

# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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## FEB/MAR 2011 #226

LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS EXCERPT GEORGE ALBON REMEMBERS DANIEL DAVIDSON POEMS PETER CULLEY  
ESSAY SEAN BONNEY ON ANNA MENDELSSOHN CALENDAR KAREEM ESTEFAN REVIEWS CHAPBOOKS BY FRANK O'HARA &  
KENNETH KOCH, ASTRID LORANGE, NATURE THEATER OF OKLAHOMA, & LISA JARNOT JESS BARBAGALLO REVIEWS  
DODIE BELLAMY ALLI WARREN REVIEWS JOHN COLETTI W. MARTIN REVIEWS MILTOS SACHTOURIS BARRY SCHWABSKY  
REVIEWS INGEBORG BACHMANN & PAUL CELAN DIANE WARD REVIEWS JANE SPRAGUE VLADISLAV DAVIDZON REVIEWS  
SREČKO KOSOVEL KARINNE KEITHLEY SYERS REVIEWS LESLIE SCALAPINO MATHEW TIMMONS REVIEWS STEVEN ZULTANSKI

\$5?



# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Corina Copp

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The Poetry Project, Ltd. Staff

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—Anna Mendelssohn

SEAN BONNEY

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Ben Wadler is an artist from Teaneck, NJ.

He is currently studying at the Royal College of Art in London.

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of Disembodied Poetics**  
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JUNE 13–JULY 10  
BOULDER, COLORADO**

**WEEK ONE:  
June 13-19**  
**Gender & Hybridity,  
and Should We Consider  
the Cyborg?**

Ana Božičević, Rebecca Brown,  
Melissa Buzzeo, Samuel R. Delany,  
Rob Halpern, Bhanu Kapil, Erica  
Kaufman, Amy King, Akilah Oliver,  
Maureen Owen, Vanessa Place, Max  
Regan, Julia Seko, giovanni singleton

**WEEK TWO: June 20-26**  
**Fictions: The Story (Narrative  
and Anti-Narrative)**

Junior Burke, Rikki Ducornet, Colin Frazer,  
C.S. Giscombe, Renee Gladman, Anselm  
Hollo, Laird Hunt, Stephen Graham Jones,  
David Matlin, Kabir Mohanty & Sharmistha  
Mohanty, Evie Shockley, Karen Weiser,  
Ronaldo V. Wilson, Karen Tei Yamashita

**WEEK THREE: June 27-July 3**  
**Ecology, Urgency,  
Dharma Poetics**

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Jack Collom,  
Marcella Durand, Lara Durback, Barbara  
Henning, Laura Mullen, dg nanouk okpik,  
Jed Rasula, Selah Saterstrom, Andrew  
Schelling, Eleni Sikelianos, Jonathan  
Skinner, Eleni Stecopoulos, Tyrone Williams

**WEEK FOUR: July 4-10**  
**Economics of the Counter-Culture:  
Performance, Publishing, Collaboration**

Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Rick Moody, Thurston  
Moore, Harryette Mullen, Eileen Myles, Margaret  
Randall, DJ Spooky, Jane Sprague, Wesley Tanner,  
Steven Taylor, Edwin Torres, Anne Waldman,  
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## LETTERS

## 1. from the director

2011's New Year's Day Marathon Reading/Benefit was another extraordinary poetry happening. Bob Holman started us off at 2:15PM with a "Happy New Year" poem that he wrote the night before and I, in keeping with Project custom, clocked in with the final word at 1:30AM. We heard from about 140 performers in-between, with too many surprises to note, but props to musician Nick Hallett whose voice stopped me in my tracks. Whatever I was about to do probably didn't get done! Even though we produce this reading, the performances (along with the collective momentum) always peel away blinders from my vision. For this I am grateful. And, huzzah! We raised over \$19,000 this year. These funds, as you know, allow us to pay the rent, continue programming 80+ readings per season and plan for the Project's future. Thank you for every dollar you spent on admission, food, books or membership that day. And thank you to the food establishments and publishers—a list of which follows this letter—who donated their goods to us. We hope you will support them throughout the year. Two Boots Pizza launched an annual Project tribute pizza, which will celebrate a different poet each year. I didn't get to the slices of "Wichita Vortex Sutra" pizza (for Allen Ginsberg, of course) fast enough, but Arlo said it was a delicious invention. Thanks to Phil and Two Boots.

Poet Karen Weiser told me I looked calmer than the Artistic Director should. I can't adequately express my gratitude to all of our trusty volunteers for taking most of the weight off our shoulders that day. This event is labor intensive and we simply wouldn't get very far without dozens of people going above and beyond.

So, back to what we do best...hosting more readings. It's my pleasure to mention a few of those forthcoming. Patti Smith made her Poetry Project debut accompanied by Lenny Kaye on guitar on February 10, 1971. They will return for a special 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert of poetry and music to benefit the Poetry Project on February 9<sup>th</sup>. The Project has been kept in business by poets for 45 years. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> its former Artistic Directors will unite for a talk and reading. Okay, I'm not impartial, but I think it's not to be missed! Also look for readings by Clark Coolidge, Ken Irby and Caroline Bergvall. The calendar on page 20 will reveal all.

We hope that 2011 holds much promise for each of us and for the state of the world. We appreciate your devotion to our New Year's celebration and thank you, again, for being part of the Poetry Project.

Yours,

Stacy Szymaszek

## 2. from the program coordinator

The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading was great. Always the biggest Poetry Project event of the year, this one featured more than 140 performers and an audience of more than 1,000. Our tiny office staff of three persons is no match for the Marathon! We needed a lot of help and we got it from these wonderful people: Aaron Kiely, Adeena Karasick, Alex Abelson, Amanda Deutch, Atticus Fierman, Barry Denny, Betsy Block, Bill Kushner, Bill Martin, Bob Rosenthal, Brenda Coultas, Brett Price, CAConrad, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Chana Porter, Christa Quint, Christine Kelly, Corina Copp, Corinne Dekkers, Daniel Kent, David Kirschenbaum, Derek Kroessler, Diana Hamilton, Diana Rickard, Dixie Appel, Don Yorty, Douglas "All Day" Rothschild, Doug Eberle, Elinor Nauen, Emily XYZ, Erica Wessmann, Evelyn Reilly, Franklin Bruno, Gail Tuch, Geoff Mottram, Geoffrey Olsen, Hilary Johnson, Ian Wilder, Jeffrey Perkins, Jeremy Hoevenaar, Jessica Fiorini, Jo Ann Wasserman, Joe Elliot, Karen Garthe, Kathleen Connell, Katie Fowley, KB Jones, Kye Ginger, Kim Wilder, Kyle R. Triplett, Laura Elrick, Lauren Russell, Lisa Ozag, Macgregor Card, Marcella Durand & Ishmael, Margaret Carson, Mariette Papic, Merry Fortune, Minna Periniva, Miranda Lee Reality Torn, Nathaniel Siegel, Nick Morrow, Nicole Peyrafitte, Nina Freeman, Phyllis Wat, Rebecca Melnyk, Robbie Dewhurst, Sara Akant, Sophie Aster Prevallet, Stephanie Gray, Stephanie Jo Elstro, Thom Donovan, Tom Weiss, Will Edmiston, and probably some others who I missed. David Vogen and Jim Behrle deserve special thanks for pulling a day-long shift at the sound table.

Food and services were generously provided by these local businesses and friends: Bob Rosenthal, Buttercup Bake Shop, Christa Quint, Dael Orlandersmith, Gillian McCain, Grandaisy Bakery, Grey Dog, Magnolia Bakery, Nathaniel Siegel, Nicole Peyrafitte, Porto Rico Coffee, The Source Unltd., S'MAC, Two Boots, and Veselka.

And we had an exceptionally well-stocked book table this year thanks to these people: Akilah Oliver, Anne Waldman, Anselm Berrigan, Belladonna\*, *Chain* (journal), Coffee House Press, Cuneiform Press, Eileen Tabios, Gillian McCain, Granary Books, Joanna Cooper, Litmus Press, Meritage Press, Murat Nemat-Nejat, Nicole Peyrafitte, Peter Bushyeager, Susan Mills, Ugly Duckling Presse, and United Artists.

It's nice to begin the new year taking part in the collective effort that makes the marathon happen—thank you all for making it possible.

2011!

