

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER  
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This is my last Newsletter. The new editor starting with #48 is Frances LeFevre. Thanks to everyone who contributed time and space. There will be no summer activities at the Poetry Project. Our financial crisis continues. It should be there in the Fall when the Project opens again. So . . . \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

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THIS THAT ETC: Correction: Lines 5 & 6 of Bill Berkson's poem in the last Newsletter should read "Had there been a piano in that room,/I would have studied it." . . . Hello to Kyran Janos Owen-Mankovich, born June 8th...Thanks to CCLM for partial support.

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Frank O'Hara. EARLY WRITING and POEMS RETRIEVED. Grey Fox Press. \$4/\$5.

Donald Allen performed these splendid retrievals and delivers them outright. They are gifts. His dedication to POEMS RETRIEVED "For Edwin Denby who asked, 'And when will we have the complete poems of Frank O'Hara?'" says everything about the specific urgency which both books take care to satisfy. Don is thorough, yes, but more importantly, he knows what (and where to put what) 's interesting. He edits. His editorial notes are useful and provocative. They function to jolt you back to the poems, and "Everything is in the poems," all the intimations of Frank's fact. Reading these books, you wonder what he didn't turn his hand to. Was there any kind of poem he left untried? or didn't once anticipate?

"Opportunity to study the poet's progress...", the process of beginnings, that indicates the plot of EARLY WRITING -- an index of talent, matter and integrity surfacing fast; Frank taking hold and clearing the decks technically to get at (trust) "the sanity of my vessel" orienting himself towards his poems. "Sea Changes" before "The Harbormaster." "You just gallop right in and deal with it." He did, and you can read the news as it happens. Looking to the future, EARLY WRITING, might well stand as Frank's authentic "Letter To A Young Poet On How To Get There": "I wrote awful poetry compounded of Donne, Whitman and Cummings, which I later destroyed..." Starting off with two poems in 1946, thirty in 1947, and he's moving along in the characteristic diversity of:

A 7-Up  
truck roars by (bellow-  
ing Swanee) so we hoist...

+

The curtain rose like a  
wing on a mountain as  
noisily as all our heads

+

and I play Schonberg  
with only a slight nervousness: it is  
my home...

+

It's our show.

In 1946, Frank was 20, out of the war (Navy), first year at Harvard... The earliest poem in EARLY WRITING is dated October that year ("...and the concrete/slipping under my blood/O empty heart") and the latest ("Experience. Is it not/self?") August 1950. The orts of history? Odd to think of Oscar Williams' Little Treasury Of Modern Verse appearing then-abouts, so that all the big immediate interlopers (Olson, O'Hara, and who else at that point? Ashbery? Creeley?) would sort of instantly define "Post-Modern" in that flickering light, i.e. "Picasso made me tough and quick, and the world..."

One always wants to know more about Frank's circumstances. His poems make you curious about their origins because he is so clear about "event" in them to begin with.

Insofar as there is depth to EARLY WRITING as a process entire, the prose section at the end spells out THE END of that "beginnings" process, a set of revelations as particular as in ZHIVAGO (his poems). The journal Frank kept at Harvard is a wonder, so candid as it obviously was meant to be, taking care of unfinished business: "One keeps a journal so that one writes, as one must, all the time." "The world is inside my head, spinning slowly." "In retrospect, the saddest moment of one's life would seem to be that in which one first became aware that sensibility must be protected by intelligence if it is to survive living. It is that realization that puts the bloodshed into adolescence. And the lack of that realization makes the rest of life a bloodshed." "I love, I create.....and I almost am."

POEMS RETRIEVED (1950-1966) is a daring book. Don Allen presumably means it to be read hinged to the original (Knopf) COLLECTED until he can prepare a new edition (COMPLETE, as Edwin suggests), The provisional title, exact as it is, looks better when you see it jacketed, out of the blue. Hardly any of these poems have appeared anywhere else before, and the level of them -- no sign that Frank ever wrote less emphatically than the occasion demanded -- is astounding. I don't mean there's an absence of the fragmentary (unfinished? "Your phone..." "Don't I know it!") or of the peculiar dizzy sensation associated with shouts of "Poem-Overboard!" (They are there and "Greatest Hits" is definitely not the unifying principle of this book.) Some interestingly look to be first-takes on first-rate poems that actually got written a little later. ("Corresponding Foreignly", for example, seems to connect to "Meditations In An Emergency" in that way.) Others, like "For Norman, En Voyage", express kinds of feeling that aren't recognizably expressed elsewhere in his work. There are many great giddy lines like "Do you know what the phiz looks like?" and "Sentimentality, aren't you sunset?" -- and lines where beautiful directness assumes complete command: "terribly cold winter, radio's been broke." But for whole poems, as crystal-real in dynamics as one might dream to find (or write, for that matter) where have these two been?

