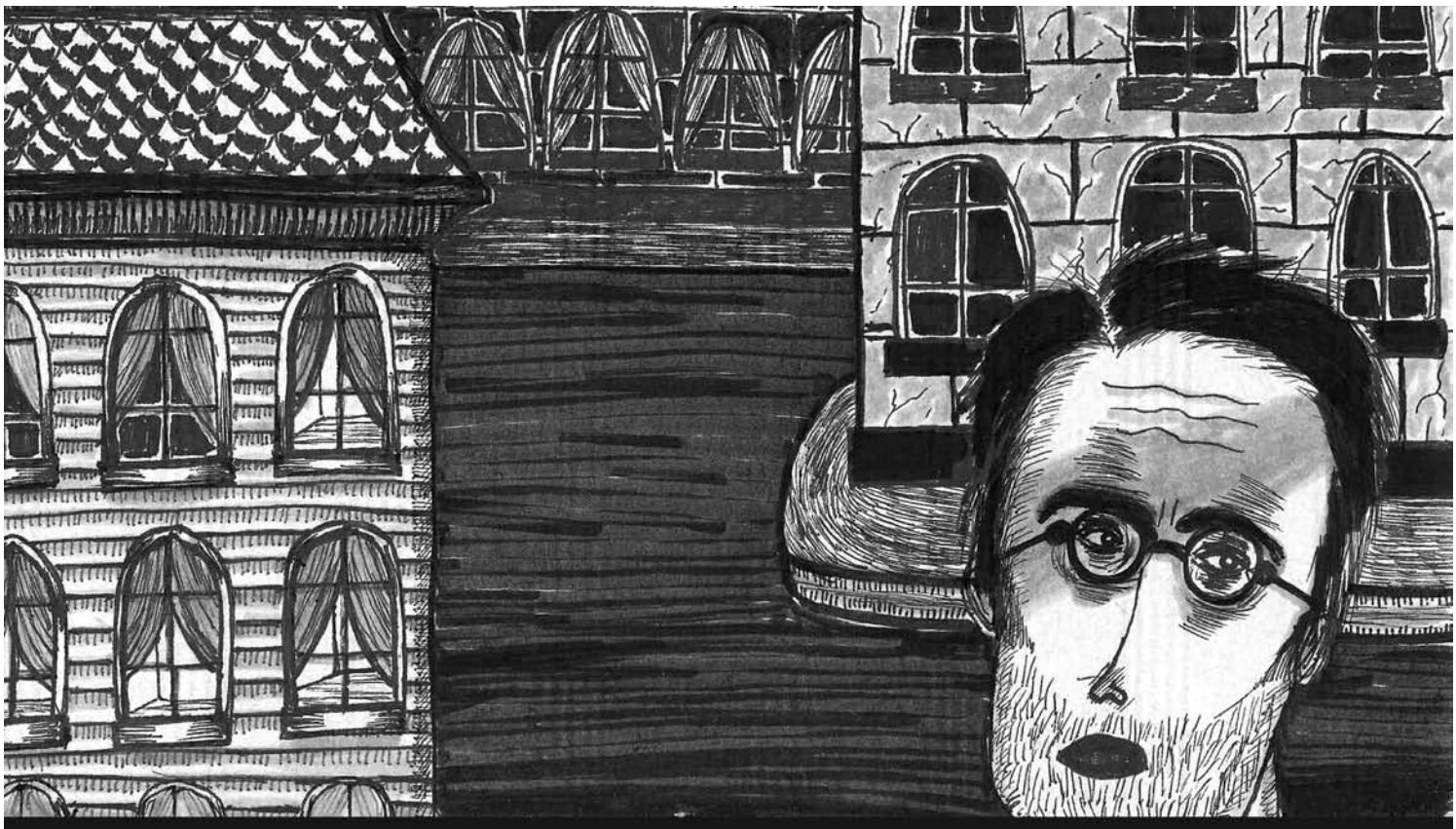

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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MARJORIE WELISH AND BEN LERNER IN CONVERSATION

ROSA ALCALÁ'S NOTES FROM THE BORDER

IN MEMORIAM: AKILAH OLIVER & PAUL VIOLI

POETRY, ART, REVIEWS AND MORE

#228

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The Poetry Project Newsletter

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Contents

From the Director

I read a lot of books over the summer, none of them books of poetry, so when "back-to-work" week came I thoughtfully looked at my library for the right poems to reset my head. *The New Old Paint* (Faux Press) by Susie Timmons is my late August companion volume. (The title always made me hum Arthur Russell's "Goodbye Old Paint" and, indeed, I felt so in tune when I discovered the title poem *is* a reference to the song.) Anyway, if you start getting emails from me that read "you are nut," "you are craz," "don't be sill," it's because I'm possessed by Susie's work!

I'm so very excited for the upcoming season. I take my hat off to our series coordinators for putting together thoughtful and enticing events. As many of you know, I'm coordinating the Wednesday Night Reading Series again so I'm brushing up on my public speaking tips ("Slow your roll"; "Hello, room, nice to meet you"; "Keep it short, please"). Our masthead hasn't changed too much. Paul Foster Johnson and Josef Kaplan have joined us as *Newsletter* Editor and Talk Series Coordinator, respectively. Arlo will tell you more about their creds in his letter. I'd like to thank Will Creeley for his term on our Board, and to welcome Erica Hunt to the table. Please check out our fresh website design and check it often. It's a work-in-progress and we're adding content every week.

I hope *PPNL* readers had a relaxing summer. Ready? Read on!

Stacy Szymaszek

From the Program Coordinator

Readers of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*—Hi! Happy late summer. It continues on the weekends, but Stacy, Nicole and I are now back in our East Village church tree house. We all stayed cool and didn't do anything we wouldn't do. Reading lists included *Locus Solus*, H. P. Lovecraft, Susan Miller, Pasolini and *The Bangor Daily News* comment fields. We took trips to Boston, Milwaukee and Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. While we were away the Mars Bar closed, frozen yogurt sales continued to skyrocket, and our office telephones all stopped working (but for different reasons). In the short time we've been back there's been minor flooding (I crossed 5TH Street a little more than ankle-deep in rain on the way home from work Friday) and a minor earthquake (Nicole almost fell out of her chair). Stacy just told me that a hurricane named Irene is coming for us this weekend. I'm thinking of copyrighting the word "Frackpocalypse" now while there's still time. These and other reasons are probably why I only trust the Acculorber Forecast to help me plan for the days and nights ahead. But why focus on doom and disaster? They're still making challah at B&H and they're screening Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet* at Anthology. Zabb Elee is bringing the amazing cuisine of Northern Thailand to 2ND Avenue at reasonable prices and Jimmy Fragosa, Saint Mark's' tireless sexton, is fixing up the church floors. We also have a wonderful group of people together for Season 46 of The Poetry Project. Macgregor Card is back for another round of Mondays, Brett Price for Fridays, and Stacy Szymaszek is curating Wednesdays again after a season away. The Monday Night Talk Series will be newly helmed by Josef Kaplan. You may already know Josef as co-editor of the terrific online journal *Sustainable Aircraft* or as one of the leaders of Tea Party Republicans Press. He's also the author of *Our Heavies* and, with Gordon Faylor, *Dunk Runts*. Also, *The Poetry Project Newsletter* you are reading right now has a new editor—Paul Foster Johnson. Paul is the author of *Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms*, *Refrains/Unworkings*, and (with E. Tracy Grinnell) *Quadriga*. He curated the Experiments and Disorders reading series at Dixon Place and worked as an editor at Litmus Press and *Aufgabe*. We of the Poetry Project office are very excited to see what Paul's version of the *Newsletter* will be!

Arlo Quint

From the Editor

Hello, comrades!

I missed the poets this summer, but the lull afforded me time to learn how to edit the *Newsletter*. Lewis Rawlings lent his indispensable design assistance. Stacy, Arlo and Nicole have been helpful and kind, as have past editors. Corina Copp provided superior instruction and advice, and John Coletti great hugs and moral support. They initiated me into this quasi-Templar thing.

Getting to know James Kaston, whose drawings appear in these pages, has been a highlight of the summer. James and I selected the drawings during a long visit to his cabinet of curiosities (apartment), which included skulls, a miniature analyst's couch, and old photographs of sports teams ("dead hotties"). We talked about his upcoming monologue performance, about nuns, about the importance of being fully clothed when receiving deliveries.

James fills notebooks with drawings like the ones you see here. Each notebook seems to have its own mood and style, but there are recurring ways of rendering figures, antiques and architectural details. The drawings are done quickly and with a light touch, but they also have a dark or mysterious side, with wincing faces and ambiguous or labyrinthine backgrounds.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and I welcome your feedback!

Paul Foster Johnson

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public Access Poetry & PennSound

We are tremendously excited to announce that The Poetry Project and PennSound have collaborated to make the cable access TV show *Public Access Poetry* (1977–78) video archive available online. 31 of the episodes are currently viewable at http://poetryproject.org/history/public-access-poetry *and* http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/video.php. You can read more about *Public Access Poetry* by following either link.

The Poetry Project is seeking $3,500 in funding to have the remaining 15 open reel tapes transferred to digital files/DVDs to complete the project and make this valuable archive available to the public for the first time. Please contact info@poetryproject.org if you are interested in making a donation toward this effort.

Get Into Our Social Media

In other news, The Poetry Project has significantly stepped up its social media game and means serious business from here on out. If you haven't already "liked" our Facebook page (http://facebook.com/thepoetryproject/), you should probably consider doing it. You really won't regret the informative tidbits we will provide your newsfeed with this season and forever. We have a Twitter (http://twitter.com/poetry__project/) too, if that's more your thing, for links and upcoming events, as well as a Tumblr (http://poetry-project.tumblr.com/) for posting images of the archival/ephemeral beauts we've come across in our recent office rummages. Get into our social media.

Birth of June in March

We'd like to publicly herald the birth of June Penelope Weiser Berrigan, who has already become a frequent Poetry Project office visitor. June was born March 14, 2011, to Anselm Berrigan and Karen Weiser. So far, she has tried to eat our ship-themed postage stamps and seems to particularly like us all.

The Poetry Project Seeks Videographer

We are looking for someone with experience shooting live events to document select readings. For a complete description of responsibilities and requirements, please visit our blog. Small stipend and large perks.

The Poetry Project and WKCR

Each month, WCKR–FM 89.9, Columbia University's radio station, will be interviewing one or two poets reading at The Poetry Project and broadcasting the interview during the week of the reading. To be sure you know when to catch the broadcasts, please get on our Twitter feed or check our blog regularly.

Part Architecture, Part Language:
Marjorie Welish and Ben Lerner in Conversation

BEN LERNER: I'd like to begin at the beginning of your new book, *In the Futurity Lounge*. The first poem, "Spacing," puts in play two famous theories/theorists of narrative: V. Propp's typology of narrative structures (viz. "donor") and E. M. Forster's memorable distinction between story and plot in *Aspects of the Novel*: "The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief is a plot." It's a short poem, so let me reproduce it:

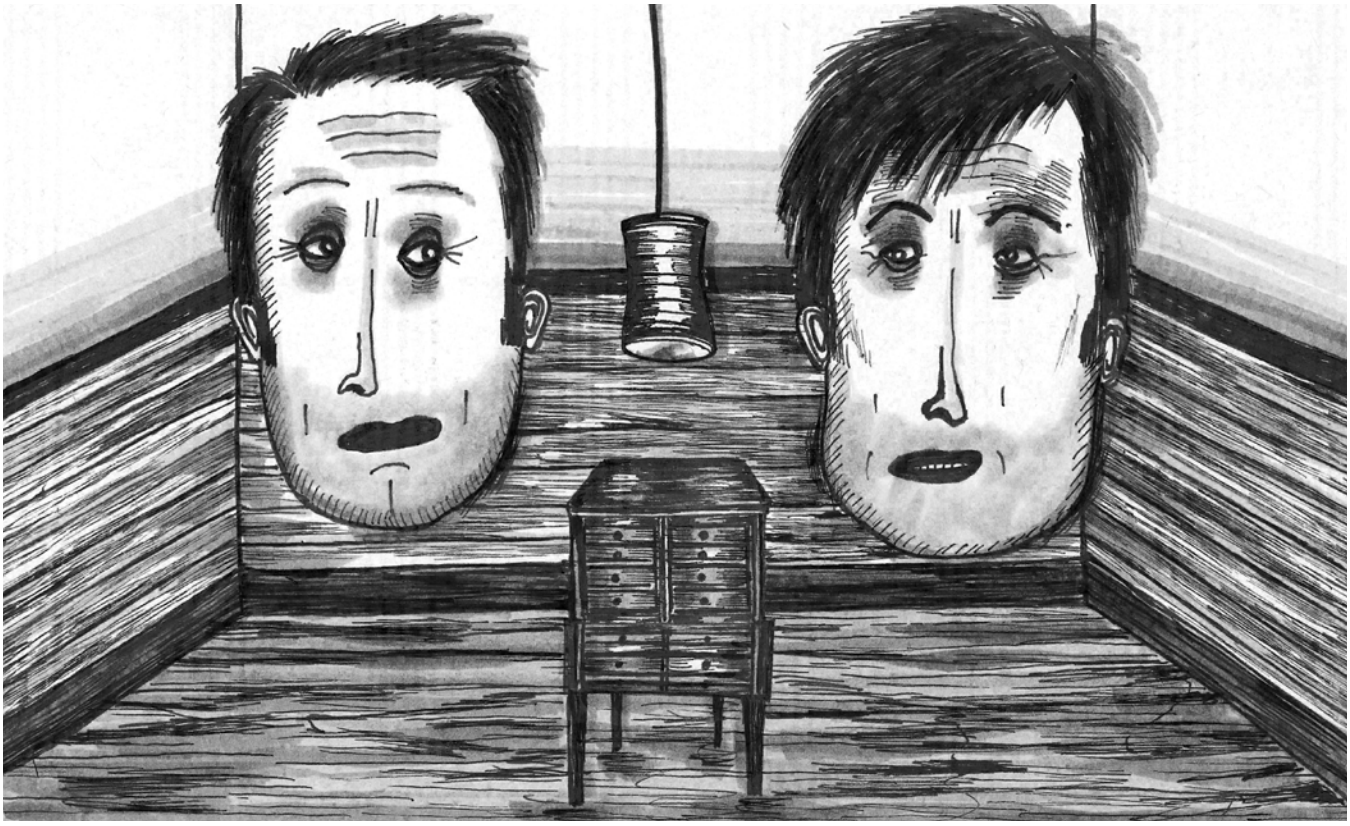
AND IT CAME TO PASS
that the King died, then the Queen died of grief.
CONSEQUENTS UNITE!
And the Queen died of grief, chafing against the antecedent
event, action, scene. And again the Queen died
in line, and so consecutive with respect to others who had died
prior to her.
IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING
that the Queen died.
ONCE UPON A TIME
is of a different order of magnitude, the Donor said.