Arlo Quint

## LETTERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 3. from the editor

Dear ones, the rascality! Not to mention the livingroom pusillanimity shown by the press after this issue went to press. I can hardly stand \$19,000 dollars of it after such an old-stager went to bat for love in the old times. It is like not using contractions for an entire film. Which means, incidentally, that there were no contractions to begin with; and if I may say so, that is how I consider contractions monastically anyhow: to be before us, procreant and undulant (yes, I am using a rhyming dictionary to write this letter—it is my magic grandfather's *The Essential Handbook for Poets and Song Writers*, and I know of at least one of you who has the same edition, even). To be clear, I am very excited about this *Newsletter*. I only have one tissue left under my wingbelt after this February/March under-policed toilsome thoroughbred hits the streets. I am considering sad. But as Mac Wellman once replied to the question, "How do you go on?": "I do not go on, I try to stop and Sit There Doing Nothing (STDN) and allow the madness to rush on by. I consider the lilies of the field." Uh-oh, that looks like a sentence I should save for my next (last) editor's letter. I'll copy and paste. "I was Christian in the Slough of Despond," wrote Djuna Barnes, and that's approaching the New Year for you. But we're beyond approach, it's true. My resolutions can't fall in and out of our lives like snow. Our resolutions (*the terrorism of infinite data*, as a friend once updated [congratulations, Cecilia and Filip!]) fall in and out of my life like actual *outcomes* instead of failure at the door. True to my discomfort, I hope you like reading about Anna Mendelssohn, who you might know as Grace Lake. Please see p. 17 for Bonney fine agitation. Also happy for having George Albon write about Daniel Davidson; see p. 9 for that farthing dip (wait are you reading out of order now?). If I talk about how much I admire Peter Culley I might as well be a Table of Contents, and who needs to see double ("double double u laps up letters *au lait*," as Kareem Estefan writes later of Astrid Lorange) ("Maybe the *intention* is to kill him *in* the diamond" —Scalapino). In the end, faulty fancies won't get us far, but I like to write them. For *The New York Times* informs us that women's tears are a TURNOFF for men and well, there's an instruction for everyday life. Like, be careful teabagging. The news seems to drift sideways...not backward, but throwin' slippers into a creekface. Dubious tarrying, so I learned recently that Kafka's *Letters to Felice* were published *after* Bachmann's *Letters to Felician* (thank you, Bary Schwabsky [see p. 25 for a wonderful review of Ingeborg and Paul Celan's *Correspondence*]), which made me sure of nothing. Then I heard that Fiona Shaw and Simon Critchley will be giving a talk on Nothing soon at the Rubin Museum, so that should season a good long lifetime. What I mean is that *you guys* are a fictionalized object of letters!

Desperately,

Corina Copp

### JANINE POMMY VEGA 1942–2010

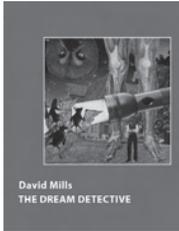
We regret to announce that our friend Janine Pommy Vega passed away on December 23<sup>rd</sup> at her home in Willow, New York. Janine was the author of more than a dozen books, including her last book of poetry, *The Green Piano*. She was an activist on behalf of women's rights and taught tirelessly inside the prison system, working many years for the PEN Prison Writing Committee. She will be missed by so many people who were touched by her vision. You can read Anne Waldman's memorial piece on our blog at [www.poetryproject.org](http://www.poetryproject.org).

### WITH REGRET

The Poetry Project would also like to note the unfortunate passing of the son of poet Laura Hinton, Paul Daniel Lyon AKA Vickers B. Gringo, 1978–2010; our hearts go out to Laura and her family.



**STRAW  
GATE**

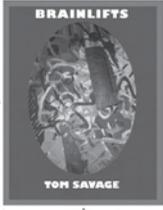


David Mills  
**THE DREAM DETECTIVE**

**David Mills, *The Dream Detective***



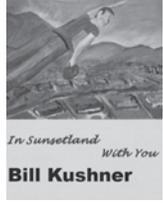
Whose Place  
Lydia Cortés



**BRAINLIFTS**  
TOM SAVAGE



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In Sunsoiland  
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## SPRING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

### WHERE THE ABSTRACT MEETS THE STREET – BRENDA COULTAS.

TUESDAYS 7–9PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 8TH.

This workshop is an investigation into interior states of the psyche and takes its cue from the physical world. We will look at work that begins with the concrete—maybe objects, bodies or places—and find the intersection where the abstract meets the street. We will contemplate the extinctions of the familiar (disappearance of print, landmarks or species, for example) and the rise of the replicas (of nature, Coney Island or new media sources). Keep in mind that within our poems anything could happen. Readings include: Jena Osman, Michael Gizzi, Eleni Sikelianos, David Wolach, Tonya Foster, Marcella Durand, Anne Waldman, and many others. **Brenda Coultas's most recent book is *The Marvelous Bones of Time* (Coffee House, 2007).**

### HYPNOPOEIA/POETICS – KRISTIN PREVALLET. FRIDAYS 7–9PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 11TH.

Ezra Pound famously described poetry as the play of *phanopoeia*, *melopoeia*, and *logopoeia* (image, music, and meaning); but there is another “poeia”—*hypnopoeia*—working behind the scenes as the thread that connects writer and reader. Hypnopoeia opens a new field of poetry studies, investigating the ways poetry alters (for better or worse) the thinking of both readers and writers. In addition to being a poet and teacher, I am certified in clinical hypnosis, and each evening I will introduce workshop participants to self-hypnosis change-work techniques. We will collaborate to discover how these powerful exercises—which could have a dramatic impact on your life—can also be integrated into your work as a writer. We will spend some part of each evening detecting the trance-states embedded in a variety of poems and other texts, and you will create your own trance-mediations. The urgency of this workshop is the future. If you don't like the way it's looking then change it. Now. **Kristin Prevallet is a poet, professor, and hypnotherapist. She is the author of four books, including *I, Afterlife: Essays in Mourning Time* (Essay Press) and *A Helen Adam Reader* (National Poetry Foundation). (www.kayvallet.com) (www.poeticsofchange.com)**

### ARCHIVES AND EPHEMERA: “THE CITY/THE BODY” – RONALDO V. WILSON.

SATURDAYS 12–2PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 12TH.

While an archive is defined as “a place or collection containing records, documents,” “a long-term storage area,” and “a repository for stored memories or information;” and ephemera is marked as a “short-lived thing,” and “printed matter of passing interest,” we shall explore these realms as indiscrete, mutable categories, as we gather and use our specific materials to generate a cycle of poems in the context of the city and the body. What observations sights/sites, mobile and static histories, artifacts, speech, signs, boutiques, bodegas, trash, art, sirens, smells, and beats meet with the body's own fluid records, whether through breath, senses, dreams, movements, internal chatter, memory, and revelations? Bound only by your own findings and tastes, you may wish to construct or bring in your small archive of daily pics, news clippings, or selections from diaries or journals as guides. Or, perhaps you possess some ephemeral notes, sketches, objects, or partial but striking drafts that you have left untouched and wish to revisit through the course. To inspire our writing and conversation, we will look to a variety of urbane, embodied poets, to include CAConrad, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Wayne Koestenbaum, Meena Alexander, Matvei Yankelevich, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Allison Cobb, among others. **Ronaldo V. Wilson's latest book, *Poems of the Black Object* (Futurepoem), won the Asian American Literary Award and the Thom Gunn Award for Gay Poetry in 2010.**

### CANDOR PRACTICE – FILIP MARINOVICH. SATURDAYS 12–2PM: 5 SESSIONS BEGIN MARCH 26TH.

Over five sessions we will engage with the question of candor. What is it and how can it be practiced through poetry? What happens when we interpret Ginsberg's “Candor ends paranoia” as a koan (zen riddle) rather than a slogan? How does the healing effect of candor manifest itself in your life and writing? What is its shadow side? Writing a letter to candor, what comes up? What secrets, public and private, can be mined in the making of poetry that energizes every molecule of being into a wakeful state? What are the risks, delights, and the magic of writing candidly? Does candor practice make candor perfect? Reading aloud from and working with the texts of *The Heart Sutra*, Foucault, Euripides, Ginsberg, O'Hara, Stein, Brecht, Notley, Myles, and others, and writing poetry at the roundtable ourselves, we will practice a candor through which there is nothing to attain, for the joy of the practice itself. **Filip Marinovich is the author of *Zero Readership* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008) and *And If You Don't Go Crazy I'll Meet You Here Tomorrow* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011).**

*The workshop fee is a great deal at \$350, and includes a one-year Sustaining Poetry Project Membership and tuition for all spring and fall classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call 212-674-0910, email info@poetryproject.org or register online at www.poetryproject.org under “Get Involved.”*

## EXCERPT

*Remembering Daniel Davidson*

GEORGE ALBON

It's my day off, so I go

catch the 1 and then the 24 and come here to Jumpin' Java to try to write about poetry and other things. This means I'll stare at a piece of paper for most of the afternoon, trying to find something there I think I know.

Jumpin' Java is in an enclave of the Castro called the Duboce Triangle. It's on tree-lined Noe, too narrow a street to handle two-way driving, except that it does. (I once saw a full-size moving truck inch its way down this capillary of a street dragging a helicopter on a flat bed behind it.) It's an old street that has maintained its early-automotive (pre-automotive?) spatiality. Each block down this section of Noe has some kind of sitting area: wooden benches or concrete benches surrounded by cultivated plants (bonsais, perennials) in boxes and urns. This sounds like affluence, but it is actually care—the building and maintenance of these spaces is paid for by the residents, non-wealthy gays for the most part, who've lived here since the seventies and want a nice street to live on.

I'm sitting at one of the two window tables, looking out at an Oregon ash tree. It's surprisingly tall given the hemmed-in circumstances of the street. It has a pale gray trunk and—best detail of all—a large open bower. I've come to love this feature in trees, and will stop to look toward ones that show it—ashes, birches, alders, hawthorns, poplars, young oaks. Right now, as I write, the sun is coming into the café and falling on my table, filtered through the branches of the ash. In combination with the refractions of the imperfect window glass, the light creates not a dappled effect on the wooden surface but something more like rapidly rushing filaments.