#### LINES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

The night's getting black  
The train is cold  
My back aches already

I don't want to smoke  
We're going too fast  
Our windows hurt the air

Last night I was sick  
And this morning worse  
I threw myself onto this coach

The wheels slice quickly  
The rails do struggle  
The mirrors shake like puddles

I'm sitting all night  
I didn't buy a pillow  
My watch got broken last week

I've not done much  
I've loved too little  
And I'm tired of running

Why are there flies on the floor  
in February, and the snow mushing outside  
and the cats asleep?

because you came  
back from Paris, to celebrate your return.

(1966)

"Impersonal to be next in line in history" is true since there is no history and Frank O'Hara is here nearly complete in his poems. It is what he did to create in "the nebulous possible positive", "this meaning growing."  
(Bill Berkson)

\* \* \* \* \*

Blink

a woman not even  
her husband  
goes even  
over  
the edge think  
digging in  
just looking at  
men thinking too  
opposites at once  
& the romantic  
which is psyche  
the struggle for supremacy  
over our ever decreasing earth  
my own brick walls  
let it all hang out  
the daintiest  
job on  
the entire civilized world  
meaning cocktail parties  
this is it  
anybody  
so and so  
ice red dust  
hug  
spring spring spring!

(Rochelle Kraut)

\* \* \* \* \*

Special to Verlaine Boyd: who says Reed Whittemore's biography of William Carlos Williams is "an excellent book": It is not. It is a terrible book, & yet another run-down of a writer's life (like Mellow's CHARMED CIRCLE, about Stein) by one who pointedly does not like that writer's work. What's worse is that this crud used up the access to WCW's unpublished papers (secret notebooks, &c.), only hinting at their contents & rather snidely at that. A big waste when you think how long it's likely to be before the chance to know Williams in such terms comes again.  
(Learned Hand)

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MOVING PARTS by Steve Katz

Mr. Katz's technical virtuosity is past question; the mind will develop structures as it goes on and who is fool enough to question a mind of such grace as we find in MOVING PARTS? There

is nothing sentimental about a machine, all of the parts have their point, and the point is nothing less than a voice, the revelation of a particular sensibility: "He sits down at Lenebaugh's for breakfast and orders some brains and eggs. He'll need the extra brains." Narrative is digression, and the narrative of MOVING PARTS (a novel of layers, moving from skin to bone to mind to spirit) is as brilliant as alcohol, more great than song. "I am often prone to distraction." The center of the book is first a story about a parcel of wrists and a trip to Tennessee, then a narrative of a trip to Tennessee to examine the grounding of the previous story. The general subject is dichtung und wahrheit. That is, he tells you the story, then about the story, then about telling you the story: not Chinese boxes or barber-shop mirrors, but the unpeeling of the onion down to the metaphysics of the thing. The voice. I mean, he tells you himself, clearly and it is a pleasure. He takes the cake. He has the cake and eats it, too. Then he offers us some. Who is fool enough to refuse such creamy and delicious gobbling? Not me, not you either: from The Fiction Collective, distributed by George Braziller Inc., \$3.95 paper. (Simon Schuchat)

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FAN MAIL FROM SOME FLOUNDER: The Home Book, Prose and Poems, 1951-1970 by James Schuyler, Z Press, Calais, VT., 1977. \$3.50

Summer apples, showy and sugary, mealy and touchy  
a finger bruise on the thin skin  
brown and silently reproachful as your wife's black eye.

It's hard not to foam over at the mouth about Jimmy Schuyler's "Prose & Poems." The language is so contemporary, the delicate ease with which he puts it to you, the sly humor that you know relishes the tongue in cheek. All this and more (of course) in The Home Book.