"And again the Queen died / in line": I like how this moment of the poem crosses the logic of narrative causality with the logic of poetic "spacing": "in line" can be read here as indicating, say, that she was a queen in a lineage of queens but it's also literalized by the form of the poem; the queen here dies (again!) across a line break. Could you say something about how you conceive of the relationship between poetic form and narrative grammar—between the poetic line and the plot line—in this poem? In this book? I think of "Spacing" as announcing narrativity as one of the volume's major themes.

MARJORIE WELISH: Structuring poems is an active preoccupation of mine, for sure, and some poems, like "Spacing," are explicitly about the sort of structure commonly called narrative. Plot concerns itself with actions—actions, not busywork. A narrative grammar urges us to consider the difference between consecutive occurrence and consequent relations. *Then..., and then...,* a consecutive order not necessarily subject to causality, may tantalize and invite speculation about events. The conditional, *If..., then...,* makes a claim to causality. The poem "Spacing" imports these aspects of narrative from literature that is more properly considered temporal; and it may be interesting insofar as, line by line, a narrative logic abstracted from story revises what happened before. My affliction, a love of poetics in the abstract, throws narrative theory into relief in such a way as to keep reframing the poem as literary, not actual narrative.

BL: Another way the book investigates narrative grammar is in its testing of predication: "Statement (Some Assembly Required)," for example, offers us a variety of elaborate predicates for "the real," inviting us, perhaps, to choose among them. "To Be Cont.," with its various ellipses, also solicits our participation as readers in the assemblage of sentences, propositions, possibly a story. And those ellipses come back in "For Best Results, Try...," among other places. I am interested in the degree to which *In the Futurity Lounge* requires assembly, comes with instructions, suggestions, imperatives, etc.

MW: As with *Isle of the Signatories*, my previous book, *In the Futurity Lounge* explores the nature of inscription: assertions not only commemorative but decidedly functional and instructive in the present. (Judith Goldman and I discuss this topic at length in the journal *War and Peace 4*.) At stake for the society that writes and reads these inscriptions is knowledge, and, so, predication of the real. Formatted like a wall plaque, "In Situ" is built of inscriptions: HERE LIE / THE FALLEN, THIS CERTIFIES THAT, FOUND, ROAD OPEN, etc., condense a guide to pragmatic social relations significant enough in public speech to appear in contracts and street signs. The poetics of inscriptions such as these, together with that of discursive statements, constitutes writing out of the written commonplaces informing public speech, but not derived from pop culture as much as from the polis, or so I think. "Statement (Some Assembly Required)" is a different sort of thing: a montage. It presupposes the space of a cosmopolis within which text moves from cultural present



to cultural past and back again, through displacement, not through recuperation. Even so, these poems are not so far apart in their main concern. The focus of the first part of my book—the complete title of which is *In the Futurity Lounge / Asylum for Indeterminacy*—is poetics meeting modernity and its aftermath in urban sites that are themselves part architecture, part language.

BL: Your selection of sites is exquisite: in "To Be Cont.," the Parc de la Villette, designed by Bernard Tschumi with input from Jacques Derrida, its follies intended as architectural signs of deconstruction; in "Pastoral Transfusion," Fallingwater, with its aspiration of integrating nature and culture (an urgent symbolic "transfusion" within range of Pittsburgh); and so on. But I want to ask about one poem in which poetics meets modernity with particular force: "Roebling Rope." Roebling is of course John Augustus Roebling, the German-born engineer who developed the wire rope suspension bridge, and is best known for designing the Brooklyn Bridge. Roebling's innovations were key in moving from hemp to wire ropes that could make such structures possible, and your poem beautifully elaborates this "wiring" as a figure for the modern cosmopolis and its contradictions. I give this very abbreviated (your poem has a great pun on "abridged") background so I can ask about the word "Aeolian" that appears in the poem's fourth section, which not only evokes the god of the winds, but the harp played by the wind (and the cables on such bridges do indeed resemble a harp). It also evokes the "harp and altar" of Crane's poem—a poet with a particularly uneasy relationship to modernist poetics. I am spilling all this ink in order to ask you to talk about the role of musicality in the meeting of poetics and modernity. What is the place, in all this wiring, of the lyric, a word whose source is also a stringed instrument? Let me quote these haunting lines from the third section of the poem that make a weird and powerful refrain:

...in signage that disinters cultural strata,
the freight of the song
Organizing social forceps in signage that disinters
the freight of the song

MW: As specific cultural sites prompted most poems written for this first part of the book, I should say that sites constructed recently—or sites reconstructed and so reconceived—allow me to study their distributions of space and time, to think about their modern and postmodern proposals for society and culture, yet also present their constructed praxis for the future. Diller Scofidio + Renfro's High Line (which prompted this prose poem), deriving some of its aesthetic ideology from the Parc de la Villette, is one of those instances. (As for Parc de la Villette, Tschumi won the competition, but Peter Eisenman, who failed to get the commission, subsequently published his conversation with Derrida, who had advised Eisenman to do a sort of grille structure that erased itself by being just at the surface of the park grounds. Poststructuralist insofar as it undoes the very assumption of architecture, Derrida's idea was not enthusiastically received by Eisenman. Actually, they spoke past each other. And

by the way, decades ago I proposed to a magazine that I research and write an article on situations in which architects decline to build.) Poststructuralist theory informs the High Line's distributed space and time. But my verbal artifact would not be recognizable to a tour guide looking for descriptions of destination spots or prospects, and this is deliberate, of course.

I am taking the scenic route in answering your question, evidently. Invited to speak on monuments' conservation some years ago, I heard myself say the words that you read as the epigraph to my poem "Pastoral Transfusion" concerning Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, dependent as Fallingwater is on an ecosystem. As for "Roebling Rope," nothing is more compelling to modernism than technological progress, which might be better expressed as the real-time inventive engagement with problematics of culture. (Think of Roebling's cable of twisted wire as deriving from the twill principle, integral to the technology of textiles many millennia old, and you will appreciate the cultural depth of Roebling's reapplication of thread.) It happens that I am familiar with Roebling's prototype suspension principle as realized in the Delaware Aqueduct, a site now preserved; and in consideration of this work, "Roebling Rope" is a poetic assemblage of technological and museological statements. Indeed, what function has the lyric in such a discursive project as culture itself?

That Pound and Stein, Joyce and Musil, found the lyric relevant within epic and epical poetics is heartening. Of course, musicality in modernist terms is much more comprehensive than the lyric as such, as is readily demonstrated in modern music from the Viennese modernists to free jazz and the poetry it inspires: Coolidge and Mackey, Taggart and Mullen, Bromige and Rodefer, Wellman and Clover, Shapiro and Hejinian, Scappettone and Tyrone Williams—all different, all theoretically savvy and musical at once. Critical theory tests the validity of the lyric. Some Language poetry accommodates the lyric on behalf of a collective investigative instrumentality; and those of us who presuppose the written convention rather than the oral tradition for poetry, and who adhere to textual strategies for conceiving our practice, nonetheless find in certain music crucial forms of thought. Not my only point of reference, but the antagonistic aesthetic ideologies embodied in the music of Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis help orient my poetics.

"Asylum for Indeterminacy," the second part of the book, issues from reading certain lyric poems under test conditions.

BL: And in this Baudelaire's "Correspondences" has a central role.

MW: Yes. The entire section is "about" that poem; but neither its theme nor its style initiated this sequence so much as the translations from the French others have done. "Asylum for Indeterminacy" gives scope to my transformations of the poem, provoked through the discrepant vocabularies of two translators' attempts to capture the sense of the same poetic object.

Long ago and far away, when reading in college, I became fascinated with the problem of translation, specifically that in Baudelaire's poetry, and wrote poems provoked by differing vocabularies attaching themselves to the selfsame artifacts. That discrepant accounts issue from the same source poem vividly demonstrated that in certain worlds there exist approximations; which may be a commonplace, but it is a commonplace of postanalytic philosophy of language. Historical and contingent language is translation's lot and culture's situation. Flash forward to a question I put about six years ago to Keith Waldrop, who was then at work on translating Baudelaire: "Why," I asked, "do people say they 'hate' the translations of Baudelaire?" "I hate the translations of Baudelaire," he said. Funny, but he meant it. So I predict an afterlife in perpetuity as poets will translate Baudelaire to save his work from the harm done by others! The point of all this is that the problem of the reception of Baudelaire—that is, how people read him and interpret his work in translation—started me on what became "Asylum for Indeterminacy," a zone of interpretive tolerance, as the engineers say, a range of plausible findings within which an object will stand or obtain, beyond which an object will collapse. (Umberto Eco, who after all tolerates all manner of semiotic mischief, finally disputed Richard Rorty's pragmatic view whereby interpretations are instrumentally useful, more or less, but there is no "nature" to the work of literature to be respected. I am interested in theories of criticism—their descriptive, interpretative and explanatory speculations and clashes. See Queneau et al.) If the constructed object is the poem, as read by others than the maker, tolerance—or the degrees of freedom within a system—is most destabilizing, and indicates that, although constrained through the demands of conveying some sort of poetic object corresponding to the original, translation is rather more like interpretation. Or even play. So in "Asylum for Indeterminacy" what's plausible and what's possible appear together.

BL: I wonder if we could turn now to your recent collaboration with James Siena, the stunning *Oaths? Questions?*, a book in which text is printed on transparent pages—Mylar?—interleaved with full-bleed abstract paintings and drawings. I think I can justify this transition by saying that there is a kind of translation at issue in this collaboration, or at least a tension between two semiotic orders: the graphic and the lexical. Text often gets in the way of looking at the images, but one can never really read the text without seeing through the transparency to the image on the recto or verso. And when the book is at rest, text and image are overlaid, seem to share a support. The result is, as one turns the pages, a switching between—and short-circuiting of—the modalities of looking and reading. Would you say something about text, image, and their relation in this strange and beautiful book?

MW: Only that Granary Books commissioned an artist's book from me; but then I chose James Siena to be my

partner, both of us doing visual and verbal elements throughout. Once I told James the conception I had for the book—that there be a reciprocity constructed between reading and seeing, we worked pretty much on our own but with a shared characteristic way of working: tactically. When you view the book, think of this: my conception for the project was to bring to a crisis modes of legibility and intelligibility in graphic and lexical registers, so that as one looks at the images, text interferes, but as one turns the transparent Mylar pages on which text is printed, the lexical register itself becomes subject to graphical apprehension—if for no other reason than the text is now seen in reverse.

Published in 2009, *Oaths? Questions?* has gone on the road: as seen in my solo exhibition at Denison University Museum; then in an abbreviated form at BravinLee Programs; and it is now on a two-year tour in "Fine and Dirty." Quite independently of this, it will appear in a conference and exhibition at Cambridge University. The care and feeding of *Oaths? Questions?* remains a preoccupation, although not a current project. My creative head is elsewhere: concerned to see *In the Futurity Lounge / Asylum for Indeterminacy* published next spring, and engaged in readying a museum exhibition devoted to my art alone, both projects definite, both in process.

BL: Can I ask you here to comment on the relation between your own practice as a visual artist and your poetry? How, for example, do you relate poetic and painterly abstraction? Grammar and the grid? Lexicon and color? Or am I suggesting false homologies?

MW: This is a FAQ. The temptation to find a secure correlation between art and life, as some do with Pound and others, continues even as postmodern theories would disabuse us of the mini-grand narrative. But do ideas migrate across practices? Analogy is tricky and misleading, and should not be taken as a literal guide or chart to meaning. This said, an abiding interest has been the field of repetition and difference. My paintings often contrast self-same, similar and discrepant structures, or juxtapose non-synonymously a gradient of differentials with a structured difference. Contraries resolve but do not disguise their incommensurable structures. I am thinking here of a type of painting I do in which a grid of colors applied in a chromatic order is set in contrast with a grid in disorder: ad hoc, improvisatory and one-off. As a distribution of the sensible, painting can manifest linguistic thought on its own terms.

