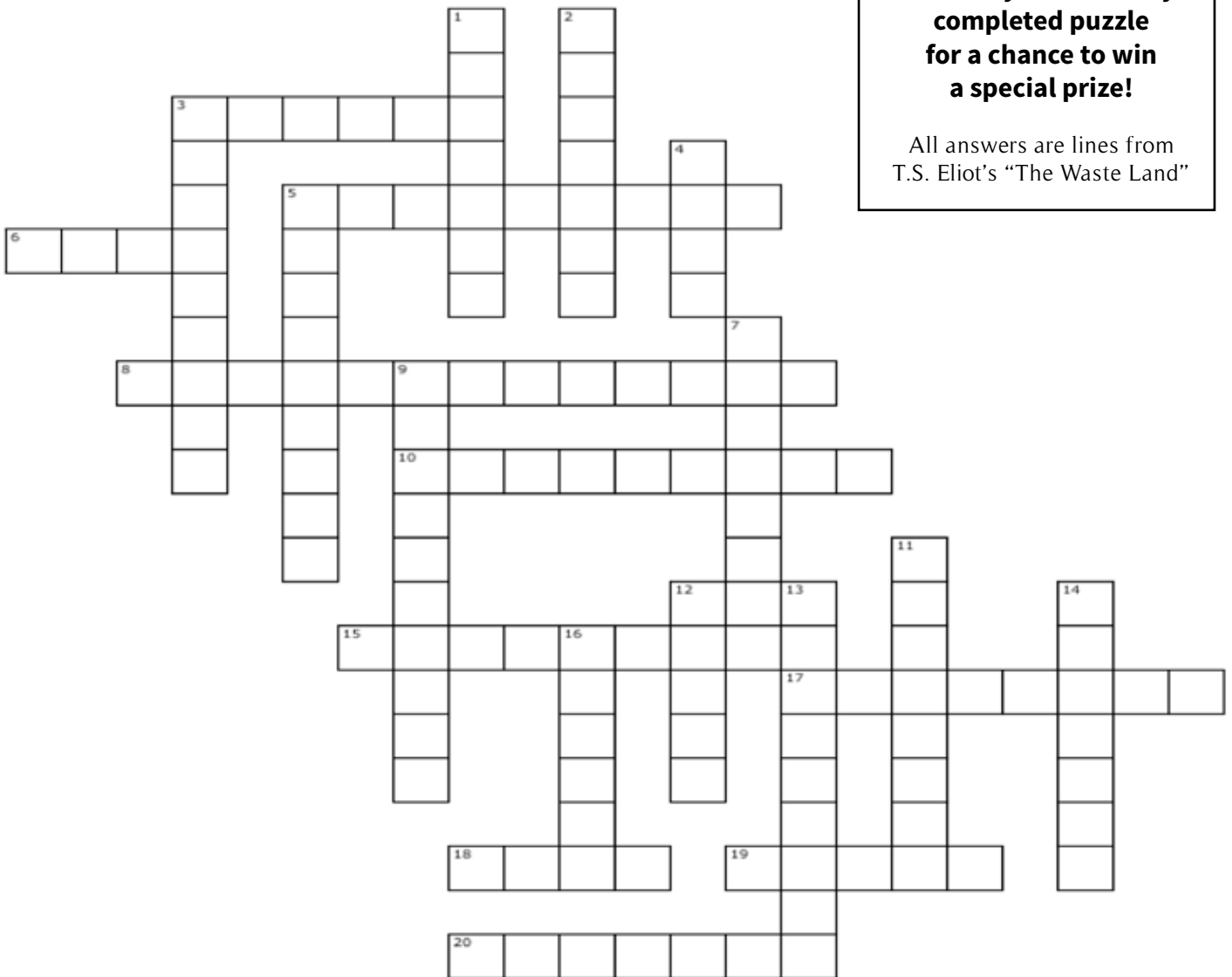
Stephen Boyer lives in Brooklyn and is eking it out as writer, performer, investigator, under-employed, older-end-of-the-millennial spectrum, non-binary person.

Crossword Puzzle

April is...

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completed puzzle
for a chance to win
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All answers are lines from
T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"



Across

3. That... you planted last year in your garden
5. Unstoppered, lurked her strange... perfumes
6. In the mountains, there you feel...
8. Doubled the flames of... candelabra
10. Flung their smoke into the...
15. Tell her I bring the... myself
17. "I never know what you are... Think."
18. Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's...
19. Where the dead men lost their...
20. You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so...

Down

1. And the dead tree gives no...
2. Pressing... eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
3. April is the... month
4. Unreal...
5. The awful daring of a moment's...
7. Those are... that were his eyes.
9. Here is..., the Lady of the Rocks
11. There is not even... in the mountains
12. He'll want to know what you done with that... he gave you
13. Followed by a weekend at the...
14. And fiddled... music on those strings
16. ...on the floor of a narrow canoe.

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