The great delight in this collection, however, is the fact that there is an ample supply of Schuyler's meticulous prose. If you've ever read A Nest Of Ninnies (w/ John Ashbery) and were flipped out by the truly zany humor and that just plain ridiculousness of the mundane then you can dig how Schuyler can tickle a laugh out of a stone. Read Schuyler's prose and find out for yourself how seemingly tame language can suddenly erupt with unexpected dazzling syntax. It's right there in front of you, that fabulous ear for dialogue and spoken idiosyncras-

But other than that, well, the poetry's brilliant, elegant, I mean: cles.

The wind is pendant-breasted as a naked Swede.  
A frosted fox grape shows  
where a bird shat as it ate.  
Blackberry canes arch and obtrude big nipples.  
And the chaste tree blooms.

Schuyler writes (in "Grand Duo"): "Art is formality, courtesy, passion, control, practice/ rehearsing the unrehearsed", and even though he's really talking about the Art of Music and Shubert, it applies equally well to his own Art.

Oh and the playlettes! ("The Custard Sellers", "What To Do? A Problem Play", "Love Before Breakfast", "Shopping And Waiting"). Wit incarnate, no doubt about it, they've got to be some of the funniest bits since Woody Allan. The humor of the humdrum household situations will lift you out of your seat with the spatula of delight, no lie.

But the poetry, ah! so magnificent, so exquisite, and with a touch that could give a mote class. As he says (in "Dreams"): "The said to be boring things/ dreams, weather, a bus trip/ are so fascinating". And he can place that "Fascinating" experience before your very eyes with a flair that is uniquely his, flawless.

Back before I made the egg test  
I thought the world as flat and very like an  
elderberry umbel  
full of round juicy people winking and waving,  
crying "Hi!" and "Meet you in the jelly!"  
or "Under the lid of an elderberry pie."

The delights of this particular collection are innumerable. Suffice it to say that Schuyler's eye is painterly and thereby more accessible than abstract, and if style is what you can do with language, well, then, Jimmy's got a real classy wardrobe.  
\* Note: unless otherwise indicated the stanzas quoted are from Schuyler's terrific poem, "Jelly Jelly".  
(Pat Nolan)

\* \* \* \* \*

I want it as much as anyone.  
I am continually made aware of how different I am.  
They ask me, "Are you always so uncomfortable?"  
They make you feel like they could care less.

It's not that I don't like them.  
Sometimes I feel an attraction.

You're continually nervous, you mumble, you stutter.  
You say to yourself, "They can't possibly understand."

Charles Bernstein

\* \* \* \* \*

I've always felt my body moving somewhere in a poem. Now I've seen it: David Taylor, Marty Skoble, and Anne Hammel in "Dancing Poems", at The Neill Gallery on May 13, 14, and 15.

They are warming up within a taped in square under gallery lights and greeting friends as they arrive and take seats around the square. The performance 'begins' when the trio stands at the outer edge of the space. Anne walks into the square then in turn the men do the same, walking naturally about. The three slowly begin to play off each other's energy-- contact improvisation style: cross paths, bump, slide and roll over each other.

"Are you ready?" "Are you really ready?" A poem begins, spoken at random by the performers as the movement continues. "Readiness", "Change", "Rearrangement." You hear breath in and out. You see physical exertion: bodies touch and bounce away. "Waves crash". This particular poem, Vicarious uses common (bordering on worn-out) words and images: change, rearrangement, riding easy rhythm, but they carry a new intensity when thrown into a silence by dancers who for five minutes have been engaged in various forms of physical contact. It's as if within these five minutes a certain intimacy has developed which the audience experiences vicariously (no pun intended) as observers. Some physical barrier is lifted that increases sensitivity to words and suggestions (not unlike a meditation). The rhythm of the poems often becomes enhanced, that is clear and articulated, as it is dictated by the movement. The rhythm is experienced visually (bodies set the time) as well as through the ear (recitation) and soul(?).

The only performance 'ground rules' for each dance poem is that each begin with walking around the space until one performer spontaneously chooses to start reciting a poem. A booklet of the poetry repertoire is handed out to the audience upon arriving, but there is no set order of their performance nor the guarantee that they will all be performed. The choice arises out of the moment by the three as they are moving. Who recites what and when is also unplanned and when the performers are tight and listening to each other, you are made to feel that the "right" person is speaking all the time.