Oaths? Questions? *(Granary Books, 2009) by Marjorie Welish and James Siena is a constructed book, with both artists contributing visual and verbal components. Welish's poetry books include* Word Group, Isle of the Signatories, *and the forthcoming* In The Futurity Lounge / Asylum for Indeterminacy, *all from Coffee House Press.*

Ben Lerner's books of poetry are The Lichtenberg Figures, Angle of Yaw, *and* Mean Free Path, *all published by Copper Canyon Press. His novel,* Leaving the Atocha Station, *is just out from Coffee House Press.*

Open House
Brian Blanchfield

We came in here to pretend. Or, rather, they suffer a rush
of faith who predicate their commission on morning
windfall, and that's us. We saw an opening in situ.
The realtor was already inside the document we opened
and encouraged us to roam the levels, helping us
to imagine a family outgrew the rooms. Motivated,
she allowed. On spring days, a wind picking up, homosexuality
blows right into the sale of synthesis, and impresses, as if
we could explain. She entrusted herself exclusively
to the parlor floor, so we could call out, wherever we were
in the square footage, our running queries, like a family,
meanwhile prowling, meanwhile fitting our practices to
the built-ins—concrete slabs and formatting palettes at the wall
and window—meeting eyes in the walk-in until the term radiant
heating could flare, following by texture and temperature instinct
dimly understood, onto the balcony and into on-demand
water control panels, a room of them. To return respectively
where Wanda waited for candor going forward. We are two men
who can agree in murmurs there is no purchase
any more in Hart Crane, but we'd keep a room for him
called Eileen Myles. What is it about the pretense we belong here
that requires an agent? Or, is that the trouble, Wanda? To whom
to speak at the bank and about what not yet are we
prepared to say. We blew in notional. Somewhere in here
I once wrote some poems Eileen liked Nijinsky could send
to his remote beloved and they demanded Diaghilev,
his signatory, the management, misunderstand the love
on tour at hotel intervals, the suite if not the marquee ever
in his name, remember, an imprimatur that effaces. One man,
another, and another. Stamps his foot. Rigid valences over
the bayview, remember, in the same print as the drapes:
I drew them, then took that down and put it in
storage. Here, against the reclaimed material the builders
appropriated, and other disenfranchised phrases, it makes
a statement. Wanda, we weren't faking exactly. Is it better to say
the cyclone fencing traffics in the paper trash the wind
found overnight or to have the wrappers spirited up against it.
We were merely on a walk we had predicated on commotion,
copyists no less than Bouvard and Pecuchet, no less prudential,
who needed only first to agree to fail in turn at every
venture except lifelong life together. In the follow-up,
I'll need to admit my credit is better off undisturbed.
Apologist, archivist, agent, eminence, front, Wanda
there's no room to call you muse. In the variorum, I had
this idea, upstairs and to the left. After dinner you're welcome

to stay for coffee. At a mission thrift store not far from here
we found a board game, and the penalty cards were prettiest.
What we do is turn them, singly, escalating the damage
a player'd encounter, as a poem builds, or a bid, until his turns
are mortal, a chill Belle Islander, the thinkable tertium quid.
To reside, to inhabit, to dwell: did you know they're all cognate
with staying? Wanda, together we have six thousand dollars.
Which, if it blew away, you might call *some* six thousand dollars.
Listen, pianissimo, the love of things irreconcilable.
That's not us, not any more. But, we keep a room for it.

Brian Blanchfield is the author of Not Even Then, *published by University of California Press. His recent poems and essays appear in* Lana Turner, Boston Review, Denver Quarterly, Or: A Literary Tabloid, *and* The Paris Review. *He is a poetry editor of* Fence *magazine and a visiting professor of poetry at the University of Montana, in Missoula.*

Notes from the Border
Rosa Alcalá

I.

When we bought our house—a 1960s ranch house that hadn't been updated since the Nixon administration—here in El Paso, Texas, more than two years ago, we pulled up shag carpeting, installed wood floors. We took down musty drapes, knocked down a wall, gave away groovy lighting fixtures that hung on multiple gold chains. With much of its past painstakingly stripped from its interior, the house became a light gray slate on which we might inscribe ourselves. Still, for the first few weeks, we spent much of our time in the bedroom, afraid to use the rest of the house. I was pregnant, and every inch of that structure felt strange to me. I found things that belonged to the previous owner, who died there; I imagined, or perhaps perceived correctly, strange smells from the old clashing with the new—and kept all the windows open in February. All I wanted to do was hide in my familiar bed and read pregnancy books. I lost myself in my own body, and in the body I was carrying. Slowly, however, over the course of a few months, the dangers seemed to recede; we began to expand into other rooms, arranging furniture, buying a crib. We had friends over. We had been living in El Paso for five years when we bought the house, but even as we settled into our new home, and prepared for the birth of our daughter, my poems continued to live elsewhere. With rare forays into the city where I lived, my writing stayed locked up in a room from the past—in Buffalo, Brooklyn, Paterson. I still felt overwhelmed by the enormity of this dusty river valley called El Paso, of its history. I felt it did not belong to me, that I was exposed under its vast skies as an outsider, even as I became part of the community, as an educator, as a neighbor.

I note this same tendency—to be elsewhere—in the poems of some of the graduate students who form part of the bilingual MFA program in Creative Writing at the University of Texas–El Paso (UTEP), where I teach. They write about Uruguay, or Colombia, the places where they are from. How could I address this tendency in myself and in my students? Almost as a corrective, I designed a course called "The Poetics of Place" in which I teach Charles Olson, Gaston Bachelard, Lorine Niedecker, Brenda Coultas, María Meléndez, and others. Students are asked to investigate their immediate environments, to be attentive to—and present in—the place they currently live. But the past slips in, their parents, the politics and trees of their home countries. They are looking to place them in poems, to make sense of them. They came "here"—to this writing program—to return "there," a place that is elsewhere. But the "there," I discovered, is always a place that is carried within us, in the form of language. If it is true, as Jen Hofer says, that "words have no home, and it is there our home is located,"[1] then perhaps the place we all are really looking for is the place of the poem, where we place the words. And it's a tough move when you are lugging all your belongings, yet don't know where it all belongs, how high to hang the pictures, where to put the stereo, the books. All this stuff—what we know (and don't know), what we have seen—is as easy (and impossible) to carry as words. Wouldn't it be nicer to travel light and step into a new place unencumbered? Is it even possible? These questions are self-directed. I apprentice in what it means to make the place of the poem a place for more than one place, including the local.

Of course, making room for the local, my students might tell you, does not necessarily mean locking it up in a poem. The local and poetry meet here in various ways—through readings, workshops, and other types of literary activism. There are several thriving reading series, including Barbed Wire, started by MFA students; Buttered Toast, by undergraduates; and my own and Jeff Sirkin's Dishonest Mailman. There is Cinco Puntos Press, run by writers Bobby and Lee Byrd, who have been committed since 1985 to reflecting border culture in the books they publish. Their press and bookstore's festive storefront lights up a quieter strip of a struggling, yet always busy, downtown El Paso, just a short walk from Juárez, México. Two of my favorite Cinco Puntos books are *Ringside Seat to the Revolution* by David Dorado Romo, a sharp and engaging history of El Paso, and *Incantations: Songs, Spells and Images by Mayan Women* by Ámbar Past, with Xalik Guzmán Bakbolom and Xpetra Ernandes. Another local publisher is Mouthfeel Press, through which I met poet Dolores Dorantes, whose work has been translated by Hofer and published in the U.S. by Counterpath Press/Kenning Editions and in the journal *Aufgabe*. Dorantes, who lives in Juárez, also promotes the stories of women's lives in marginalized communities as director of the border office of Documentación y Estudios de Mujeres, A.C. There is also BorderSenses, a nonprofit literary organization that publishes a bilingual magazine of the same name. It currently sponsors Memorias del Silencio, a writing workshop for farm workers and their families that has produced five volumes of work. To see, a few years ago, a room full of workers and their families at the release party for one of the volumes was to be reminded that poetry is vital beyond MFA programs or elite literary circles. It's also true, as all these presses and organizations attest to, that poetry in the U.S. should, and can, reflect not only cultural, but also linguistic, diversity. As such, *Rio Grande Review*, a magazine run by UTEP MFA in Creative Writing students, carries on the tradition of magazines like *El Corno Emplumado* and *Mandorla* by bringing together writers from different parts of the world writing in Spanish or English. It is gaining even more recognition beyond the border, having recently hosted a reading in Madrid.

II.

Still, there are the poems. How do we speak the local in poetry? Or how do we let the local coexist with other geographies—familial oceans, historical forests, imagined islands? There are three poets I would like to mention who help me (and my students) with this struggle. It is also a way to introduce you to a few writers who live in (or have recently left) Texas, but are also from elsewhere: Hoa Nguyen, Susan Briante, and Farid Matuk. Their poems teach me how to integrate the inside and the outside; the many presents and the many pasts; the there and the here. They teach me how to be attentive to them, allow them to cohabitate. It's not an all-or-nothing situation, their poems tell me. Take, for example, Briante's *Utopia Minus*. Briante's poems move between the ruins of the past and the structures of the present, between a recently boarded-up Sunglass Hut and General Sherman's funeral; from Jamestown, Virginia, circa 1619, to her native Newark, New Jersey. These are not separate poems; they are built of fluid space-time. She navigates the present, asking, "To whose ancients should I direct my inquiries?" The ancients and the living are part of the same fabric; each upsetting, repositioning, the other. Like my house, the layers of paint and ghosts that constitute the past are part of one structure. They all exist in the present, too: in the place of the poem.

Maybe because of the example these poets offer, I have seen my work open up to a multi-spatial, multi-temporal attentiveness. This attentiveness also seemed to take a foothold around the time we replaced our water-sucking lawn with something more sustainable. When these ranch houses were built, the Chihuahua Desert on which they were erected was understood as an enemy to be overcome. These houses and their sprawling front and back lawns reflected the trends of the time rather than the desert climate that would most likely endure longer than any mustard-colored double oven or pink commode. The builders and residents of that time also came with desires shaped by the past, shaped by

Collapsible Poetics Theater at UTEP, September 23, 2010. From Left: Angel Valenzuela, Rodrigo Toscano, and Christine Foerster. Photo: Daniel Chacon.

elsewhere—Northeastern childhoods, Hollywood versions of postwar domesticity. In place of the St. Augustine and Bermuda grasses, we planted Red Birds of Paradise, with their shock of yellow and red, purple sage bushes, orange lantanas, agave—but we kept the allergy-producing (and now banned) mulberry trees. The result is an interesting, if not always harmonious, conversation: these desert-friendly species, still babies, foregrounding the materials of another time, a blonde-colored brick, a once-fashionable tint of avocado green, and the hidden roots of the mulberry trees all the while undermining our foundation.

III.

According to statistics, El Paso is among the safest large cities in the United States; yet it borders Ciudad Juárez, México, which, because of drug cartel violence since 2008, is now one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Even prior to the current drug war, Juárez was already marked by the brutal murders of hundreds of women, many of them maquiladora (factory) workers who had been raped, mutilated, and left in ditches. Throughout my teaching career in El Paso, I've seen the violence reflected in the writing of my undergraduates, who, unlike the graduate students, are mostly from this area. Some cross the bridges daily from Juárez, others live in El Paso but have familial ties to the other side of the border. What they write is not "topical." They are not trying their hands at political poetry. They do not feel obligated to write a "war poem."

I would like this border region to be known for more than its violence, but I wonder how many people in other parts of the U.S. are even aware of it. Even as they watch the news on their flatscreen televisions or listen to it on their radios (its parts quite possibly assembled by Juárez women in foreign-owned maquila-

doras), what's happening on the border gets less attention than any random politician's sexual improprieties.

It's hard to even imagine poetry giving us the news, as William Carlos Williams thought it should, considering that poetry reaches so few people (and here Williams' "yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" feels literal). But poets do write about life and violence here and across the border, because the news cannot really get into its complexities the way poetry can. Most recently, Valerie Martinez's *Each and Her* and Benjamin Saenz's *The Book of What Remains* have provided different, yet personal, approaches to documenting what has and is still happening in this region. There is also a magnificent translation, by Hofer and Roman Luján, of María Rivera's "Los muertos," a gruesome litany of the victims of violence and the places in Mexico, including Juárez, where their bodies are found.[2] Some of the victims remain unidentified, and the geography of violence extends beyond the locations of their murders, into the U.S.

One of my students said it makes him mad when people think that if they go to Juárez they will find dead people on every corner. He lives in Juárez; for the 1.5 million who live there, he insists, life continues. It's not all bloodshed.

But poets do write about life and violence here and across the border, because the news cannot really get into its complexities the way poetry can.

And as I reread what I have written above, I fear that I am contributing to this notion, that what I tell you about Juárez is what I hear from this side of the border, from this privileged distance.

It is true, too, that despite the proximity of violence, the way it is present in our lives here, it can also be strikingly absent from our students' writing. Perhaps it doesn't touch them directly—living on the U.S. side of the border, they are shielded from it geographically, like me, or they have luckily avoided it. In any case, the love poems continue, the poems of alienation, shitty jobs, search for self. I want to be clear: these poems are necessary, too. One tires of needing to write about the larger troubles. And there's no respite here from troubles, nor anywhere else in the world for that matter.

IV.