There are two cafés on Noe. This is my favorite. Most people here go outside to use their cells. I remember an interview with Robert Creeley where he kept using the phrase “deeply pleasant,” and that's what this place is—it's deeply pleasant. The one down the way, the Café Flore, is the “see and be seen” café, with crappy food and espresso. It's a gay landmark, I guess, but the vibe is brittle and calculating. I only go there if this one is full, or I need some eye candy that day. Jumpin' Java, on the other hand, has untuned guys at laptops, reading Cavell, leaning like scholastics into their notebooks, and checking each other out—more satisfying versions of the dance.

At the moment the café is about half full. The barista's twelve-year-old is playing chess with a customer. There are a few conversations going among the tables, but mostly single guys at their screens. It was here, in

fact, that I first encountered “outlet cruise.” I looked up from *Debbie: An Epic* to see a guy standing before me, then crouch and look *under*. Before I had time to decide whether to be offended or flattered, he found what he wanted and took out his detachable cord. Now, of course, an entire etiquette has evolved, whereby the sitter helps the plug-seeker look for his quarry, even giving up his chair if he's been found to have encroached too close to the alternating current.

The music of Tinariwen quietly but steadfastly fills the café. This is a group of loosely-knit Touareg men (and a few women), descendants of a generation who grew up struggling to maintain their traditional autonomy along the southern Saharan nomadic routes. Suppressions by the republic of Mali combined with droughts a decade later resulted in a diaspora of Touaregs to the urban centers of Libya and Algeria. It was in this environment of wage economies and rootlessness that the Touareg youths did something they'd never done before. They picked up guitars, first acoustic and then electric. Like Reggae, it's rebel music, but while reggae is rhythmically two-beat and taps into pop, soul, and gospel, this music keeps the sinuous pentatonic drone of North African musical tradition. Reggae often uses verse and chorus, but Tinariwen and its counterparts have maintained the call and response, often with the main singer delivering a line, and the rest of the group echoing it in unison singing.

So here with the rushing light and Tinariwen's patient statement, I find myself—not entering a liminal space, but waking up into one that I guess was there already, not unwelcome but not appealed to. It feels like a space of contemplation, but it's not really calming. What seems like “void” is a mesh of preoccupations.

This month (September 2006) will be the tenth anniversary of Dan Davidson's death. I had met my partner Dennis a few months before then, in June, and as Dan and I were more or less speaking again, I mentioned this new chapter in my life and he was the perfect friend—excited, eager to listen, one question after another. I don't remember how we got back in touch, but we began having phone chats again, on our best behavior, with only a trace of the old tensions underneath. I knew that Dan's fierce

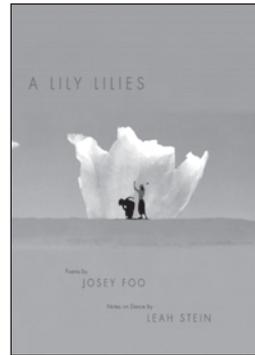
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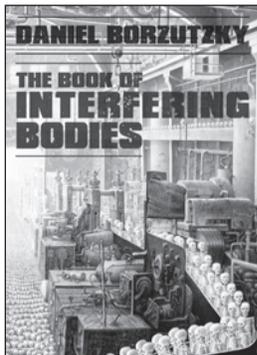
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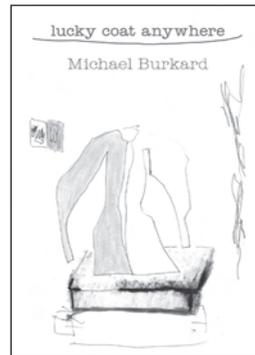
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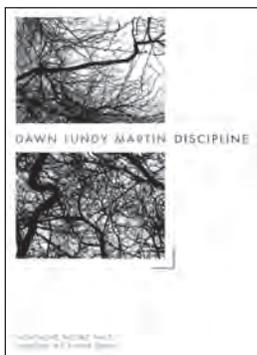
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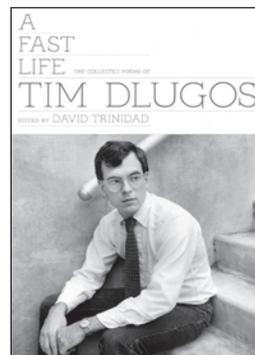
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engagement with the Bay Area avant poetry scene (what he liked to call “the writing community”) had almost completely burned off, leaving a man vulnerable to ghosts of the past—ghosts that once were passions—and looking for the next involvement, the thing that would lift him up again. He told me he’d been dating a nurse, one of many he knew at the medical center where he went for his weekly blood check. He was on a chemical leash that got shorter and heavier with each passing year—coumadin for his blood (he had a plastic heart valve), analgesics for his migraines, valium from his therapist, and toward the end, a disastrous round of interferon (which he stopped) for Hep C. This last diagnosis, made in his last year, was I think the last straw. As the entitlement era drew to a close and his SSI checks became more restrictive and he had to pay for his meds more and more out of his pocket, he must have sensed that the future was trying to head him off. Brice Marden talks about new beginnings that seem suffused with hope but which eventually turn out to be labyrinths that lead only backward—I wonder if Dan hadn’t also begun to feel that way. And yet during one of our chats, when I was ineptly trying to commiserate with him, saying something to the effect that life was hard with occasional patches of brightness, he stopped me short. What do you mean, he said, life has *great swatches* of brightness, *towering heights* of beauty and joy.

Dan was the first poet I’d ever met who lived his life as The Poet, with no interference from a day job or schedule, save weekly and/or monthly visits to various clinics. He worked very hard on his poetry—after fifteen years, some of it still searches along a hard edge. He also worked hard to develop, if I can put it this way, his deportment—his self-presentation as a professional and engaged artist. Looking at “deportment” makes me see that it could apply to Dan in more ways than one. With his uncompromising apartness he was indeed “deported” from run-of-the-mill America, taking none of its pleasantries for granted, and always at odds with those who did, or could. (“Don’t I look *acculturated*?” he once asked when he showed me a photo of himself and his then-girlfriend Jenny, followed by his high-pitched laugh.) And he was also “deported” from the world in which being an engaged poet could mean something, could be a fact worthy of attention, if not automatic respect—as happens (used to happen?) in the world surrounding North America. So if his deportment were also these things, they were part of the background of his active deportment—the styles he chose in facing down such a world. Remembrances turn into anecdotes when I think about Dan, but I also remember him in his ratty cane chair in the flat on lower Haight (gotten off the street like everything else in the flat), on the phone to poet A quietly suggesting that poet B, who was close to poet C, be included among the poets speaking at C’s memorial. Likewise the sense of company he provided, his enthusiasms and despairs, his fearsome intelligence, his pitiless debater’s will, his advice on where to send submissions, and how.

1.) *Always* have something in the mail.

2.) *Never* fold your work. The SASE should be larger than 8½ x 11, and the original mailing envelope even larger. There’s a subtle difference if it’s folded. And if you get it back it’s still uncreased and you can send it to the next place down the line.

He also wrote two computer rules for Gary Sullivan on an index card, when Gary, a mutual friend, got his first PC:

1.) Turn it off before the brain melts.

2.) Think—Plan—Attack!

We finally got together in the present, the present that was now over ten years ago, after one plan after another snagged—with Dan, you always had to be prepared for plans to fall through. We hadn’t seen each other for a few years. I’d moved somewhere else, he was still (as always) on lower Haight, living his hand-to-mouth existence in digs he called “the Anarchy Arboretum” with a couple of steadfast roommates. I met him at my door, and was startled at his shoulder-length hair—he’d always worn it short. Our mutual wariness remained, and there were no handshakes or hugs, but up in my flat we started catching up and things seemed warm. One of his friends, a woman he had been at school with, mentioned at his memorial that one of the ways he’d changed from the last time they’d been together was that he blinked slower. And that’s what he did that afternoon in my flat: he blinked slower. At one point I mentioned a recent mugging, my first. It had been bad (clubbing, etc.) and as I was in the middle of my account I saw big tears rolling down his cheeks. He got up, I got up, and we embraced, Dan squeezing with all his strength.

He’d turned a corner. Dan had always been a mix of the almost irrationally combative and an almost equally perplexing vulnerability. But the combativeness had pretty much disappeared (the battles he chose were always uphill ones, and how long can that be sustained?), leaving the vulnerability and lostness. In the past, your desire to shelter him was always at war with the things he would do or say that made you feel you had to take him on. Now, shelter was everything.

I wish I could say we were able to resume our former closeness, but this was not to be. In addition to our past troubles, the hiatus of a few years had made a change in our orbits—we had different friends, different projects, different perspectives. And there was the time factor: I had a full-time job and was often too beat to do much in my spare time (Dan wasn’t someone you could chill with), whereas he lived on disability checks and had an open calendar. The irony, if that’s what it is, is cruel and stupid: I, with very little free time, am writing this ten years later; while Dan, who had so little time left, had all the time in the world.