Heightened intensity is the main recurring element that I saw rising out of this collaboration. Here's a passage from On the Mountain, a spiritual ode to nature: stoned out on ozone

and clear air/on loving feelings/on space/on sunlight, my face burns with sunlight  
At his point Marty and David face each other, stop their movement and recite in unison, "my face burns with sunlight." It is as if each face is the sun itself, glaring at the other.

Then there is a quiet story that David begins, My Grandfather's House. He performs a series of slow cartwheels that he continues throughout the piece, giving the feeling of a man-child, the cartwheels convey a strong steady rhythm. At the same time, Anne and Marty roll and jump over each other in the center of the space (almost like children). "My grandfather's house still stands where I left/it, years ago, on its treeless street,/sun glaring on the pavement, iron fence/around the top."

The story you hear becomes visually textured by the dance dialogue that's happening simultaneously. It's this simultaneous element that can get in the way too: like trying to pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time. Some difficulties were encountered in trying to keep a flow between words and movement/the one zapping concentration and energy from the other. This becomes less of a problem, I think, with more practice. Also involved are the hazards of improvisation in general--that things don't always jibe. But so what?

This group speaks to me about the possibilities of collaborative work both between artists of the same media as well as between artists of different art forms--dance, music, drama, visual arts. It's also about discovering languages, not specifically verbal.... Keep eyes and ears open for more.  
(Robin Messing)

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BOOKS MAGS ETC: From 432 Review, (Simon Schuchat, ed), Box 1030, Peter Stuyvesant Sta, NYC 10009: #3 (Laments and Chastisement, by Frank O'Hara) & #4, \$1. . . Roof #2 (edited by James Sherry & Tom Savage), Segue Press, 300 Bowery, NYC 10012, \$2. . . EEL FOR (Peter Inman, ed) 3314 Mt. Pleasant #2 N.W., Washington, DC 20010. . . Michael Wolfe, World Your Own, Calliope Press, Wentworth Road, Walpole, NH, \$3. . . dodgems (ed by Eileen Myles), 86 E 3 St, NYC 10003 . . . Rebecca Brown, For The 82nd Airborne, Adventures In Poetry, 437 E. 12 St, NYC 10009. . . Steve Katz, Moving Parts, Fiction Collective, \$3.95. . . Cavemen (ed by Simon Schuchat), Box 1030, Stuyvesant Sta, NYC 10009... Rebecca Wright, Ciao Manhattan, Telephone Books, Box 672, Old Chelsea Sta, NYC 10011, \$1.50.

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#### DER RING GOTT FARBLONJET

"The story of how the Nihilump stole the magic Rheingold and, after many events, its wonderous restoration to the river from whence it came." So, modestly, begins a new epic! The Ridiculous Theatrical Co. has stunningly transformed the Ring Cycle into what it always has been! I knew nothing from the Wagner before last night (except for comic Brunnhildas on television and my father's ridiculous attempts to tell the tale over dinner). This production is lost; the way the ring is lost; it is there; but there is a big center in it. Charles Ludlam has taken the ridiculous story and by treating it simply and straightforwardly has unleashed the fury contained in the plot of Gods, Gold, Sex, Love, Death, and Victory. The production takes about three and half hours but the pacing is perfect. The first two acts are swift and unhurried; conveying almost all of the story. The third act is a tone duller (mainly red and black) but by that time the audience is enchanted; dwarfs have fought for and lost the ring and the Gods have fought for and lost the ring (Mother Earth could tell you why but won't) and now mankind type beings in a somewhat dull manner (but with added stealth) do the same thing. Ludlam's production is furtheristic! It seems set just over the hill and it is becoming more and more familiar. The sets, costumes, lighting, music, and productions are beautiful and complete. The entire cast is earnest and elevated to the humor of the work. It seems hard to separate any of the achievements of acting, design, or direction, for it all worked as one Der Ring Gott Farblonjet. Try to see it all at the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, 79 E. 4 St, 288-8558, Saturdays only, and ask how to get half price tickets. (Bob Rosenthal)