I want to return to this idea of poems as places in and of themselves. They represent or reflect our own migrations, our past and present homes, but are also homes proper. I am thinking specifically, in this instance, not about the poems we write, but about those we read. We add our voices to them when we read, which is a way of moving in. Some are more habitable than others. Some are more habitable to some people than others. But some poems allow a kind of habitation that reminds you that your voice is one among many; that even the poet's voice is not singular, because words are not singular, because identities are not, and neither is our understanding of them. And here I am thinking of Rodrigo Toscano's *Collapsible Poetics Theater*. When Toscano came to El Paso last fall to perform work from his book, as part of the Dishonest Mailman series, he recruited three students and one faculty member to participate in his performance. Seeing them perform Toscano's work helped me to understand better its dimensions as well as its relationship to place. The four who worked with him were from various parts of México and the U.S.: three women, one man, of different ages, ethnicities, physical appearances. Their voices carried their places of origin, and with some, that place marked a distance from the English they were speaking, or from the Spanish that is also part of the text. In order to fully capture the gist of one of the pieces—"Pig Angels of the Americlipse: An Anti-Masque for Four Players"—the embodiment of the work is central, as each player "can be of any age, gender, or accent." This means that each set of players changes how we understand the text. But we must also think of how place shapes our understanding of it, how it is understood in place. Since we are on the border, Toscano was likely to encounter players who could speak both the Spanish and the English he integrates, who could pronounce words in one language or the other fluently, or not, and who could switch between both. He was also likely to encounter an audience who could understand the moves between languages, who might identify Rubén Darío as the poet who penned, "Yo persigo una forma que no encuentra mi estilo, / botón de pensamiento que busca ser la rosa." I wonder what differences Toscano perceived in each of the many places his work was performed. How was that perception (and reception) shaped by demographics, by local politics and culture? Wasn't that the intention of the work all along, to keep the voices multiple, shifting, to displace us, dislodge us from any entrenched ideology regarding nationhood or citizenship? More importantly, his work demonstrates that the poem can be both place and displacement, a place that is displaced by each new voice and body, with each of those voices and bodies interacting. In this embodiment of place and in this placing of the body, we get the messiness and possibility of borders, such as the one that defines El Paso with its fences and armed guards, its thousands of workers crossing every day back and forth between two nations. What does it mean to be from here? How do the borders of the poem shift as it is populated by different voices, languages, bodies, beliefs? What do we define as "the city" when its population ebbs and flows daily,

hourly? In "Proprioception," Charles Olson writes, "movement or action is 'home,'" and this is clearly evident in Toscano's physical poetry, in which the barest architectural structures allow for a reimagining of placement through the bodies that enact it, a new kind of allegiance to a collaboration of differences upsetting the "message" of the poem, rather than a singular national identity—or "meaning." And this is evident in this city called "El Paso": the pass.

V.

Bodies stream in both directions over one of the international bridges. Women are carrying umbrellas to shield them from the sun, which at 10AM is already oppressive. I watch as men and women lug things they have bought here in downtown El Paso, and I think of them returning home to Juárez without the benefit of the "executive safe routes" established to safeguard the executives of the foreign companies whose factories line the border there.[3] The street leading to the bridge is filled with stores displaying bra and panty sets and skin-tight jeans on armless mannequins. There are bins piled high with shoes and notebooks. Everything spills onto the streets, in sharp contrast to the contained, sterile and air-conditioned malls where most suburban El Pasoans go to shop.

Today I came in search of one of the defunct Farah apparel factories in the old garment district not far from the bridge. It is now occupied by a company that recycles used clothing, but at one time El Paso was known not as a recycler, but a maker of clothing, and Farah was a key player in what was at one time the "jeans capital of the world." Here, they made denim clothing—and later, other garments—long before it became fashionable.[4] Think James Dean in *Giant*, filmed only three hours from here in Marfa, Texas. El Paso was also a major stonewasher of jeans, a process that drained El Paso's scarce water sources but was vital to its economy.[5] NAFTA ended the city's century-long history of garment production. In response to the displacement of garment workers, a nonprofit organization, La Mujer Obrera, was formed to provide training and opportunities to the women who lost their jobs when the factories closed. Its Mercado Mayapan, located in a former garment factory not far from the Farah plant, resembles a Mexican market, with artesanías, baked goods, Mexican food from every region, produce. It has been largely empty every time I have visited. I would like to see more people come here, to spend at least a portion of what they would at Walmart.

I have left my house today in search of this history so that I can later retreat into my study and write poems about textile work, which intersects with my own history. But I'll stay a little longer down here first. It's already after noon; I may as well have lunch. Maybe I'll head over to one of my favorite Mexican cafés, Los Colorines, over in the Chase Bank building.

Rosa Alcalá is the author of a poetry collection, Undocumentaries *(Shearsman Books, 2010), and recently completed a research trip to Lowell, Massachusetts, where she looked at the role of women in the textile industry.*

Notes:

1. Jen Hofer, "Translation Is a Form of Following," *Jacket 2*, June 20, 2011. http://jacket2.org/commentary/translation-form-following

2. Jen Hofer, "To Speak or Speak to What Cannot Be Spoken," *Jacket 2*, July 8, 2011. http://jacket2.org/commentary/speak-or-speak-what-cannot-be-spoken

3. Ryan Jeltema, "Electrolux, Other Maquiladoras Affected Little by Bloodshed in Mexico," *The Daily News: Greenville, Belding and Montcalm County, Michigan*, March 7, 2011. http://www.thedailynews.cc/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubSectionID=11&ArticleID=38361

4. Jackie Corrales et al., "Farah Manufacturing Now Just a Memory," *Borderlands* 23 (2004–2005): 14, 15. http://dnn.epcc.edu/nwlibrary/borderlands/23/Farah%20Manufacturing.htm

5. Andrea Abel and Travis Phillips, "The Relocation of El Paso's Stonewashing Industry and Its Implications for Trade and the Environment." http://www.cec.org/Storage/79/7314_Abel-EN.pdf

A Tribute to Akilah Oliver (1961-2011)

Rachel Levitsky

Akilah Oliver was my great good friend. I had a physical proximity to her life and her death, an intimacy that was, I now know, frustratingly incomplete. Simultaneous with our social intimacy was our consumption of each other's work. We read each other, interviewed each other, went to each other's performances, spoke about ideas, sat on juries, were in a reading group discussing Giorgio Agamben. She was integral to the Belladonna* project from its inception (the first reading featured Akilah and Marcella Durand) and continues to be so thanks to her yet-to-be-fully-explored body of work. Our friendship inhabited a sensual sphere; food, wine, music and scenery (urban and rural) animated the intensities of conversation and silence and travel. We gossiped, took walks, traveled by foot, train, car and plane to and from each other's various dwellings. Akilah, as Patricia Spears Jones noted recently, had the wanderlust—home was a cinema reel that became a still at 132 Lafayette Street, in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, about which she often said, rapturously: "I love my neighborhood."

The friend-consumer relationship felt fluid when Akilah (I also call her A now) was alive. Without her beautiful, live "loved body" in my proximity, I struggle to maintain the sense of lithe osmosis between the two positions. Friend is kin (I thank Hannah Zeavin for my use of this word); it responds to the whole of a person, doesn't experience multiplicity as contradictory. The consumer or reader, on the other hand, is trained to experience something monovalent; the position physically resists multidimensionality—I imagine young women furtively reading *Pamela* or *The Wide, Wide World*, their faces close to the page in attic crawlspaces.

To read A's work, which I read to be also the very body to which she refers in her work, is to read beyond the multiple positions from which she produced: multicultural performance artist, sister, queer theorist, lover, traveler, black radical woman warrior, grieving mother, poet, traveler, feminist, friend, professor. A's textual and performative body is one that is ever returning to the problem of instability—"I am a system of relations"—a possible inexistence of identity in which identity itself is cast as trickster, taunt and motherfucker that prevents the reality of actual personhood:

it's alright. breathe their air.

I wish I could speak without betraying somebody's delusions.

Was I ever something to believe in?

A is a body attempting to navigate the difficulty in maintaining that spot of knowledge/suspicion while being historically and artistically present, having a radical consciousness, being witness and emergency responder:

glimpse#098: if woman is a false category then I've just made all this up.

if memory is the act of bearing witness.

and just as your death has become mine.

Akilah Oliver's art and life as a confluence, called into being by urgent necessity, became particularly extreme upon the death of her 20-year-old son, Oluchi Nwadi McDonald, after medical neglect on March 13, 2003. A sprang into action. In the year following Oluchi's death she formed LINKS Community Network, an intervention against the invisibility of the uninsured, and she wrote and began to perform *An Arriving Guard of Angels Thusly Coming to Greet* (Farfalla Press, 2004). The piece toured nationally with ensembles that variously included musicians Steven Taylor, Tyler Burba, Todd Burba, Latasha Diggs, Bethany Spiers, and Rasul Siddik, and poets Anne Waldman, Bhanu Kapil, Fanny Ferreira, and Sabrina Calle. The performance score forms the center of her collection *A Toast in the House of Friends* (Coffee House Press, 2009). In an author's statement for the book, she wrote:

In approaching the subject, the death of the beloved, I enter into an investigation of the ecstatic in the dual sites of rapture and rupture. For me, an absolute rupture occurred at the time of my son's death, so that the world broke open, in a sense, and I decided to follow the opening to wherever it led, rather than try to patch it or close it. The opening, this rupture, this state of the world breaking open and me, being broken open, did not lead to any one rapturous state (as if rapture, or bliss, were a desirable closure), but rather led me to want to continue to go there, off, beyond the limits of language and cognition to rapture (an intense pleasure of transportation from one place to another, as in heaven). I think for many poets, at least for me, to write is a kind of difficult dance with rapture; it is a way to beckon the day as a beloved, a way to talk to the dead, a way to collapse the known world into the impossible.

Choosing not to retreat from the unformed, broken world of unbearable loss, A was remarkable in her production, a body of work that advances the possibility, in activism, collaboration, thinking, writing and performance, of continuing to live, love, make meaning in the destructed, vacant racial/economic/technological morass of the U.S. in the aughts, not as an expurgation of her personal loss, but as an active, formal, epistemological investigation of the ecstatic potential of loss.

This book is really not about sorrow, but about being broken open and going down that passageway, or to transverse Janis Joplin's adaptation of some other black blues motif, 'you keep talking about sorrow, but you don't even know my name.' Perhaps then, it is a book of naming.

Akilah was not interested in being read through the lens of her biography. She mourned her son, but to read her work through the lens of memoir neglects the actual impetus to write and perform: "I attempt history making." A's method was to turn anything received on its head, and often, into a question. (I thank Renee Gladman for reminding me of this.)

how did you break your heart.
how did you refuse your spirit a body.

is you is or is you ain't

When is the "tipping point"

How much time is enough time?
What is the primary duty of repair?

what does it mean for a culture to act?
who dat you love

Experience and biography are not behind the words, but in them, unfolding thought, as what a question asks us to do, or becoming live, incantatory performance, howl, collaboration, dirge, in A's words: "embodied activism." Reading this body is to be invited to exit a passive readerly role, to leave that crawlspace and enter lover flesh. Its placement in reality, its groundedness in the personal and political, doesn't foreclose it from historical, theoretical or mythical readings, but rather asserts theory, history or myth as being in-the-making, including these forbidden, invisible bodies, "my impossible body," A's and Oluchi's bodies, dead or alive, mine, yours, lovers' bodies all, loved bodies, for which her body was prepared and written.

This constant press against history, up and into action, is hard work, and after all, Akilah was also a person in pain. She took great pleasure in flying from or with it to Prague, Paris, Berlin, the European Graduate School's nest in the town of Saas-Fee, in the Swiss Alps. These trips, her returns to her bases in New York, Boulder, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and her various readings around the country, her work at Pratt, the New School, the Poetry Project, Naropa, Naropa, Naropa, making home in her apartment, buying the perfect shoe, dressing up, reading and performing with Anne Waldman and others, gifting her famous Parisian music box to babies Alma and Eva and good great friends, going to the fancy organic store and getting herself eight ounces of organic hamburger to cook for dinner ("half tonight, half tomorrow"), sending out missives of love on Facebook, were all sources of tremendous pleasure, along with bodega candles, body oils, fancy vodka, women's sports, and.... She wrote into the gravity of pleasure, that it was the good of life, and of grief that refuses exclusion from its nectar, and she invented language for this greedy and generous grief, its ecstatic enormity. A gleaned from its fearful determination to destroy, finding in it the material "to fight you, my long past."

People commonly think of me as two.

A moved through the broken world, a wide, wide one. We are amazed at her reach, how she left her pieces among us, grinning trickster, identity teaser, inviting us, our worlds, to

come together. In her travels—psychic, intellectual, cross-continental—she was having a great time, a constantly-in-motion time, a fighting time, an advancing time, a refusing "overdetermined biographies" time. She was focused, attentive, exact, multiple. Her persistent reaching out, her refusal to stagnate, made her, as her sister Marcia Oliver says, and as scores of us—students, friends, readers—will confirm, a life changer.

Who is the dead person?
Is 'I'm sorry' real to a dead person?
Am I the dead person?

In the past short while, several fierce feminists in my immediate area of production have passed, including kari edwards, Emma Bee Bernstein, Leslie Scalapino and Akilah Oliver. The premature passing of these visionaries has been personally devastating, and also publicly catalyzing to those of us committed to making the coming community. Each was in her way a truth-sayer, vocalizing the lacunae of direct expression of the real imposed upon our world from within and without. Their early deaths unfold an imperative that we, the living, make common space for materializing and giving vocal and social dimension to grief. By "social" I mean a confluence of political, artistic, economic acts that revolve around the activity of making the world that we live in. Akilah Oliver put her body upon that line. Her unwavering stick-to-itiveness in her refusal to bend to calcifying essential categorization was no matter of self-abuse. Rather, it was a fluid extension; as all of her students, colleagues, friends, mentors, and collaborators know, her liberatory ideas without fail informed her praxis in life, creation, love.