The evening after he smothered himself his roommate Miguel and I wrote his obituary together over the phone. We were hoping to get it into the proper obit page in the *Chronicle*, but it ended up in the paid listings, the fee paid for by one of Dan’s teacher friends. Miguel and I stumbled over how to describe Dan’s non-poetry “activities.” We finally settled on “iconoclastic social activist,” with a bit of tongue in our cheek (though Dan would have unhesitatingly agreed). Activism of a kind it certainly was. Once he strolled into a Nordstrom and lingered near a display table of high-end cosmetic items just long enough to surreptitiously deposit a professional-looking sign he’d made at home which said FREE—TAKE ONE. Pranks like these were warm-ups for his most elaborate hoax, a bogus Bart Bulletin which he’d done up on his computer to look like the real thing, and which stated that, due to the current oil crisis, Bart had been compelled to “review its services.” After a few public relations paragraphs that agonized over the difficult decisions Bart had to face during such a shortage, the bulletin

dropped the other shoe and said that it would be forced to raise fares by 80%—and all senior and handicapped fares would be discontinued. He took the original and photocopied a ream of these bulletins; then descended the stairs of the 16<sup>th</sup> and Mission Bart station and fearlessly deposited them in the Bart Bulletin receptacles, using his long overcoat to shield what he was doing from the security cameras, then went home and waited for the shit to hit the fan. Alas, this cherry bomb turned out to be a dud—after a few people called the administration offices to protest this new policy, the bulletins were found and pitched, and that was that.

Though Dan relished confrontation and courted it more aggressively than anyone I've ever known, some of his oppositionality could be conventional. During the first Gulf War he made a simple 8x11 page, which said simply SAY NO TO WAR, in big caps that filled the sheet, then made copies and put and plastered them everywhere—on retail bulletin boards, stacked in cafés, left in magazines at newsstands. People would find them and put them up in their homes. You'd take the bus and see the signs in apartment windows all over San Francisco.

His subtlest move, conceived and carried out during that first Gulf War, was also the one most deserving of "iconoclastic social activism." It was a small rectangular pin the size of a stick of Dentyne, worn on your shirt and bearing a single word: IRAQI. Dan wore his pin all the time and made them for anyone who wanted one. I don't know if Dan knew the work of Guy Debord (I suspect not, since he never mentioned Debord, and he mentioned everything) but his IRAQI pin was the perfect Situationist gesture. Transforming himself into a walking signifier of either a declared enemy "overseas" or a helpless civilian caught between two power-thugs, he forced people viscerally to have a view, and if they had one already, to assess and declare it. Strolling through the Financial District, down chi-chi Union and its phalanx of boutiques, or any neighborhood in the city that had a well-greased notion of the good life in America, Dan was a walking rip in the texture. He worked the effect of statement made away from a platform and dropped into the gaps of everyday living: if you can't bring the war home you can at least create a flash point that made avoidance of the discussion impossible. The hostility he provoked with this little pin was remarkable to behold. What's *that* supposed to mean, people would ask. What do *you* think it means, he asked them back. Even people not disposed to favor the war could be put off by the line in the sand, and for Dan a person polarized by such activities was a person jarred into seeing the picture whole (though this was an outcropping of one of his worst beliefs, that only polarized positions are deeply held).

Dan exemplified the spirit of the WWI-era avant-garde more than anyone I knew, and he felt the attendant pressurization. True avant-gardists are soldiers, working in ways that incur risk and casualty. Every successful gesture is further proof of the imperturbability of the mass. James Baldwin said that his writing was directed not toward the unconscious ones, who were probably beyond influence, but toward the *relatively* conscious, the ones who might be capable of dilating their perspective. Dan never made this distinction (he would have seen it as timidity) with the result that every incursion, even one that felt like a victory, was also a solitary head beating against a wall.

Not that the last life has been taken its forms  
hold and tend passage held in the light of hand  
a sweetening in the eyes a drinking  
that lays answering  
lending a final portion squeezed out of debt  
in the relationship of the overlooked a shaping  
of the personal  
not to have a clock bringing its share.

These opening lines from "Bureaucrat, My Love", Dan's best poem, seem to be counting down the seconds even as they reference sweetening and light. Written four years before he died, it's far from his last poem (some spiky, directly topical work was still to come) but it's the poem that seems, in my view, the one most haunted by a future reckoning he will never know. Something is being gathered and rehearsed.

Building on an idea of Nietzsche, Massimo Cacciari speaks of "posthumous people," artists and thinkers whose effect on others happens only after their death. "They are misunderstood more than others, more than actual people. And yet they are heard better (...) The ghosts of posthumous people practically force themselves to be heard, practically cause the dimension of hearing to be rediscovered." And yet this is surely a belief among the living, among poets—not as posterity but as the message in the bottle, as transmission to an imagined distant listener, who may turn out in the end to be only a future one. Dan's "relationship of the overlooked" is of this process. The overlooked could be the poet but could also be the unfound thought or preoccupation the poet is trying to pass to others, who may be able to take on the urgent whisperings in the poem and synthesize some of its nature in their own time on earth. Poetry-making, with its investment in imaginal and semantic complexes as bearers of hope, is also at times an act of mourning. Poets as posthumous people are the ones who consolidate and commemorate the loss of nature. They remember, then remember remembrance. And they also know that this is not one-directional. Reflection beams forward as much as it sifts down onto spent time.

Dan, my love, difficult and brilliant friend, you are remembered.

• • •

**Notes:** Previous versions of this excerpt have appeared in *Mirage #4 Period(ical)*, issue 134 (September 2006), edited by Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian; and on Michael Cross's blog, *The Disinhibitor* (<http://disinhibitor.blogspot.com>). Much thanks to these editors.

*Daniel Davidson's culture (Krupskaya) and Image (Zasterle)* can be ordered from Small Press Distribution ([www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org)). Sections of culture not included in *Krupskaya's* print edition can be accessed at the *Krupskaya* website at: [www.krupskayabooks.com/culture2.pdf](http://www.krupskayabooks.com/culture2.pdf).

**George Albon's** most recent book is *Momentary Songs (2008)*, from *Krupskaya*. Chapbooks from *Envelope* and *Albion Books* will appear later in the year. The above recollection is from *Cafe Multiple*, a prose work in progress.

## POEMS

---

*Sampler*

PETER CULLEY

*in memoriam Jonathan Williams & Gerry Gilbert*

Skutz Falls on  
 Bruckner's 4th  
 non-fog salvia's  
 anecdote the antidote.

Clarence Bend  
 broke then re-broke the ice-ends  
 confectioner's toffee holes  
 patched the interior.

Gravel spot-welds  
 baked the basket's granite  
 into flakes of fondant  
 iced with dust.

\*

Fornicating leaves  
 of each five one's turned upward  
 the vestige of Fielding Road  
 not excepted.

*Mythago Wood*  
 screech of harrier  
 screech of owl  
 permission to dig.

Sump path empties  
 into high river death splash  
 paint can pukes  
 its last bridge tag.

Landfill campers stumble  
 four steps from the fence  
 mouths full of pebbles  
 gullets full of debt.

Enormously reduced  
 by reverse mapping  
 muskeg description  
 pamphlet's gutter.

\*

A newly formatted  
raven's tongue  
pops digitally out & in

of trombone beak  
Texas jug band style  
but overhead no news crawl

no basslines from inland terraces  
or hoots from hominid heights,  
offroad daytrippers drop

off arbutus cloudtops  
badger into a crevasse  
midwestern cushion full stop tree

bent under a towhee  
the tread of a groundwater smeller  
rumbles through the cellar.

\*

Dig & tug  
where it's soft  
& not drained off.

South from Alaska  
a Rockford smog bomb  
digs its own tomb.

Fill's chewed up & gone over  
Fill's gone off  
Fill's gone fishy.

A vacant lot's  
a mountainside  
to which you're tied.

Parked at an angle,  
parked with struts,  
the runoff runs through the ruts.

A softball meteor  
redly sat except it  
can't be brought back.

Magnetism's a tip off,  
so're the iron fillings  
of the rent-a-cop.

\*

No used bookstore  
on the moon  
no white grow-tent puff

no Atlantis  
 no inflation  
 where the pampas meets the rough

no use for facetious  
 paperback feces  
 produced by our species

on fire when I bought it  
 I dropped it then fought it  
 just like they taught it.

\*

The reasons why I mumble  
 are numerous  
 & far from simple

from truck to trestle  
 bare arm tickles  
 conjoined freckle

we talk handshake talk  
 Harewood muscular under the dome  
 or pigeon walk home alone

wooly Bouvier wrists  
 grasping cans of Lucky  
 & freezer burn slushies.

\*

A ferry receipt's too thin  
 for the sort of work engaged in  
 by a jimmy-wielding skeleton

& the crocuses would like to know  
 if spring is here or will it go  
 the way of *Dr Zhivago*

garden shovels in a row  
 outside Rona row on row  
 yellow blue green yellow

our reno hit a rock  
 our reno hit the hard pan  
 our reno hit a wall

a business card's too thick  
 for all but thin-lipped heretics  
 stirring their Kool-aid with a stick.

\*

No need to get  
into a stewpot  
with a sacrificial horse

these days of course  
a streak of Bovril hot  
from tartan thermos

the battle of the trees  
& the battle of the letters  
& the battle between the

the letters & the trees & the rocks  
has got me threading  
paternoster naps past dawn—

*I am the falcon  
I fly blind  
through a progressive sky—*

Hampton Hawes  
of Hermosa Beach his  
harmonium gently weeps.

\*

Something  
you said once  
is why there's  
a past tense.

Anyone  
can say please  
that's hurtin'—  
tell it to the second person.

Vicodin country  
by funicular entry  
Rancho Relaxo  
by appointment to the gentry.