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Ray DiPalma's MARQUEE A Score (Asylum's Press) is the latest in a series of books and published pieces that support his position among the most advanced poets and writers of these times. Since the 60s when he began publishing, DiPalma has maintained an integrity about his work, and the methods he uses to produce it, that has been impressive to those of us who have followed its progress -- though others have obviously been offended by his obsessive commitment to "the work" and his equally intense avoidance of "personality" in presenting it. Not that his poetry lacks personal references and personal concerns -- a popular work at readings, yet to be published in full, his "The Birthday Notations" is a series of entries from English and American literature and literary history over the past several centuries recorded according to a process of selection that includes their falling on the day and month that mark DiPalma's birth (a nice blend of literary interests, biographical data, and structural tactics, and a premier example of DiPalma's exploitation of literary references to a degree beyond that of any post-50s poet I can think of, yet with a technique that is fresh as well as relevant) -- but that the personal is always subordinated to, or thoroughly integrated with, the solutions to problems of language and structure.

DiPalma's work spans the spectrum of approaches familiar to the "avant-garde" in all the arts, but at times his respect for linguistic and literary precision has been mistakenly labeled "academic," and often by poets who have themselves worked in the "sonnet" form, or in other traditional and academically accepted forms, while DiPalma has always invented or explored the original forms still inaccessible to most of "the academy." His work has always seemed more architectural than painterly, to me. And in this sense MARQUEE is "in the tradition." Although indicated as "A score," the music at first seems frozen, as in a great construction, like Gaudi's famous buildings in Barcelona. And MARQUEE is as seemingly whimsical, humorous, and eccentric as Gaudi's buildings are at first glance. But there is also a flow to the work that resembles a musical progression. In fact, if you can relax with MARQUEE's movement it becomes at times overwhelmingly "fast and easy" (as in "this body's built for speed" of blues tradition), and even when more serious in its insistence it is still delightful thanks to its visual effects (the surface catalyst for "the fast and easy" sense of it), a judgment that leads me to suspect the designation "A score" can be taken to mean a tally, as well as a musical text. The eccentricity is not just in the work being made up entirely of nonwords (except for words designating the primary colors, the text is composed of letters, symbols, and syllables consisting entirely of vowels, e.g. "aeu"), but in the presentation of these nonwords, including the use of lining and "scoring" (in the sense of crossing out and "creasing" in a way, as in printing), in which the colors named are used (in a resolution that is as engaging as it is fun).

Some of the theory and eventual practice behind MARQUEE is offered in a challenging, if sometimes portentous, "Afterword" by Steve McCaffery, whose concerns are valid and intelligent but cause him to ignore the lighter and broader implications of the work, (some samples: "MARQUEE is one of several recent works that form a seminal contribution to a new emergent tradition of the signifier." Or, "MARQUEE is an open challenge issued out to that communicational schema that has traditionally cast reading as a function of passivity.") But it still seems important to make clear that DiPalma's work, from his first books of the late 60s, to his most recent ones, express an integrity and commitment to the uses of language in new and demanding ways, and that his achievement offers much that needs to be learned by those whose understanding of the placement of words on the page is based on the concept of literature as a second language, instead of the first it always must be. (Michael Lally)

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from Robert Creeley's CONTEXTS OF POETRY: INTERVIEWS 1961-1971, p 161

MacAdams: What about the size of the paper?

Creeley: That changed. I mean at times the page would be bigger. Living in Spain I used legal-size sheets so that that would change the length of the stories. It wasn't a formula. It was just a habit--in the same way that, say the choice of paper and pencil or pen or typewriter were. It was part of the instrumentality. Just so, that sense of a five page context. It would be like buying a particular size of canvas. I felt very at home with that size of canvas, so to speak. I wanted to work in an economy of statement that had to do with a range of five pages. If you look at the manuscript you'll find that the chapters are all about five pages. The next question was, "How shall these be distributed, these five page pieces?" Then I thought, "Well, in fours," Four is a number that actually feels very comfortable to me, and

yet has a variety of possibility within its own nature. Like one and three, or two and two. Or simply four. So that I can feel that that makes a viable balance. And so I then designed the circumstance as five chapters to each part. There are four parts. Four main parts. And then each chapter is in an economy of five pages in length, with five chapters to each of the four parts. And five chapters in the book. Which is sort of back to two again.

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### Personnel Poem

The other day I ran into myself on the street  
I knew it was me  
Same face, same pants, same shirt--  
I wonder what I was thinking?

I got in my car and someone already was behind the wheel--  
it was me

When we got home I opened the door and there I was  
Wondering where I'd seen myself before

Michael Brownstein

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