Notes:

1. This is an adaptation and extension of a tribute given at Akilah Oliver's Memorial at The Poetry Project on June 15, 2011. All quoted and italicized lines are written, performed or spoken by Akilah Oliver.

2. Belladonna* is an event and publication series devoted to activist, critical production of feminist avant-garde literature. There is a plethora of information, and a link to a recording of this first reading, at http://www.belladonnaseries.org/.

3. This statement can be found at http://thetoleranceprojectarchive.org/oliver.html/. I am grateful to Rachel Zolf for pointing out the statement and for reading it at A's memorial. A descriptive article about Oluchi McDonald's life and death can be found at http://archive.boulderweekly.com/042403/newsspin.html/. Additionally, a Pulitzer Prize-winning series of articles about Drew/King County Hospital from the *Los Angeles Times*, which was in part inspired by Oluchi's story and Akilah's activism, can be found at http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2005-Public-Service/.

4. In a *How2* review that Tisa Bryant and I cowrote in 2000, Tisa eloquently points out use of myth in *The She Said Dialogues*. This review can be accessed at http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_3_2000/current/alerts/levitsky-bryant.html/.

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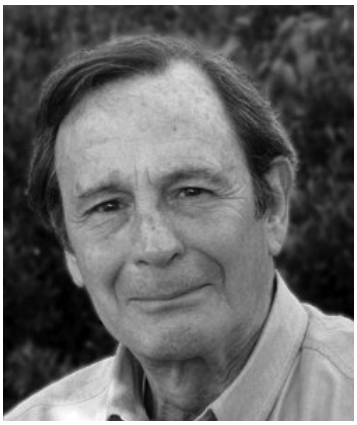

In Memoriam: Paul Violi (1944-2011)

Charles North and Tony Towle

Paul Violi started coming to Tony Towle's poetry workshop here at the Project in Spring 1970, at about the same time that Charles North did. The piece below is a collaboration between Towle and North.

We met Paul, and each other, at the Poetry Project in 1970. Recently returned from a year abroad—partly in Nigeria with the Peace Corps, partly traveling on his own—Paul had found his way to St. Mark's, where he began sitting in on workshops offered by poets pretty much his own age, the so-called Second Generation New York School, whose peer he soon became. He had been writing poems since he was a teenager and claimed Pound as his chief mentor. He also loved Keats and Coleridge. From the outset, he struck us both as straightforward, skeptical, funny, generous—and talented. He never seemed aware of his good looks, but he was clearly one of W. S. Merwin's competitors for the title of Handsomest American Poet.

The three of us hit it off almost instantly and became close friends as well as poetic colleagues. Not that our poems were alike, more that we approved of certain ways of approaching poetry and disapproved of others. We began meeting regularly for a drink or coffee, first at Fanelli's on Prince Street, then at a succession of cafés including the now-defunct Caffè delle Muse on 3RD Street near LaGuardia Place (which each of us has memorialized in a poem). Did we talk shop? Some; but we did much more gossiping, joking, venting, trading news, kidding around. There was a lot of wit in the air, supplemented by other poets who joined us from time to time, among them Barry Yourgrau, Ted Greenwald, John Godfrey, Larry Fagin, and, in the past decade, Bob Hershon and occasionally his wife, Donna Brook. Even though we devoted most of our conversation to everything *but* poetry, getting together was important to us, not only as pals but as poets. It's arguable that on the occasions when one or the other of us couldn't make it, Paul's presence was the one most missed.

The wonderful, substantial obituary William Grimes wrote for *The New York Times* came as something of a surprise. As more than one person remarked, when it wasn't clear if the *Times* would come through, Paul by no means had a national reputation, never mind the brilliance of poems like "King Nasty" or "Counterman" or "Appeal to the Grammarians." The spike in his book sales since his death is an irony. Even among those who have loved his work, the satirical or outrageously funny poems are far better known than his lyrics having to do with love and nature, works that meant as much to him as did his Greatest Hits. Still, no one who has heard Paul read the latter can forget them, or the fact that the third or fourth hearing left one just as helpless with laughter.

Paul was always reading—often something having to do with history—and invariably had an illuminating take on what he read. Some of his best poems originated in his reading. He was a genuine intellectual; he was also tough-minded, suffering gladly neither fools nor sentimental attitudes nor inept poets and their poems. That he was a beloved teacher—in particular at the New School, where he taught in the MFA poetry program for a decade, and at Columbia, where he took over undergraduate literature and writing classes Kenneth Koch had taught—is testimony to his perspicacity, his perspicuity, his wide reading and his generosity toward others. Two carloads of New School students drove 50 miles to the April memorial service near his home in Putnam County. Two former Columbia students flew in from Tokyo. Everyone who spoke at the memorial had wonderful things to say about Paul as a person, quite apart from his writing and his teaching. Paul's wife, Ann, his daughter, Helen, his son, Alex, and his twin grandsons were central to his life. When anything in their lives was on his mind, there was little room for anything else.

Paul was the most energetic and probably the busiest person either of us knew. He commuted endlessly to his teaching jobs. He hiked, spent a lot of time on the water, chopped down trees for exercise, loved to eat and drink, got his work and his writing done, was ready at a moment's notice to help any of his friends or family—and was never incapacitated by the depressed states that periodically afflict the rest of us. Or if he was, he didn't let on. All of which made his illness and death uncanny. When the official diagnosis came, on January 21, he told only a handful outside his family and made us pledge not to say a word. Whether he believed he could lick his cancer before anyone got wind of it—or he didn't want anyone's sympathy, or he simply found his situation unspeakable—isn't clear. What is clear is how private he was, and how little use he had for conventional sentiment. As a result, people who cared a great deal about him didn't have the chance to wish him well or to express their deep affection as they would have wanted. In April, when Paul died, people who hadn't known his age were amazed that he was almost 67. Maybe he looked 55; often younger than that. Everything about his life made his death shocking.

UPCOMING POETRY PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Time-Glide: Going Vocal: 5 Days Of Writing & Recording
Anne Waldman & Ambrose Bye

Tuesdays at 7PM / Begins October 4 / 5 Sessions

The aim in this workshop is to experiment with ways our poetry guides us from sonic ideas toward recorded composition. How do we want to hear ourselves and our compositions? We will start with vocalization of selected texts of others in an ensemble performance, and then create our own pieces through a series of "experiments of attention." We will invite collaboration with one another as writers, as voices and as musicians. We will consider writing as score or libretto, work with *spechstimme*, and create a fourth-dimension wall of sound. Ambrose Bye will be recording and arranging the increments of our plots to save the world. Inspiration from John Cage, Helen Adam, the 16TH century, mantra, etc.

Fun, Fearlessness & Fireworks
Elinor Nauen

Tuesdays at 7PM / Begins November 8 / 5 Sessions

In this five-week workshop we'll consider: desire, longing and language; finding the line between confession and embarrassment, between personality and the shrink; how to be happy off the cutting edge; how form can propel your poems, and finding and inventing the forms and words you need; making your bread as salty as you want (cuz no one's buying it); using the dictionary; and poets O'Hara, Koch, Ted Berrigan, Timmons, Myles, Byron, Henderson, Padgett, Violi, Michael Gizzi, the Williams twins (Hank & William Carlos), Chaucer and others. Elinor Nauen co-hosts the Prose Pros reading series in New York City. She has written or edited *Cars and Other Poems*; *American Guys*; *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*: *Women Writers on Baseball*; *Ladies, Start Your Engines: Women Writers on Cars and the Road*; and several chapbooks. *So Late into the Night*, a book-length poem in ottava rima, came out in Spring 2011 from Rain Mountain Press.

The Constraint, the Cookbook, and the Anecdote
Tan Lin

Thursdays at 7PM / Begins October 6 / 5 Sessions

This will be a workshop in constraint-driven exercises, prison escape schemes of writing, box and fugue variations, generic descriptions, the anecdote, and ambient, environmental language works. Some attention to plants, perfumes and cookbooks as cross-references. Occasional recourse to music and the non-rock music associated with growing up. Works conducted in various scales, from the tiny to the extra large. The course will also explore writing in paratextual arenas, footnotes, indexes, wikis, bibliographies and the like. There is no "free" writing in this class. The course will be supplemented with a few short readings (TBA).

Stick Around: Poetic Collaboration as the Determined Practice of Letting It Happen
Jo Ann Wasserman

Fridays at 7PM / Begins October 7 / 10 Sessions

Throughout The Poetry Project's history, collaboration has played an integral part in both the organization itself and in the work that came out of readings, workshops, friendships, love triangles, feuds and celebrations within the walls of St. Mark's Church. Economic and social conditions present in New York of the 1960s, 70s and early 80s made it comparatively easy for poets and other artists living downtown to hang out and work together on projects, but things have changed and so have the logistics of spending unstructured time with other writers and artists. In 2011, collaborations are more likely to be constructed online than in person, proposing the inevitable question about what might be lost when we don't work face-to-face. We will use the opportunity of this workshop as a time/space for working together using a variety of launch points including: repurposing each other's work, collectively producing/interpreting collage, employing poetic forms, practicing telepathic collaboration and creating collective imaginary identities. We will collaborate with each other, with ourselves, with people we will likely never meet and even with the dead.

Poetry, Ruin My Life: The Poetics of Trouble
Brendan Lorber

Saturdays at 12PM / Begins October 8 / 10 Sessions

Adverse verse—the almost infinite ways in which poets get in trouble for their writing or write as a response to having found themselves in hot water. We will harness the power of destructive creation and its more popular opposite. We will learn methods that writers have used for millennia to demolish their good name and work in the name of something more compelling. Be they dissidents, visionaries out of favor with normative constraints, provocateurs, petty bone-pickers, vengeful deities made flesh, brilliant fuckups or simply poets whose decision to write remarkably unmarketable work doomed them to lives of privation—they all found the secret ecstasy within despair. As civilization enters its new era of volatility and collapse, it's a good time to play with fire. We will look at ways writers have estranged themselves from selves born of routine. We will develop our own techniques to wreck our lives, through writing, in ways spectacular, subtle and sublime—and create the heretofore uncreatable. We absolutely will not equate one writer's struggles with another—each is unique. But what they all share is transgressions' tumultuous opening to the immediate, various-as-possible grace of unsheltered vision—and instructions on how you can join them.

The workshop fee is $350, which includes a one-year Sustaining Membership and tuition for any and all spring and fall classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Caps on class sizes, if in effect, will be determined by workshop leaders. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call (212) 674-0910. Visit www.poetryproject.org for full descriptions and the instructors' biographies.

EVENTS at THE POETRY PROJECT

MONDAY 9/26
PAOLO JAVIER & DAVID MELTZER
Paolo Javier is the current Queens Borough Poet Laureate. The recipient of grants from the Queens Council on the Arts and New York State Council on the Arts, he is the author of four chapbooks and three full-length poetry collections, including *The Feeling Is Actual* (Marsh Hawk Press). **David Meltzer** is a poet associated with both the Beat Generation and the San Francisco Renaissance. In addition to his many books of poetry, Meltzer has edited many anthologies, including the book of interviews *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (City Lights, 2001). In 2005, Penguin Books published *David's Copy: The Selected Poems of David Meltzer.*

WEDNESDAY 9/28
ANSELM BERRIGAN & DAVID TRINIDAD
Anselm Berrigan's newest book, *Notes from Irrelevance* (just out from Wave Books), is made of one long poem that puts irrelevance to use by making it a tag for deep depth, getting lost and willful desire for image dissolution. It's funny. Last decade he ran The Poetry Project for four years, and right now has a very interesting summer job at Bard College as half a chair. **David Trinidad's** most recent book, *Dear Prudence: New and Selected Poems*, has just been published by Turtle Point Press. His other books include *The Late Show* (2007), *By Myself* (with D. A. Powell, 2009), and *Plasticville* (2000), all published by Turtle Point. He is also the editor of *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos* (Nightboat Books, 2011).

MONDAY 10/3
OPEN READING
(SIGN-UP AT 7:45PM)

WEDNESDAY 10/5
CHARLES BERNSTEIN & MAGGIE O'SULLIVAN
Charles Bernstein is author of *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays & Inventions* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010; paperback, 2011), *Blind Witness: Three American Operas* (Factory School, 2008), *Girly Man* (University of Chicago Press, 2006) and *Republics of Reality: 1975-1995* (Sun & Moon, 2000). He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is co-director of PennSound. **Maggie O' Sullivan** is a British-based poet, performer and visual artist. She is the editor of *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK* (1996). Recent works include *Body of Work* (2006), which collects her now out-of-print, London-based booklets made between 1975 and 1987, *WATERFALLS* (2009), and *ALTO* (2009).

FRIDAY 10/7 (10PM)
JAMIE TOWNSEND & LAURA SOLOMON
Jamie Townsend lives in East Kensington, Philadelphia, where he is organizer of the c/c reading series and a co-founder of con/crescent, a chapbook publisher and magazine focused on discursive essays and creative nonfiction. He is author of the chapbooks *STRAP/HALO* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2011) and *Matryoshka* (LRL Textile Editions, 2011). **Laura Solomon** was born in 1976 in Birmingham, Alabama. Her books include *Bivouac* (Slope Editions, 2002), *Blue and Red Things* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2007) and *The Hermit* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011). Her poetry has appeared in magazines across North America and Europe and has been translated into ten languages.