Vestigial barb  
on a red branch  
plausible to pollen  
but otherwise not often.

Somedays  
the heat's off  
& spring goes out  
the open window.

Talismanic  
ordinary chalices  
huddled masses  
take their chances.

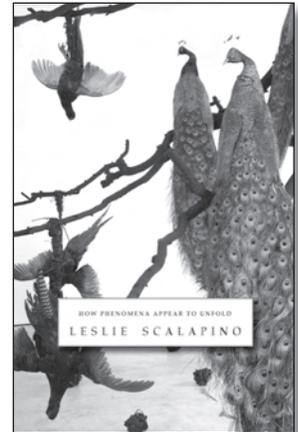
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Advancing thought  
like they ought  
the moon trails its coat  
across their throat.

\*

I wish I could sing  
like Ronnie Drew  
instead of sounding  
just like you.

With a nickel  
& a nail  
the Thursday freight  
his voice derailed—

foghorn from Goldfinch  
to Joanna  
from Elisabeth St.  
to Valhalla

something a circling bird  
discerned  
in meaty terms

what was said & not said,  
a hammering on  
an empty head.

Empress Citation  
disturbeth not  
the quails at their suppers;

though the lookout  
shoots through  
the sweet-pea undercoil

then squawks left six feet  
for everyone else  
it's just another brindle head

patrolling loose & low  
along the overgrowth's  
trackside pharmacopia.

**Peter Culley** lives in South Wellington on Vancouver Island. His books include *The Climax Forest*, *Hammertown* and *The Age of Briggs & Stratton*. His blog *mosses from an old manse* has been online since 2004.

## ESSAY

# “Minds do exist to agitate and provoke / this is the reason I do not conform” —Anna Mendelssohn

SEAN BONNEY



PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER RILEY. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN.

If you want to find good poetry written in Britain, you have to go looking for it: with very few exceptions, it is hidden away behind a poetry of more or less genteel self-expression, metrical sentimentalities and easily digested liberal homilies that are essentially reports on police reality.

But there is a vast seem of artistically and politically complex poetry also being written here, and Anna Mendelssohn, who sometimes also published under the name Grace Lake, wrote some of the best. It is chaotic, at times manic and compulsive, by turns mocking and playful, hurt and exasperated, and always exceptionally confrontational and political. At times the poems seem to begin and end almost arbitrarily, as if the reader has walked into a room midway through a conversation. They change direction rapidly: thoughts trail off and morph into associative play, from which a bewildering irruption of direct, and often accusatory speech, may appear—and just as quickly disappear back below the porous surface of the poem. To illustrate, here’s a fairly lengthy quotation from “June 21st”—students of radical European politics of the mid-twentieth century will get the title’s reference:

scour, grouse, loses back, knows how to, chervil.  
 little owl. who other trust loaded who quizz loess  
 italian fish, poitrine. chlorine fear rests, quizzical.  
 having taken, was that too, meurthe-et-moselle do not  
 walk on air, precipitate, mon dieux prie adieu  
 pieds noirs crumbs holt            john bull.  
 auxerre. cierre. du haut en bas.    homberg.  
 cherry brandy. strapped back. large glass goblet.  
 yellow glass avignon mass my brother he did me lacerate  
 laureate. a buff. they are the one. & to never  
 give the woman back to herself to tear away to sin  
 with loud hacks raw projections chewed and rough  
 the demolition, no, no to mind, no to soul, no to  
 o this lovely world in its various features

There’s nothing else like it. Mendelssohn’s work insists on poetry as a specific method of thought. These poems are saying something, something that can be only reached by means of the poem itself. That is, contrary to a few received ideas, poetry *does* communicate. If you are able to listen, if you are not a cop, you will be able to hear:

Purpose. Returns. Specific Movements. Voices that never fail to sustain a social dimension. Voices that don’t trail off into dyers land. Voices that don’t lounge as precautions to exhaustion in siesta time when observations could cause disruptions in tedium.

This, from “London 1971”, defines the poem’s voice as a means of *interruption*—that is, a communication that refuses by what it does, as much as by what it says. The voice’s “social dimension” is there to “cause disruptions in tedium”, to force official speech to convulse and break down into everything that it cannot, for its own obfusatory reasons, say. But because of that disruption, the poetic voice is aware that it is under counterattack, feels itself in danger of being forcibly disappeared, of being erased by a master discourse that needs, for its survival, to pretend that nothing in the poem actually exists. The poem, in much of Mendelssohn’s work, is not simply counter to official discourse; it is actively engaged in battle with it. Her bio note in the 1996 anthology *Conductors of Chaos* says as much:

My academic career was brought to an abrupt halt in 1967 by harassment, both political and emotional. Upon returning to this country, in 1970, I was attacked, my own poetry seized, and my person threatened with strangulation if I dared utter one word of public criticism. I was unable to return to university at that point and was silenced.

Those threats and that silencing were hardly metaphorical. Her note here was as close as she got in later life to referring to her involvement in radical countercultural politics, which led ultimately to seven years of imprisonment for alleged membership of the Angry Brigade, who in the early 1970s carried out a series of armed attacks against British capitalism. Their targets included police stations, Tory party offices, Scotland Yard's central computer and the trendy Biba boutique, as well as the offices of the Ford Motor Company and the home of Tory minister Robert Carr, architect of the Industrial Relations Bill. Mendelssohn consistently denied involvement with any actual bomb attacks, but she didn't deny that she had been heavily involved in left-wing activism, that she knew some of those involved; and she stated clearly that she was in sympathy with them, however much she disagreed with their actual methods.

Sensational biographical data such as this make it tempting to view Mendelssohn's poetic work as a continuation of left-wing action by other means. Poetry has after all been frequently used as a metaphor for revolutionary struggle. The Situationist Roaul Vaneigem called revolution "lived poetry", and in the *18th Brumaire*, Marx said that a successful revolution must have as its content the "poetry of the future".

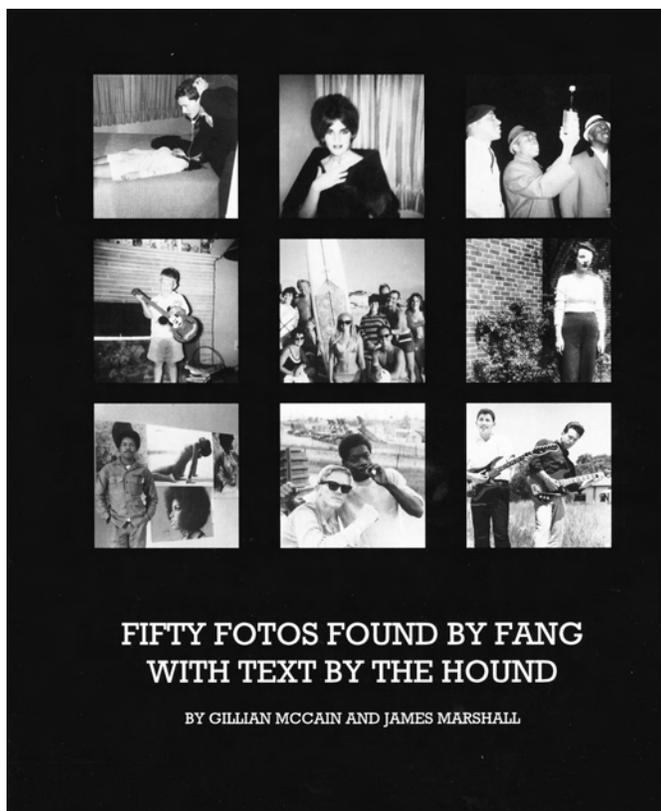
But after her release from prison, Mendelssohn always refused to speak about what she had been involved in. After a few years, she went to study literature at the University of Cambridge, and lived more or less reclusively

in that city for the rest of her life, concentrating all her energy into writing and painting. But that's not to say the poetry retreated into an apolitical hermeticism. Far from it: traces of her prison experience run through the work, and the *attitude* of the poetry is consistently one of absolute contempt for bourgeois society and its domination by police reality:

I do not run the prison system.  
I am not a lesbian.  
Serve your own sentences.  
In future.  
I collect sentences.  
I used to have a set of my own.

Musicians, artists, choreographers,  
windhover.

This is the sentence of the poet versus the sentence of the judge: the interrupting voice versus the voice of authority that will punish all interruptions. Mendelssohn's utopian society of art is overridden and taken away by the sentences of authority. It is unsurprising, then, that a dominant mood in Mendelssohn's work is anxiety, and even a sense of persecution. It is a political poetry that is fully aware of the limits of what is permitted in bourgeois society, that understands that for a revolutionary, or ex-revolutionary,



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the prison is the centre and the perimeter of permitted life. But the poetry is by no means that of the victim, or even of political defeat. Written largely between the mid-1980s and the late 2000s—that is, through one of the most reactionary periods of recent British history—what is remarkable about Mendelssohn’s work, in this context, is its absolute refusal of the melancholy of failure, or of fearful attempts to reintegrate into the dominant system. In the poem “Half”, she mocks those who are “bombasting rebellion yet demanding legal status”.