MONDAY 10/10
ABRAHAM SMITH & STEVE TIMM
Abraham Smith's poetry collections are *Whim Man Mammon* (Action Books, 2007) and *Hank* (Action Books, 2010). Summers, he is a farmhand for Hawks' Highland Farm in Ladysmith, Wisconsin; falls, winters and springs, he is Instructor of English at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. **Steve Timm** is the author of the recently published *Un storia* as well as *Disparity* (both from BlazeVOX) and three chapbooks, one of which, *'n'altra storio*, is available online at bathroommagazine.wordpress.com and is a sequel of sorts to *Un storia*.

WEDNESDAY 10/12
CHARLES NORTH & ANNE WALDMAN
Called by James Schuyler "the most stimulating poet of his generation," **Charles North** is the author of nine books of poems, most recently *Cadenza* (2007) and *Complete Lineups* (2009); a book of essays on poets, artists, and critics, *No Other Way*; and collaborative works with artists and other poets. His newest collection, *What It Is Like: New and Selected Poems* (Turtle Point/Hanging Loose), is due in October. North is Poet-in-Residence at Pace University in New York City. **Anne Waldman** has been a member of the "Outrider" experimental poetry community, a culture she has helped create and nurture for over four decades as writer, editor, teacher, performer, magpie scholar, infrastructure curator, and cultural/political activist. She is the author of more than 40 books. Coffee House Press has just published her monumental antiwar feminist epic *The Iovis Trilogy: Colors in the Mechanism of Concealment.*

MONDAY 10/17
JENNIFER TAMAYO & ROBERT FERNANDEZ
A writer, artist and performer, **Jennifer Tamayo** is slowly becoming a human being. Her manuscript, *Red Missed Aches, Read Missed Aches, Red Mistakes, Read Mistakes* was selected by Cathy Park Hong as the winner of Switchback Books' 2010 Gatewood Prize and was published in June 2011. **Robert Fernandez** is the author of *We Are Pharaoh* (Canarium Books, 2011) and *Pink Reef* (Canarium, forthcoming in 2013). He is the recipient of awards from the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and the Gertrude Stein Awards for Innovative Poetry. He was recently named a New American Poet by the Poetry Society of America.

WEDNESDAY 10/19
READING FOR AIMÉ CÉSAIRE'S *SOLEIL COU COUPÉ/SOLAR THROAT SLASHED*
Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) published *Soleil cou coupé (Solar Throat Slahsed)*, a collection of 72 French surrealist poems imbibed with representations of Africa as a mythical homeland, in 1948. Wesleyan University Press recently issued the only bilingual edition of this collection, translated into English by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman. Readers this evening are **Thomas Glave, Brent Edwards, Anne Waldman, Jayne Cortez, Heller Levinson, Jerome Rothenberg** and **Clayton Eshleman.**

FRIDAY 10/21 (10PM)
ALLISON CARTER & JIBADE-KHALIL HUFFMAN
Allison Carter is the author of a book, *A Fixed, Formal Arrangement* (Les Figues Press), and three chapbooks: *Shadows Are Weather* (Horse Less Press), *All Bodies Are the Same and They Have the Same Reactions* (Insert Press) and *Sum Total* (Eohippus Labs). She currently lives and teaches in Los Angeles. **Jibade-Khalil Huffman** is the author of two books of poems, *19 Names for Our Band* (Fence, 2008) and *James Brown Is Dead* (Future Plan and Program, 2011). His art and writing projects, spanning photography, video, performance and poetry, have been exhibited and performed at MoMA/PS1, Mt. Tremper Arts, Eighth Veil and The Tank.

MONDAY 10/24
JOHN COLETTI & JACQUELINE WATERS
John Coletti is the author of *Mum Halo* (Rust Buckle Books, 2010), *Same Enemy Rainbow* (fewer & further, 2008), and *Physical Kind* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo-Labs, 2005). He recently served as editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* and co-edits Open 24 Hours Press with Greg Fuchs. **Jacqueline Waters'** new book, *One Sleeps the Other Doesn't*, will be published by Ugly Duckling Presse in Fall 2011. Previous publications include *A Minute without Danger* (Adventures in Poetry) and two chapbooks, *The Garden of Eden a College* (A Rest Press) and *The Saw That Talked* (Minutes Books). She edits The Physiocrats, a pamphlet press.

WEDNESDAY 10/26
DAVID LARSEN & KATHLEEN FRASER
David Larsen is a poet and scholar now living in New York City. Since the 2005 appearance of his poetry collection *The Thorn* from Faux Press, his poetic work has all but merged with his work as a translator of Arabic prose. During the recent uprising in Egypt, he was a Fulbright scholar in Cairo, putting in work on a series of 'Abbāsid-era lexical texts. **Kathleen Fraser** has published 14 small press and trade works, including *il cuore: the heart, Selected Poems, 1970-1995* (Wesleyan, 1997); a book of essays, *Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and the Innovative Necessity* (University of Alabama Press, 2000); and *Stilts, Somersaults & Headstands* (Atheneum, 1968).

MONDAY 10/31
JAMES COPELAND & ARIANA REINES
James Copeland is the author of the print objects *Why I Steal*, *To My Plants*, and *Fax II*. With Michael Barron and William Rahilly, he has collaborated on a series of text enhancement performances. He publishes a book series, Content, and works as Managing Director at Ugly Duckling Presse. **Ariana Reines** was born in Salem, Massachusetts. Her books include *The Cow* (Alberta Prize, Fence, 2006), *Coeur de Lion* (Mal-O-Mar, 2007; Fence, 2011), and *Mercury* (Fence, 2011). *TELEPHONE*, her first play, was commissioned and produced by the Foundry Theatre in 2009, and was the winner of two Obie Awards. She was Roberta C. Holloway Lecturer in Poetry at University of California, Berkeley, in 2009.

WEDNESDAY 11/2
DOUG LANG & RON SILLIMAN
Doug Lang was born and raised in Wales, and has published poetry and novels in the UK. He moved to Washington, DC, in 1973, where he ran the Folio Reading Series in the late 1970s, and where he has taught writing at the Corcoran College of Art and Design since 1976. His works include *Magic Fire Chevrolet* (Titanic Books, 1980), *Hot Shot* (Jawbone Press), *Lumbering and Tingling: Sonnets* (1989), and *Horror Vacui* (1991). **Ron Silliman** has written and edited over 30 books, and has had his poetry and criticism translated into 12 languages. *Silliman's Blog* has received over 3 million visits and he is maxed out on permissible Facebook friends. In 2012, he will be a Kelly Writers House Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania.

FRIDAY 11/4 (10:30PM)
WELCOME TO THE WRITING MACHINE
The Writing Machine celebrates over a year of collaborative writing and its first magazine with readings, food, cocktails and music in a low-lit lounge atmosphere. Developed as a directed collaborative by Cynthia Gray, the Writing Machine uses a line exchange method to engage with poets from across the country. Writing Machine poets direct the writing, with Gray acting as a responder. For this event, **Stephanie Barber, Chuck Stebelton, Richard Fox, Vincent Dermody** and **Douglas Piccinnini** will be reading. Cynthia Gray will read from poems written with Jen Hofer, Joseph Havel, Howie Good and Amina Cain.

MONDAY 11/7
HARMONY HOLIDAY & JARED STANLEY
Harmony Holiday spends most of her time in New York somewhere between distribution and production, listening to a lot of Sun Ra, Eric Dolphy and George Duke. Her first book, *Negro League Baseball*, was published by Fence Books in July. **Jared Stanley** wrote *Book Made of Forest* (Salt, 2009) and four chapbooks, including *How the Desert Did Me In* (The Song Cave, 2010). Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Recluse*, *Badlands*, *Ping*Pong*, and in *Slope 27, "The Weather at Five O'Clock."*

WEDNESDAY 11/9
TRACIE MORRIS & ELLIOTT SHARP
Tracie Morris's public art career started as a poet performing at events with the Black Rock Coalition in the late 1980s and early 1990s at venues such as CBGB's and Time Café. She began performing and recording with avant-garde musicians including Elliott Sharp, Vernon Reid, Uri Caine and Val Jeanty. Morris has new books in the works, including *TDJ: To Do w/ John* (Zasterle, 2011) and two recording projects: *sharpmorris* (with Elliott Sharp) and *Introducing the Tracie Morris Band*. **Elliott Sharp** is an American composer, multi-instrumentalist, producer and curator central to the experimental music scene in New York for over 30 years. He leads the projects Carbon and Orchestra Carbon, Tectonics, and Terraplane, and has pioneered ways of applying fractal geometry, chaos theory and genetic metaphors to musical composition and interaction.

MONDAY 11/14
AMARANTH BORSUK & KATE DURBIN
Amaranth Borsuk is currently a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities at MIT. With Gabriela Jauregui, she has translated the work of Paul Braffort, selections of which have appeared in *Western Humanities Review*, *Aufgabe*, and *Caketrain*. She is the author of the chapbook *Tonal Saw* (The Song Cave, 2010). **Kate Durbin** is a Los Angeles-based writer and artist. She is author of *The Ravenous Audience* (Akashic Books, 2009) and the conceptual fashion magazine *The Fashion Issue* (Zg Press, forthcoming). Borsuk and Durbin are co-authors of *Excess Exhibit* (Zg Press, forthcoming).

WEDNESDAY 11/16
JESSE SELDESS & HOA NGUYEN
Jesse Seldess is the author of two books, *Who Opens* (Kenning Editions, 2006) and *Left Having* (Kenning Editions, 2011), as well as chapbooks on Hand Held Editions, Instance Press, Answer Tag Press and the Chicago Poetry Project Press. **Hoa Nguyen** was born in the Mekong Delta, was raised in the DC area, and studied poetics in San Francisco. She is the author of eight books and chapbooks including *Chinaberry* (Fact Simile, 2010) and *Hecate Lochia* (Hot Whiskey, 2009). Wave Books will be publishing her third full-length collection in Fall 2012.

FRIDAY 11/18 (10PM)
POETS' POTLUCK
The Thanksgiving Poets' Potluck is an opportunity for New York's poetry community to come together for an evening of readings, performances and delicious food. Admission is free if you come with a dish. Anyone interested in bringing a dish should email Brett Price at fridaynightseriesp@gmail.com.

MONDAY 11/28
TALK SERIES: POETRY AFTER THE WHITE HOUSE POETRY JAM: A PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE AVANT-GARDE
This talk will focus on poets Alison Knowles (founding member of Fluxus) and Kenneth Goldsmith (Conceptual Writing figurehead) and their inclusion in the 2011 White House Poetry Jam. Specifically, thinking about Knowles and Goldsmith as "avant-garde" figures: whether there can be an avant-garde that is current and representative, and how that impulse affects/ is affected by an institutional context such as the White House. Panelists include: **Rod Smith, Sandra Simonds** and **Steven Zultanski**.

WEDNESDAY 11/30
JULIAN T. BROLASKI & ELIZABETH WILLIS
Julian T. Brolaski is the author of *gowanus atropolis* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011) and several chapbooks. *Advice for Lovers* is forthcoming from City Lights in Spring 2012. Brolaski lives in Brooklyn, where xe is an editor at Litmus Press and plays country music with Juan & the Pines. **Elizabeth Willis** is the author of five books of poetry. Her most recent work, *Address* (Wesleyan, 2011), looks at where we speak from as subjects and how we locate ourselves as political objects. *Meteoric Flowers* (Wesleyan, 2006) is a turbulent hybrid work inspired in part by the wildness of Erasmus Darwin's Botanic Garden. She teaches at Wesleyan University.

All events begin at 8PM unless otherwise noted. Admission: $8 / Students & Seniors $7 / Members $5 or Free
The Poetry Project is located in St. Mark's Church at the corner of 2ND Avenue & 10TH Street in Manhattan.
Call (212) 674-0910 for more information. The Poetry Project is wheelchair-accessible with assistance and advance notice. Schedule is subject to change.

Book Reviews

Imaginary Syllabi
Edited by Jane Sprague
(Palm Press, 2011)
Review by erica kaufman

Imaginary Syllabi, unlike any other collection, "does not aim to adhere to various structures typical of textbooks or anthologies of various essays on pedagogy." Sprague hands her reader a wide range of classrooms to imagine, opening up the possibilities of what might actually work within academia, despite contemporary disarray (budgetary and otherwise). Borrowing Rebecca Moore Howard's term, *Imaginary Syllabi* reminds us that "curricular activism" is still possible, and reassures us that activism comes with a commitment to experimental and experiential tools and texts.

Despite the fact that reflection, collaboration, and communication (both between students and between teachers) almost always accompany "pedagogy" (particularly in writing and composition studies), how often do we really exchange ideas? What do we say when we talk about pedagogy? Do we actually share ideas beyond commiserations about class size, low pay, restraints on curricula? In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor interrogates education's potential as a politically charged enterprise, positing that "education is a socializing activity organized, funded and regulated by authorities who set a curriculum managed (or changed) in the classroom by the teachers. [Yet] education is a social experience for tens of millions of students who come to class with their own dreams and agendas, sometimes cooperating with and sometimes resisting the intentions of the school and the teacher." With this, Shor articulates the tension between education's institutional demands and the actual bodies in the classroom, which is crucial to any genuine inquiry into the practice of teaching. *Imaginary Syllabi* acknowledges this reality (along with the idea that every classroom and institution is different), yet offers a variety of strategies for figuring out (or imagining) how to remain a pedagogue in a meaningful way.