Refusal is a key element of the poem’s communication: there are many to whom that communication is refused. At one point she mentions those who are “never to be allowed anywhere near this poem”, elsewhere she states unambiguously that “my poetry is not for them”, “I don’t talk to the police except never”. And more playfully: “I’m not suggesting any of you are landlords—only— / we are very different & I read Gogol from that position”. That position is *outside*, of both the judge’s sentences and the perimeters of the society he defines.

As far as Mendelssohn’s enemies are concerned, and these are many—not only judges but, variously, pompous poets, social workers, narrow-minded politicians and patriarchal imbeciles of all sorts—it is a communication that only speaks to them in order to deny their ability to read, and to refuse them a place within the poem. It is an outsidership that also has nothing to do with the easy conformity of the poet as some kind of rebel. Mendelssohn is no rebel; the content of her refusal to communicate with her enemies is one that demands the possibility of communication, and of the reality of a community that can exist despite the accusations of its incomprehensibility and illegitimacy. In the face of those who would have “silenced” her, the response is to speak a language to which they have no access.

“Minds do exist to agitate and provoke, to make”—this, in “pladd (you who say either)”, is as much of a statement of poetics as anyone could need. Poetry can’t be merely oppositional—and thus the agitation and provocative stance of Mendelssohn’s poetry must be such that its intensity can make a ground, can take position. The poems will keep the judges, etc. *out*, but those same words must have people to whom they *can* speak. The anguish of any oppositional writing is the doubt, not so much that anyone is listening, but that there is anybody to hear. But the question then becomes *how* do these poems speak. If a poem has to have content, it is not the same content as, say, an agitational leaflet, or a piece of journalism. The poem’s agitation comes from elsewhere.

Marx’s *18th Brumaire* has a somewhat cryptic hint for poets who would be properly political, as opposed to being the authors of protest poems: “there the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase”. Marx is arguing that the French revolutions of the nineteenth century failed because they still modelled themselves on historical events, when what was required was the discovery of a new model through the process of making it. For a poet, it means that the content isn’t something that can be poured readily into some preconceived form (*phrase*, in Marx’s terminology); rather the poem’s formal reality is smashed up by the emergence of new content.

live twine photo-wner lime scratch gap  
lice dodge trial & error electric patch pop  
tine dREEN w/th terrier legs of the giraffe  
wodge mile sceptic sc foulard two heads  
zipped aprons gloves pegged rug beads  
grist to the mill camille desmoulins free  
mistressclasses sc cross coloured glass  
scrovlong chiselled pros & cons slouch hat  
raised gutted close tense racing singing  
lachesis a back was taken for you were unwanted  
& the silence too failed to effectively resist  
a rush which should have, windswept, sufficed  
without the gold I did not hold or the cardboard  
partitions when my feet were meeting you  
in another cinema after the wrought iron gates  
closed before the ghostly market off the caledonian road.

That’s the first sentence from Mendelssohn’s “purdah darting glances”. The “ghostly market off the caldeonian road” makes me think of “The Caldeonian Market” by Brecht, but where in that poem Brecht rummages below the surface of the items that are for sale in the market, and pushes his hands into the detritus of the centuries, Mendelssohn begins with that detritus, the rubble and shit of language. Shattered words turn into objects, which in turn become statements. It is as if Brecht’s poem has been turned inside out.

The poem’s content, as an interrupting voice, comes from just that convulsion, where the poem turns inside out, where the statement emerges directly from the rubble of poetic form, or indeed from institutionalised avant-garde politesse. The untruths that the language carries are pounded into garbage, are twisted out of shape, until the perpetrators of those untruths can *no longer* enter the language, and so that not new forms, but new statements can emerge. Or, as Mendelssohn puts it beautifully: “a poem of objects that live by magic”.

• • •

**Note:** *Anna Mendelssohn passed away in 2009. Her major collection, Im placable Art, is still available (Salt Modern Poets/Equipage 2000), as is the pamphlet Py, from Oystercatcher Press. The pamphlets she published as Grace Lake through the nineties, including Viola Tricolor, Tondo Aquatique and Bernache Nonette, are rather harder to come by: they need to be reprinted in a single volume as a matter of urgency. Meanwhile, Europe is on fire. Its spectres have arisen.*

**Sean Bonney** has written *Blade Pitch Control Unit* (Salt, 2005), *Baudelaire in English* (Veer, 2008) and *Document: Poems, Diagrams, Manifestos* (Barque 2009). His sequence “after Rimbaud” is being published serially in various fugitive editions, and his long poem “The Commons” will be published in 2011. He lives in London, UK, but can be found at [abandonedbuildings.blogspot.com](http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.com).

# POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

## 2/2 WEDNESDAY

### Thomas Devaney & Dara Wier

**Thomas Devaney** is the author of two poetry collections, *A Series of Small Boxes* (Fish Drum) and *The American Pragmatist Fell in Love* (Banshee Press); and a nonfiction book, *Letters to Ernesto Neto* (Germ Folios). Recent poems have been published in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Jacket*, and *The Awl*. He teaches at Haverford College and is the editor of *ONandOnScreen* (poems + videos). **Dara Wier's** *Selected Poems* came out last fall from Wave Books. She's on the permanent faculty of the University of Massachusetts Amherst MFA Program for Poets and Writers and the Juniper Summer Writing Institute.

## 2/7 MONDAY

### Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:45.

## 2/9 WEDNESDAY

### Patti Smith w/ Lenny Kaye & Janet Hamill

Forty years ago, on February 10, 1971, **Patti Smith** made her Poetry Project debut accompanied by **Lenny Kaye** on guitar. On this ruby anniversary, Patti and Lenny celebrate four decades of "three chords merged with the power of the word" in a special commemorative concert of poetry and music to benefit the Poetry Project. Patti recently won the National Book Award for nonfiction for her memoir *Just Kids*. Opening the evening will be their longtime friend **Janet Hamill**, who has published five books of poetry, the latest called *Body of Water*, and two CDs of spoken word backed by the music of Moving Star. The event will be held in the Sanctuary. *Tickets for this special performance are \$15 general admission, \$10 for Project members/students.*

## 2/11 FRIDAY (10 PM)

### Steven Karl & Kathleen Miller

**Steven Karl** is the author of *State(s) of Flux* (Peptic Robot Press, 2009), which is a collaborative chapbook with Joseph Lappie, and *(Ir)Rational Animals* (Flying Guillotine Press, 2010). In one way or another he is involved with Borough Writing Workshops, Coldfront Magazine, Sink Review, and Stain of Poetry. He lives in Brooklyn, NY and blogs at [stevenkarl.blogspot.com](http://stevenkarl.blogspot.com). **Kathleen Miller** is a poet and social worker who lives in Brooklyn. Her work has been featured in publications such as *HOW2*, *Jacket*, *Faux Press' Bay Poetics Anthology*, *Matrix Magazine* and *Shifter Magazine*. Her chapbook, *The Weather is Happening All Around Us*, was published by Delirium Press in 2006.

## 2/14 MONDAY

### Caroline Bergvall & Kim Rosenfield

**Caroline Bergvall** works across media and art forms. Her projects alternate between books, audio pieces, performances, and installations. Her publications

include *Goan Atom* (2001), *Fig* (2005), *Plessjor* (2007) and *Alyson Singes* (2008). *Meddle English New and Selected Texts* has just been published by Nightboat Books. Currently an AHRC Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts (2007–2010), she will be a Visiting Fellow at the University of Copenhagen in Spring 2011. She lives in London. **Kim Rosenfield** is the author of five books of poetry and maintains a private psychotherapy practice in NYC. Her latest book, *Lividity*, is forthcoming from Les Fignes Press in 2012.

## 2/16 WEDNESDAY

### Alan Gilbert & Anna Moschovakis

**Alan Gilbert** is the author of the book of poems, *Late in the Antenna Fields* (Futurepoem, 2011), and a collection of essays entitled *Another Future: Poetry and Art in a Postmodern Twilight* (Wesleyan University Press, 2006). His poems have appeared in *Bomb*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *The Nation*, among other places. He lives in Brooklyn. **Anna Moschovakis's** debut collection, *I Have Not Been Able to Get Through to Everyone*, was featured in *Poets & Writers* and was a finalist for the Norma Farber First Book Award. Her new collection is *You and Three Others are Approaching a Lake* (Coffee House, 2011).

## 2/21 MONDAY

### Lewis Freedman & Nathaniel Otting

**Lewis Freedman** reads poems, writes poems and currently resides in Madison, where he runs the \_\_\_\_\_-Shaped Reading series with Andy Gricevich. Two chapbooks, *The Third Word* [what to us(press)] and *Catfish Po' Boys* (minutes BOOKS) were published in 2009. He is also a co-editor at the multi-locatable Agnes Fox Press. **Nathaniel Otting's** a sub-sub librarian for Flying Object, minutes BOOKS, and Walsler & Company. Some poems can be found in *Skein*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and *notnostrums*. His first chap or book is *The Wrong Tree; or, Some Wrong Book* (Supermachine, 2-11).

## 2/23 WEDNESDAY

### Studying Hunger Journals

Come celebrate the release of **Bernadette Mayer's** *STUDYING HUNGER JOURNALS* (Station Hill Press). In part, the journals explore psyche and were undertaken in cahoots with a psychiatrist via two running journals, so that while she kept writing in one he could read the other. She wrote in colored pens, intending to "color-code emotions"—to see if her synaesthetic ability to see letters as colors might act as a bridge to seeing emotions. She had had an idea: "...if a human, a writer, could come up with a workable code, or shorthand, for the transcription of every event, every motion, every transition of his or her own mind, & could perform this process of translation on himself, using the code...he or we or someone could come up with a great piece of language/information." While an abridged edition appeared in 1975 with *Adventures In Poetry/Big Sky*, this is the full text of that enterprise. The book will be read by a wide range of luminaries, including **Lee Ann Brown**,

**Barbara Epler**, **Phil Good**, **Bernadette Mayer**, **Don Yorty**, **Michael Ruby**, **Marie Warsh**, **Lewis Warsh**, **Adam Fitzgerald**, **Peggy Decoursey**, **Bill Kushner**, **Bill Denoyelles**, **Deborah Poe**, **Peter Baker**, **Miles Champion** and **CAConrad**.

## 2/25 FRIDAY (10 PM)

### A Reading for VANITAS 5: Film

This reading celebrates the publication of the fifth issue of *VANITAS*, a journal of poetry, criticism, and essays. *VANITAS 5* takes on film, to see what meanings attach to the word, what it is to have a screen between things, a boundary, lining, partition. The reading will feature contributors **Elaine Equi**, **Nada Gordon**, **Ron Horning**, **Jerome Sala**, **Tom Savage**, **David Shapiro**, **Tony Towle**, and **John Yau**.

## 2/28 MONDAY

### Stephanie Barber & Adam Robinson

**Adam Robinson** lives in Baltimore, where he runs Publishing Genius, plays guitar in Sweatpants, and writes. His first book, *Adam Robinson and Other Poems* (Narrow Books, 2009) won second prize in the Stupid River. **Stephanie Barber** is a writer and multimedia artist currently living in Baltimore, MD. Her book and DVD, *these here separated to see how they standing alone or the soundtrack to six films by stefanie barber*, was published in 2008 by Publishing Genius. Other books include *for a lawn poem* (Publishing Genius, 2007) and *poems* (Bronze Skull Press, 2006).

## 3/2 WEDNESDAY

### Kenneth Irby & Pierre Joris

**Kenneth Irby** was born in Bowie, Texas, in 1936, and grew up in Fort Scott, Kansas. He was educated at the University of Kansas, Harvard University, and the University of California, Berkeley. Some recent books include *In Denmark* (in the second issue of No: a journal of the arts, 2003); *Studies* (First Intensity Press, 2001); and *Ridge to Ridge* (OtherWind Press, 2001). His *The Intent On: Collected Poems 1962–2006* was published by North Atlantic Books late in 2009. **Pierre Joris** is a poet, translator, essayist and anthologist who has published over forty books, most recently *Canto Diurno #4: The Tang Extending from the Blade*, a 2010 Ahadada Books ebook, *Justifying the Margins: Essays 1990–2006* and *Aljibar I & II* (poems). Recent translations include *Paul Celan: Selections*, and *Lightduress* by Paul Celan, which received the 2005 PEN Poetry Translation Award. With Jerome Rothenberg, he edited the award-winning anthologies *Poems for the Millennium* (volumes I & II).

## 3/7 MONDAY (6 PM)

### 13<sup>th</sup>-Annual Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam Prelims

*\$5 Teens, \$7 Adults, FREE for Performers*  
NYC's hottest teen poets compete for a chance to represent their city at the Brave New Voices

National Teen Poetry Slam in San Francisco, CA. Come support the voices of the next generation, as they take the stage and speak their mind. To enter, poets must be 13–19 years old, and sign up at [www.urbanwordnyc.org](http://www.urbanwordnyc.org) or just show up. First come, first served. Audience members are encouraged to come early, as seating is limited.

### 3/9 WEDNESDAY

#### Clark Coolidge & Filip Marinovich

**Clark Coolidge's** most recent books are *The Act of Providence*, a long poem about his hometown (Combo Books, 2012), and *This Time We Are Both*, the result of a trip to the USSR with the Rova Saxophone Quartet in 1989. A collection of the writings, lectures and conversations of Philip Guston, edited by Coolidge, has just appeared from The University of California Press. He lives in Petaluma, California. **Filip Marinovich** is the author of *Zero Readership* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2008) and *And If You Don't Go Crazy I'll Meet You Here Tomorrow* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011). His poems have appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Aufgabe*, *EOAGH*, *Critiphoria*, and *True Expression: Village Zendo Journal*. A poet living in New York City since 1993, Filip has also performed his poetry in Belgrade, San Francisco, and Paris.

### 3/11 FRIDAY (10 PM)

#### Sommer Browning & Mathias Svalina

**Sommer Browning's** first book of poems, *Either Way I'm Celebrating*, is coming out in February 2011 with Birds, LLC. She draws cartoons, writes poems, teaches bookmaking and, with Julia Cohen, curates The Bad Shadow Affair reading series in Denver, Colorado. **Mathias Svalina** is the author of one collection of poems, *Destruction Myth* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2009), five chapbooks, and five collaborative chapbooks, four of them written with Julia Cohen. He also has a hybrid novella forthcoming, *I Am A Very Productive Entrepreneur* (Mud Luscius Press, 2011). With Zachary Schomburg, he co-edits the online poetry journal *Octopus Magazine* and the small press Octopus Books. He lives in Denver, Colorado.

### 3/14 MONDAY

#### Molly Bendall & Daniel Tiffany

**Molly Bendall** is the author of four collections of poetry: *After Estrangement*, *Dark Summer*, *Ariadne's Island*, and, most recently, *Under the Quick* (Parlor Press). She has co-authored, with Gail Wronsky, two collections of "cowgirl" poetry and the new *Bling & Fringe* from What Books. She teaches at the University of Southern California. **Daniel Tiffany** has published translations of Sophocles, Georges Bataille, and the Italian poet Cesare Pavese. His critical works include *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (University of California Press, 2000) and *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance* (University of Chicago Press, 2009). His first volume of poetry, *Puppet Wardrobe*, was published in 2006 by Parlor Press; a second book of poems, *The Dandelion Clock*, appeared from Tinfish Press in 2010.

### 3/16 WEDNESDAY

#### Connie Deanovich & Sharon Mesmer

**Connie Deanovich** is the author of *Zombie Jet* and *Watusi Titanic*. Widely anthologized and published in the small presses, Deanovich is from Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin. **Sharon Mesmer's** most recent poetry collections are *The Virgin Formica* (Hanging Loose, 2008) and *Annoying Diabetic Bitch* (Combo Books, 2008); previous collections are *Half Angel*, *Half Lunch* (Hard Press, 1998) and the chapbooks *Vertigo Seeks Affinities* (Belladonna Books, 2006) and *Crossing Second Avenue* (ABJ Books, Tokyo, 1997), which was published to coincide with a month-long reading tour of Japan. For the past fifteen years she has taught literature courses, fiction workshops, and graduate poetry seminars at the New School in Manhattan. She is a member of the flarf collective.

### 3/21 MONDAY TALK SERIES

#### Sergio Bessa & Mónica de la Torre: Materials

Conversation, analysis, short readings, and provocations around the idea of materials, with two writers who dilate the hemispheric. **Sergio Bessa** is director of curatorial and education programs at the Bronx Museum. He is the author of *Öyvind Fahlström—The Art of Writing* and co-editor of *Novas—Selected Writings of Haroldo de Campos*, both through Northwestern University Press. He has recently released *Mary Ellen Solt—Towards a Theory of Concrete Poetry*, a special issue of the Swedish journal *OEI*. **Mónica de la Torre** is a cross-disciplinary writer whose poetry books in English are *Talk Shows* (Switchback, 2007) and *Public Domain* (Roof Books, 2008). She is also author of two Spanish-language poetry books published in Mexico City: *Acúfenos* (Taller Ditoria, 2006) and *Sociedad Anónima* (Bonobos/UNAM, 2010). She is a 2009 NYFA poetry fellow and senior editor at *BOMB Magazine*.

### 3/23 WEDNESDAY

#### Artistic Directors of The Poetry Project TALK (6:30 PM) & READING (8 PM)

Paul Blackburn gave a reading on September 22, 1966, and so began the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church-In-the-Bowery. The Project has been a major force in contemporary poetry for 45 years, and run by poets for all of those years. Please join us as we celebrate this aspect of our history by hearing from the poets who filled the role of Artistic Director with a short panel followed by a reading. With **Anne Waldman**, **Ron Padgett**, **Bernadette Mayer**, **Eileen Myles**, **Ed Friedman**, **Anselm Berrigan** and current Director **Stacy Szymaszek**. We will also listen to recordings from founder Paul Blackburn and first Director Joel Oppenheimer.

### 3/25 FRIDAY (10 PM)

#### Jeremy Hoevenaar & Kristen Kosmas

**Jeremy Hoevenaar** was born in New Jersey, lived in New York City for nine years, and now lives and attempts to photosynthesize poems in Baltimore. Some work can be found in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Tantum Journal*, *The Recluse*, *Shifter Magazine*, and *Forklift, Ohio*. **Kristen Kosmas** is an American writer and performer. Her plays and solo performances have been presented at numerous venues, including the Prelude festival, Performance Space 122, Dixon Place, Little Theater, Barbès, the Ontological/Hysterical Downstairs Series, Experiments and Disorders, Supermachine, CROWD, and Yardmeter Editions. Her play *Hello Failure* was recently published by Ugly Duckling Presse.