Sprague's "Endnote" expresses her intention of "collecting and putting forth these models of formal, feral or mongrel pedagogical experiments," to "assert ways in which teachers might learn from each other using these various examples of pedagogies as a way of sharing and talking about teaching and artistic production, especially as these examples affirm other ways of thinking outside accredited models." Books about poetry and teaching have proliferated in recent years. To me, this indicates the long-awaited acknowledgment that writing professionally today includes teaching, and writers need to discuss pedagogy. However, few guide the reader in engaging in this tricky enterprise. Sprague's word choice ("formal, feral or mongrel"), and clear investment in "learn[ing] from each other...[and] sharing and talking," shows *Imaginary Syllabi*'s approach to opening a dialogue on teaching writing—diverse and multifaceted.

Imaginary Syllabi's contents represent a productive range of approaches to this notion of "syllabi"—perhaps because Sprague specifies that "there is no intended fixed, predetermined or official meaning attached in this [conceptual framework] to the word 'teacher'...teachers are sometimes not necessarily human organisms." The book begins with Kristin Prevallet's call to "seize and re-deliver," directly followed by Dana Teen Lomax's "Disclosure," in which she makes the instructor's privacy public, and then asks her audience to grapple with the responses evoked by releasing documents like credit card bills and medical records. CAConrad contributes a stellar selection of "(soma)tic exercises"—radically re-visioning the "writing prompt" that requires writers to engage physically and psychically with the practice of poetry. Conrad writes, "I will resist / I am going to / resist I am / resistance in the making," reflecting the book's motive—to resist, uproot, make and act.

Dorothea Lasky's "Imaginary Syllabus: The Red Exercise" delivers an excellent "exercise" easily translatable to classrooms of all levels and varieties. Lasky also shares how she came to discover this exercise, and how it evolved into her chapter. I can see Lasky's classroom while imagining my own. As Lasky writes, "A color is an easy theme, because it is one we start learning to notice at a very young age." This attention to the act of "noticing" speaks to the intricacies of "the red exercise," but also reminds us that as writers and teachers, we notice. To quote Lasky again, "A young writer should never feel constrained by a lesson, only helped by the construct." In many ways, this statement epitomizes a solidly student-centered classroom—a space with no one expert, where everyone can query and grow.

Stan Apps' "English 0000 Syllabus" asks students to "investigate two areas of concern... the concern with the possible...[and] the concern with motivation." These "concerns" and Apps' structure allow students to delve into "social structures" and the way "environment" and economy affect the "possible." Apps' incredible detail and useful lines of inquiry make the "imaginary" classroom palpable. Jennifer Nellis joins the composition classroom with "movie-telling" or "benshi"—an exciting way for students to write themselves into the visual, the cinematic. I could easily rave about each contribution—which is rare for a compendium or anthology. I always find one piece less thrilling, but here, every single submission is useful, thought provoking, and different from all others. Rob Halpern's "The Dead and the Living" joins Adamczyk, Hamilton, Levin and Long's "Mobile Mapping for Everyday Spaces." This demonstrates excellent editing and the wealth of materials all types of educators can share.

In *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes, "our task will be...to understand the collective...not as a hive mind within which we all become drones, but as a fertile community composed of multiple intelligences, each of which is always working in relationship with others." *Imaginary Syllabi* finally creates the space to participate in this kind of learning community. "[T]his project is to spur and develop a sense of critical inquiry, partnership, collaboration, critique and rebellion...." This collection surpasses that goal. I hope that this invaluable resource will pave the way for many such conversations.

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erica kaufman is the author of censory impulse. *she teaches at Baruch College and other places.*

Sherwood Forest
Camille Roy
(Futurepoem, 2011)
Review by Brandon Brown

Robin Hood is so weird. Weird, I mean, in that the historical provenance is utterly corrupt and "Robin Hood" only exists as a literary trope, as a kind of content that can be resuscitated by writers and balladeers for different purposes. And yet the Robin Hood figure, because of or despite its mutability and flexibility as a character in narrative, persistently provokes an anxiety of historicity, sending scholars over the centuries on fools' quests to establish an historically sound rogue.

What do you think? Maybe the world of Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men, which in many accounts takes place within the literal boundaries of Sherwood Forest, uncannily reminds one—by inversion—of the very world in which these traditions spread. The ballad tradition of Robin Hood begins almost contemporaneously with the European "discovery" of the New World and the subsequent hegemony of capitalism. As the fiduciary regimes of European nations began the long process of dismantling the commons and ratifying accumulation at the cost of any imaginable human misery, the radical autonomy and recuperative methods of this "prince of thieves" must have seemed literally and figuratively utopian; the lair must have seemed both unimaginable and a proposal for heaven on earth.

It's this duplicity of worlds, the utopian and the ravaged, that emerges in Camille Roy's astonishing *Sherwood Forest*. In the "Sherwood Forest" that this book surveys, penetrates, and reports back from, the abject absolutely overlaps with the virtuous. The perverse and the proper interpenetrate, twin, cease to be identifiable as such. What populates the poems are simultaneities of disparate affect, "like pillows in chaos." Inside it, signifiers routinely flip to the extent that signification as such atrophies: "worlds withdraw from the rushing water. / Names & letters: goners."

This dissolution of signification is expressed by repeated figures of ambivalence, provisionality, and reversal, as part of a larger consideration that the book undertakes, paraphrased by an epigraph from Céline: "In the kitchen of love...vice is like the pepper in a good sauce; it brings out the flavor, it's indispensable." So, for affirmative human relation, collective social practice as much as good fucking, crime is integral. The simple morality of the fairy tale, which in *Sherwood Forest* includes *The Wizard of Oz* and film noir, is rejected by Roy's reevaluation of all values. So in "Little Red," which evokes another fabulous forest story, "Little Red regrets how she did love it / or not exactly....Wolf story gleamed under her cloak. / It was so beautiful, that minute."

In the traditional tale of Red Riding Hood, the young girl has to traverse the woods in order to affirm the conventional determination of normative familial servitude. What threatens to intervene in that order is nature itself. But unlike Red's world, in which the zone of the natural threatens to lure the subject into its realm of perversion, the duplicity of Roy's forest comes to us...or were we already in it? The paradoxical desires represented by Little Red's vacillating sense of delight corresponds to the human world surrounding those disappearing forests. But far from describing the simultaneity of opposing valences as a catastrophe, the Bataillean impulse of *Sherwood Forest* is to relish oppositional feelings and jouissantly slough off juridical prohibitions: "Wrong is that burn / in my crotch / where delicious wish stirs the red broth."

These necessary impossibilities are maximized; they include and insist on all of this as matters of life and death. The opening words of the book—"You are dead, imagine it"—initially perform an imperative to an uncanny and only grammatically possible action: to "imagine" anything while being dead. Throughout the book, death itself is associated with both the imagination and work, the killer of the imagination. This is iterated in part by reference to Simone Weil's bracing sense that "work is like a death. We have to pass through death. We have to be killed."

In the condition of contemporary capital, those dispossessed of accumulated wealth have to work to live. David Graeber has shown in eloquently blunt language that "wage slavery" is not a dysphemism, but perilously literal. In *Sherwood Forest*, work, which is the durationally conditioned exchange of one's physical and psychic capabilities (including "the imagination") for the bare means of survival, is described as a sort of death-in-life. This ghastly situation relates to the conceptual armature of the book's form as well: "Narration as desire, fissure, recognition deferred via suspense so that arrival implies death." The suspense is the erotic possibility inherent in living.

Which reminds me to say that *Sherwood Forest* is a terrific noir itself in its sense that "crime pays" in polysemous ways. But how liberating is it to contemplate a form of autonomy realized by criminal activity undertaken in pursuit of love and pleasure?! There's a phrase of the artist Scott Treleaven, referring to the cum-covered, crime-loving utopia envisioned in *The Salivation Army*: "as dog-eared and fucked up as it was, it was still better." God I love that. And I think that sort of sentiment resounds in *Sherwood Forest*, although Roy's poems evoke the liberatory powers of collective criminal enterprise through a repertoire of classic capitalist characters, rather than a direct call to utopian praxis.

You know how one of the conventional pleasures of noir fiction is the "peek into the grimy underworld." That there is an underworld and it's right here in front of our eyes. That we have always lived there. In *Sherwood Forest*, the woods are in the city. It's hard to tell when you've entered, and it's uncertain that you get to exit. That seems to me one of the most exciting of Roy's insights, that collective enterprise based on uncertainty (rather than ideology) can effect the maximum of human pleasure. Moreover, such collective enterprise, such an astonishing underworld on earth, already exists. She writes as the last line of "Crime Story," a miniature of the whole book, "What we are looking for is here, but in degraded form." This book is indispensable.

Brandon Brown's first book, The Persians By Aeschylus*, was published by Displaced Press in 2011.*

Cracking Up
Andrew Levy
(Truck Books, 2010)
Review by Abigail Child

Andrew Levy writes exhilarating, felt travel through the daily in *Cracking Up*. He sets his scales wide and permeable: sound and beat, rhythm and connection, intimation and public fact. Unequal events in unequal stanzas. Levy creates a world in pineal flight, associative and sophisticated in construction.

His irony, wherein the absurdity of event calls forth the humanizing power of laughter, is sincere. Under the aegis of impatience, war, pop culture, and non sequitur, Levy sets out critical notations, yearnings, and scans of a busy world in an ongoing flood of elated aural babble—a crack-up. Levy walks through a world in which he cares, even if it does not need his care. As he says: "The world that I wanted words for / Doesn't need them."

The work is organized into stanzas haunted by "static." Levy deftly dances through this universe of "scratch space," "silicon graphics," "government soldiers," "normalization in-laws." These are not patronizing representations; rather, they are all—erasures, runaways and charmed combatants—invited into the party. Unequal and specific: dogs and hearts and characters and properties and farting, adolescents, curings, misappropriations, self-criticism in the shape of "martyr." Union-schooled: "Why don't they give the workers parachutes?" And elated wonderings: "How poor I would feel without poems."

Cracking Up is a surfeit of sound and criticism, of the "wrong crowd" of culture capitalists and the arrogance of science, of the need to reinvent fictions and to endeavor in an often opaque world. Levy's writing includes a plentitude of straight shooting: "I'll race you to the tree house"; "Everybody knows it's a crappy economy"; "fleeing / ...toward Babylon"; "We are walking though pieces of people."

On the cover, the title is in a fat white font within a blue field, and Ann-Margret—smiling though seemingly in pain—runs towards the camera. Popular and theatrical, the dramarama or traumarama of our installed imaginaries is regenerated in dignity and a kind of hope, set within the moment of spin. He lets loose the vortex and the very next, next, next thing. Levy's daughter Sadie's Steinian comment ends "Note on Assembly and Composition," which follows the main text. He is on a tangent here. How else could a crack-up happen? The city, misunderstandings, drugs and leaf-blowers are conjoined with demolished urban space. As he notes in his poem, "there is no outside" underlying our subjective loyalties and points of view. He quotes Williams' "The Desert Music": "The mind / is listening."

"I live in the permissible world, in a community I can't afford and in which I have only a slight idea what kind of language will slowly be revealed...." "Truth...is an experiment." "...[T]hat they must keep transforming, where they love." Levy has created this transformation, sticking his finger in to "show" his "own order of necessity." It is ours, too, and well worth the pleasure of its reading.

Abigail Child is a film and video maker living in New York.

Either Way I'm Celebrating
Summer Browning
(Birds, LLC, 2010)
Review by Jeffery Berg

I received Sommer Browning's *Either Way I'm Celebrating* from Birds, LLC with a temporary tattoo of one of her comics within the pages. I treasure the little gift and the poems in her debut. Her work exhibits a whimsy and playfulness like that tattoo but also a terseness and toughness in clipped phrasing and dark imagery. The collection opens in a carnival freak show where "The Smallest Woman in the World" asks "for money to buy a wheelchair." Browning's poems combine the sad, peculiar and humorous. The title poem has a wry comic posturing: "They're saying irony is dead. / And for a few minutes I thought / I might die too—a woman / who would buy a fifth of liquor / and a pregnancy test just to see / the look on the clerk's face." I was moved particularly by the last stanzas, which recall a moment in a drive-in theater which morphs into a meditation on art: "...I didn't get the way something / huge and astonishing could be flat, / could not exist at all." "Still Life," clean, simple and box-shaped like a little painting, aptly describes this flatness and the implications for an image ("Banana. Silly pornography"). Whether performing charades or listing the names of the dead, Browning's poems have a "skittering limitlessness," definite stopping points (in short, punchy phrasing), a charming flatness and unique observations.

The book's strongest section, "Vale Tudo," travels to Long Island and ruminates on a pay-per-view fight, a bland Marriott (a note about "complimentary toiletries" is a nice, funny aside), shopping malls (one movement lists stores within a lit-up directory of "the perfect mall"), and the "Walt Whitman Birthplace Historic Site." Browning is particularly cutting in laying out the depressing memorialization of Whitman as a "Historic Site" ("a crock of shit") and as a shopping mall ("...let me tell you about the façade of Walt Whitman Mall, how it's carved with passages from *Leaves of Grass*, how the blocky Emigrant Savings Bank sign is bolted to the poem").

An earlier poem in the collection, "Breed" ("Can I build it for you? The carpenter frames us in, destroying movement like a photograph"), ends up nicely setting up the last series in the book entitled "To the Housesitter." Here Browning "frames us in" tiny rooms of philosophy, delicate language-play, and muted physical descriptions of two figures—a mechanic ("His arm is attached to a wrench, / and he mucks up the music") and a woman ("She waits until he looks, / then poses as an orchard, / but her hips"). Browning's primitively drawn comics break up the sections and accentuate the collection. Even if writing can be "difficult" and "flimsy," Browning has a way of sharing her perspective with us and celebrating our inadequate world.

Jeffery Berg lives in New York and co-edits the online journal Clementine.

Blue Rain Morning
Jamey Jones
(Farfalla/McMillan & Parrish, 2011)
Review by Lauren Russell

Jamey Jones' first full-length collection, *Blue Rain Morning*, is driven by place, as the poet/speaker travels between Brooklyn and Pensacola, Florida. The long poem "Elsewhere in the Universe" traces the speaker's transition from Floridian to Brooklynite, as he navigates a sense of dislocation—"strong-arming one's way through / the fear of unfamiliarity" to a kind of ease,

where the novel of
New York seems to have
shifted, lifting new graces
of itself into another zone
where finally one takes
the time to clean the
apartment
and the subways start to
feel like eye blinks
information carriers
balancing balance in the
what happens breath of
the boroughs

Yet the speaker of these poems remains slightly removed, often viewing the action through a window. The section "East Window Illuminations" is composed of such observations, the poems as remarkable for their sonic properties as for their visual details. In the prose poems that constitute the section "Twelve Windows," the speaker's environment and mental landscape converge in surprising ways. "Biblical," a love poem to a chaotic Brooklyn apartment building, begins with the "Howl"-like exclamation, "O valentine antique tenement cemented deep shifting dark surfacing jedis and minor eruptions!" In "Fall Down," another of the "Twelve Windows" poems, the windows appear as vertical streams: "Release your river heart back to its start, a beginning window stream divided by fire escapes." Like urban space, rivers—another of Jones' recurring images—are shared, a point expanded upon in the later poem "Avenue Vision I," when the speaker watches a well-dressed man taking a picture on the street and transforms the scene into: "A well-dressed man catches a river in his hand as if it were a baseball hurled from the other side of the street by a young skateboarder behind the dumpster."

Among the book's other obsessions are color, weather, and morning, all manifested in the title. The many iterations of blue remind me of Barbara Guest's collection *The Blue Stairs*, where in one poem the reader encounters "Blue metaphysics," "sylvan blues," "blue coughs," and "blue Crusades." Jones goes a step further, invoking "chemical synthesis synesthesia" in a world that includes not only a "blue smell," a "blue sentence," and "silly blue angels," but also the mental state "blue in the head," and even the value "On a scale from one to ten—blue." Weather often directs mood and is as likely to wreak havoc—whether destroying manicured hairdos in Brooklyn or uprooting houses in Florida—as to create a sense of peace. In "Bearing," weather is even personified, as snowflakes "appear to have faces with eyes, astonished looks of confusion, excitement, bewilderment." Morning plays an active role in the collection—characterized by "baked angles," " touted choices," "couch sky talk," and, in the poem "The Morning Paper," a list of greetings that bears syntactic resemblance to the children's book *Goodnight Moon*: "good morning balustrade / good morning fenestration / good morning wristwatch ticking / on the table." The abundance of morning poems underscores the speaker's search for reinvention, as morning is a time to "loosen / the rubber band of all things / possible."

The poems of *Blue Rain Morning* are a joy to read. Far from composing a travelogue or static compendium of observations, they articulate the speaker's tangled reactions to time and place through intricacies of sound—with assonance, consonance, rhyme, slant rhyme and full-word repetition employed to marvelous effect. All are evident in the poem "Once in a While," where Jones describes summer as

Casting the ballot of doubt
Inadvertently plumbing for nothing
Creating a smog a bog a numbing
Haze in an otherwise perfectly
Slinky head

Your song is a slinky poem
Your head is a plumbing riddle
Pluperfectly pounding to be solved

If this part of the poem seems to be stumbling forward in a daze, it is partly due to Jones' skillful use of line breaks and parataxis to direct pace. Both are also at work in Part 12 of "Elsewhere in the Universe," where I can almost feel the speaker's heart racing:

The fight and flight
Are inseparable and are
Happening now but would I
Wonder sideways sidetracked
A lonely parable dressed in flesh
A hole in the I in the who
In the what to make of it scenario
Of five bullets shot through the day
Through the words of a random
Afternoon this drenched cocoon
Has no center

Part celebration and part interrogation, *Blue Rain Morning* is as much concerned with the

cocoon's leaks as with its shelter. Whether confronting Brooklyn gun violence or the sweltering monotony of a Pensacola summer, Jones recognizes that where you are is seldom exactly where you want to be—yet "where you were / becomes where you are."

Lauren Russell is the author of the chapbooks The Empty-Handed Messenger *(Goodbye Better, 2009) and* Dream-Clung, Gone *(Brooklyn Arts Press, forthcoming). She recently left New York to study writing at the University of Pittsburgh.*

a/s/l
Uyen Hua
(In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni, 2011)
Review by Alice Whitwham

Uyen Hua's debut, *a/s/l*, journeys with a refracting lens through a labyrinth of urban settings and apartment interiors. Populating its streets, walls, windows and rooms are the icons and artifacts of popular culture: pop stars, hit songs and consumer brands. Invoking a media world whose products are assimilated into consciousness without mediation, *a/s/l* performs a daring analysis of capital's practices and of the individual subservient to them.

That the subject of *a/s/l* is an addressed "you" affords the poems a consciousness of the culture industry's mechanisms unavailable to the subject enmeshed within them. From this position, Hua can expose the various ways in which that industry assimilates the individual into its processes. Underlying Hua's selection of stars—Rihanna, Avril Lavigne, Ashley Olsen, Brittany Murphy, Lil Wayne, to name a few—and their seemingly arbitrary appearance across this text is a knowledge that the hit song, the pop star, the commercial movie, are manufactured after recognizable patterns: homogenized, simple structures that serve as a mechanical substitute for those more individual and complex ("ever notice how peter gabriel's 'in your eyes' and justin timberlake's 'until the end of time' are the same song?"). In contrast, Hua's "you" frequently identifies celebrities through trademarks: "jessica simpson's cover of a berlin song" is subordinated to an impression of her public personality: "the first kiss with her ex / husband." She wonders who was crazier out of Willie Nelson and Patsy Cline, and decides it was "Mick Jagger's mouth" that "made the 60s big." Referencing celebrities via individuating labels is one way in which Hua's subject has been influenced into pretending differentiation between the ultimately undifferentiated.

The standardization of pop culture's products promotes a set of rigidly conditioned reflexes in Hua's subject. Hua shows us that the repetition of the hit song, for example ("sometimes you just have to shrug / put the record on repeat," reads one stand-alone poem), or the familiarity of a famous face, prepares the individual to look for only a recurrence of the same familiar experience, even, or perhaps especially, when novel details intervene:

you read about a wedding bomb in karidahar
bodies scattering to scatter bodies;
and still, the largest part of you is like, dude,
british general, why's your name nick carter?
that's just weird.

Presented with news of global crisis, Hua's "you" diverts her atomistic attention to the one thing about it she can recognize—the lead singer of the Backstreet Boys in the name of a British general, the attribution of weirdness to her response wryly emphasizing its banality: not only depoliticized but also entirely depersonalized.

In this book, distinctions between the public world of administered goods and private individuality prove increasingly fragile; individuality is wrested from the self unable to make demands outside the limits of what has been supplied. Not only capable of responding only to the familiar, Hua's subject also proves herself a victim of random media accidence and its fragmented and superficial production. She is comically insensitive, even stubbornly averse, to the possibility of depth and dimensionality in language and narrative. While sensual gestures and emotional articulations of her own are made through imitation, as stock phrase: "what you said that day...when my espadrilles got caught between two large rocks—I was so taken." Serious feeling is so trivialized by its conveyance in clichéd, lazy superlatives that processes of communication and response begin to take on the characteristics of choreographed routine:

your hand against your chest is saying,
'that really moved me.'

standing under an archway, you will feel, 'this
is truly a triumph.'

Hua affords the reader a lucid demonstration of the subject's alienation—not only from a genuine engagement with things outside the boundaries of her own subjectivity but also from herself—her own emotional life.

The perpetual circus of celebrity culture and its corrosion of individual consciousness is a reality these poems reflect. There is a marked lack of interplay between surface and depth in the sequence—at the level of image, in which broken surfaces have cut out the potential for responses requiring deeper evaluation: "the page of the newspaper with the latter half of every article," and of form, in Hua's use of juxtaposition and parataxis. Sections or whole poems are often made up of concrete references or isolated topical moments (Hua rarely carries meaning over from the literal to the figurative), whose arrangement without conjunctions allows her to reveal only an incompatibility of disconnected parts: "hugh grant on a bench with a child / the traffic that passes / canned fruit / 4.36 pm, drying hosiery, 1988, white porches." Titles, where the poet uses them, do little to provide poems with orienting context.

Creeping feelings of passivity within such a monopolistic, fragmented environment urge the subject to seek out an experience of coherence, one that manifests itself in the text only illusorily, in memory: "we listen to old songs; / we think of when every piece of the world / was held together / we want to be whole again." Having adapted to becoming narrow consumerism's equally narrow object, Hua's subject endeavors to recover this fantasy of wholeness not just through the purchase of, but also by the identification of herself with, pop culture's products: "His bags are packed and you call on Avril Lavigne to tell you what that / means. She gives you a song to let him know how you feel." The habituation of fame within ordinary experience is only the logical continuation of this psychic exchange:

you make your way across the patio with your
arms wrapped
around yourself. this time, on a lawn chair,
with your knees
folded and tucked under an oversized
sweater:—as james
brown reasoned, not for my own sake, but for
the sake of others

you stare off and imagine an ocean in front
of you.

unable to move forward, you make note, if
only people were kinder.

The subject's overwhelming self-consciousness isolates—or insulates—her from a sense of consequence or historical time. Wrapped up entirely in herself, Hua's "you" defers the task of assuming the responsibility of individuality, defers the moment when she might look out with genuine curiosity and engagement at the world, and attributes feelings of frustration at her own docility to a lack of compassion in others: "if only people were kinder."

That imitation and parody grants *a/s/l*'s poetic voice a degree of authority over, but not exemption from, embroilment in pop culture's machinery is something the sequence could do more to acknowledge. Nevertheless, Hua's debut sharply and wittily analyzes the erosion of individuality by the cult of celebrity in poetry that deftly accommodates its dizzying reality.

Alice Whitwham is an assistant editor at Litmus Press and lives in Brooklyn.

Questions for Tea Party Republicans Press

The *Newsletter* recently put some questions to **Douglas Piccinnini** and **Josef Kaplan**, the editors of Tea Party Republicans Press. Their signed, handwritten responses (reproduced below) were returned on the other side of a Bank of America credit card rewards program summary.

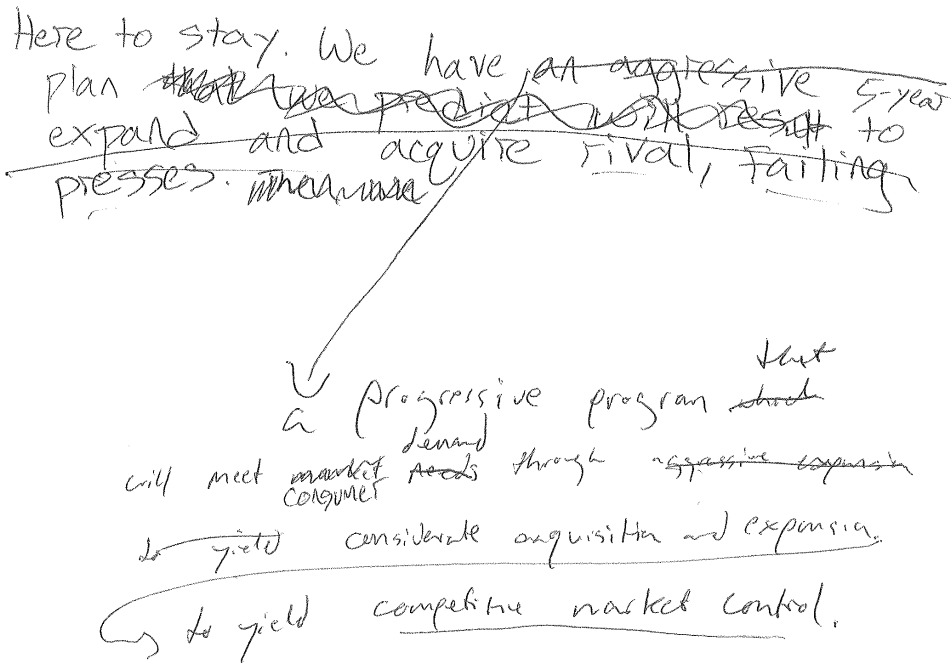
Now that your congressional counterpart has brought us to the brink of financial collapse, how will the press do its part to hasten the apocalypse?

Put out more books.

The two titles you have published so far, Lawrence Giffin's *Sorites* and Astrid Lorange's *Eating and Speaking*, seem to have some things in common. Both poets are concerned with the sentence; there seems to be a philosophical current in each book; both have a sense of humor. Are there the beginnings of an aesthetic platform here?

We will continue to publish the best poetry that our friends have to offer.

Has the press popped up to publish these worthy books only, or are you here to stay?



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Yes.

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