### 3/28 MONDAY

#### Chris Glomski & Paul Foster Johnson

**Chris Glomski** was born in Pueblo, Colorado, and has mostly lived in or around Chicago. His first book of poetry, *Transparencies Lifted from Noon*, was published by Spuyten Duyvil Press in 2005. This spring, The Cultural Society will publish his second book, *The Nineteenth Century*. His translations of contemporary poet Massimo Gezzi will appear in a future issue of *Chicago Review*. **Paul Foster Johnson's** first collection of poetry, *Refrains/Unworkings*, was published by Apostrophe Books, and his second, *Study in Pavilions and Safe Rooms*, will be published by Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs. With E. Tracy Grinnell, he is the author of the g-o-n-g press chapbook *Quadruga*. His poems have appeared in *The Awl*, *Cannot Exist*, *GAM*, *EOAGH*, *Fence*, and *Octopus*. He is an editor at Litmus Press and lives in New York.

### 3/30 WEDNESDAY

#### Erica Kaufman & Maureen Owen

**Erica Kaufman** is the author of *consory impulse* (Factory School, 2009) as well as several chapbooks. Poems from her most recent project, *INSTANT CLASSIC*, can be found in *Little Red Leaves* and in *Elective Affinities*. She lives in Brooklyn and teaches at Baruch College and Bard's Institute for Writing & Thinking. **Maureen Owen**, poet, editor and publisher, is the author of ten poetry titles, most recently *Erosion's Pull* (Coffee House Press). Other titles include *American Rush: Selected Poems* and *AE (Amelia Earhart)*. Maureen currently teaches at Naropa University and is editor-in-chief of Naropa's on-line zine *not enough night*.

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8 PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. ADMISSION \$8 / STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7 / MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE  
THE POETRY PROJECT IS LOCATED IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER OF 2ND AVENUE & 10TH STREET IN MANHATTAN.  
CALL 212 674 0910 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE. SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY KAREEM ESTEFAN

**01. *The Correspondence of Kenneth Koch & Frank O'Hara, 1955–1956* and other series chapbooks**  
Ed. Josh Schneiderman;  
Ammiel Alcalay, Series Editor  
(Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative, 2009–2010)

“You really sit on your ears when you write, don't you?”

“How do you ever manage to record your sensations while falling down a flight of stairs, anyway? And I'm stuck in my nostalgia, like a mugwump.”

That's Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch, respectively, trading their awe of each other's poems in 1955. Gathering dozens of letters in two short volumes, editor Josh Schneiderman situates this correspondence in the moment after *Poetry* published a scathing review of Koch's first book, which O'Hara defended in the journal's following issue. The affair led Koch to write “Fresh Air,” and Schneiderman gives a fascinating account of Harvard's short-lived, iconoclastic journal *i.e.*, *The Cambridge Review*, which published the poem after O'Hara read it publicly.

In a lengthy introduction, Schneiderman tells the story of this correspondence by staying close to the poets' words and actions, even as he can only name their conjuncture distantly: “what Jordan Davis, registering everyone's distrust and tacit acceptance of the term, calls the ‘so-called “so-called New York School” of poets.’” Three pairs of quotation marks around New York School: this is the mediation CUNY's Lost & Found series of chapbooks seeks to pierce by lifting correspondence, critical prose, journals, and transcripts of talks out of library archives.

The series seeks not only to present noteworthy historical documents, but more importantly, “to intervene and intersect with conditions and interpretations of the present.” Many of the

editorial introductions protest the acceptance of theoretical stances foisted onto the poet retrospectively, a move that Diane DiPrima fights forcefully, in the body of her text, by resuscitating H.D.'s mysticism.

Reading these poets' uncollected writings is a joy, but it is questioning by Lost & Found editors like Ana Božičević that resonates across the series: “Is there something in the nature of terms defining critical vocabularies that precludes trusting the intent of the poet, forcing the critic's voice to take precedence?” In the tradition of the New College Poetics Program in which Robert Duncan and Diane DiPrima taught, CUNY's graduate students approach their archival research as scholars in creative collaboration with poets. They recognize the boundaries between poetics and criticism not to reinforce them, but to question the ways the history of “New American Poetry” has been written.

**02. *Pussy pussy pussy what what or Au lait day au lait day***  
Astrid Lorange  
(www.gauss-pdf.com, 2010)

As much a character as a chorus, *Pussy pussy pussy what what* steps on to twenty stages with as many voices in Astrid Lorange's PDF chapbook. “Pussy the softish Basket” spends six lines in each *au lait day* resort, by which O Lady Puss means as much as page, always more or less making equations, sciencelike or Steinlike or just “drunkish.” “What about as big as three names as / strapped together What about as as / firm as a tinned fish was about as as...”, Pppww thinks to herself.

On her own holiday from homeland Australia, Philadelphia-based poet Lorange falls for the practical pussy on her first page, who “figured out the wattage of my / reading lamp: seventy-odd. A / lesser girl O wouldn't've O no / couldn't've. I predict longlove.” Longlove: open Os and fused syllables flirt with the poet and her reader: “we made a fantasy involving suds / a handful of allergens some sexwax / [...] And then became aroused by *logic*.” Pppww sighs.

Triple p double double u laps up letters *au lait*, but the satisfactions of the text are not just the play of naming and numbering: *eros* here is present-tense entrance, that is, the pussy who

keeps walking in. Walking into the proverbial bar each time: I think this is why “Puss walks in more or less a joke” and enters another page “fitting like an anecdote.” Pussy is nobody or anybody, a joke or an anecdote, but in any case a subject. It is she who enters. “Puss like a / beer can two thumbs and a whiff / of a steelmill. Puss a speech act.” Lorange and Pppww laugh until the next act.

**03. *Chorégraphie***  
Nature Theater of Oklahoma  
(Handheld Editions, 2010)

*Chorégraphie* is one dancer's description of one minute of movement in a Nature Theater of Oklahoma performance. Filled with em dashes, “uhs” and ellipses, the text is extremely tentative, measuring the difficulty of representing dance in language (and at a distance from the event). It's also incomplete: three dancers performed a seven-minute sequence of movements, and their descriptions of this sequence “took (in total) longer than four-and-a-half hours to complete,” write Nature Theater core members Kelly Copper and Pavol Liska. The 16-page chapbook is necessarily a fragment, removing two dancers' testimonies and six minutes of performance.

Copper and Liska explain that the minute described here is the only moment in which “all three (finally) dance in unison.” In many senses, then, *Chorégraphie* represents a disarticulation: from the apparent unity of movement to the discrete units of language, from a sequence to a segment, and from a group to an individual dancer. Like past Nature Theater projects—their most recent performance, *Romeo & Juliet*, re-staged the play entirely from eight friends' memories—this chapbook showcases an awkward poetics of memory or what the group might call an “uh re-representation.”

So how does the text read? Like some admixture of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*, with the body in fragmented sentences, and *Soliloquy*, a stream of redundant and permuted utterances: “So—the arm comes up. / Or the—the—first comes up, / knuckles pointing... / to the—to the sky... / the thumb is probably pointing / at your ear... / Uh. / At that level.” Attempting to represent movement in speech, but also in retrospect, the dancer stutters and rewords under the contradictory pressures of improvisation

and reportorial accuracy. *Chorégraphie* is not a satisfying read, but Copper and Liska's editorial subtractions point the way out of the text, "to-ward...you// So. / Uhm...," into a redacted world.

#### 04. *Amedillin Cooperative Nosegay* Lisa Jarnot (The Song Cave, 2010)

Animals, sounds, objects and relations collide in Lisa Jarnot's *Amedillin Cooperative Nosegay*, a long poem of correspondences and refrains. A flipbook that opens "into the eve of a picnic of trees of the strawberry rugulet rabbit tyrone / into a glazed economic disturbance caused by the rain most dramatic and strange," it is a musical gathering of names and patterns that creates new order by conflating and confusing conventional phrases. A *poesis* of the strange, Jarnot's associations of gratifying parts—"object relations banana"—come prior to grammar. Or in or of or with but not subject to it: "a tittle rizzle, after the z, after the e, a luminous simultaneity."

Jarnot works in threes for much of the chapbook, whether in brief stanzas, paragraph-long lists or columns down the center of the page: "what do you / know about chickens / about sadness and / raspberry jam and / the hundred thousand / songs of milarepa / a molecular empathy / plinkets of sunlight / connecting all the / stars." If it's a challenge, it's also a lullaby: "connecting all the stars" as the astronomical enormity of knowing and not-knowing and a delightful way to exhaust and rest the eyes.

The names of writers and friends appear throughout the poem and so do "the polish president," "icelandic volcano ash," and other occasions for mourning and wonder between August 23, 2009, and August 23, 2010, the compositional frame noted at the end. Jarnot placidly records the passing of the poet and pacifist anarchist Tuli Kupferberg: "deep meta-physical fatigue / beautiful but stupid / and tuli also // that we slip / into and out / of the world." A name as the conjuncture of the beautiful and the stupid, or, life as slipping: reasons to read *Amedillin Cooperative Nosegay*.

**Kareem Estefan** currently co-curates the *Segue Series* at the Bowers Poetry Club and studies art criticism and writing at the School of Visual Arts.

#### *Whistle While You Dixie* Dodie Bellamy (Summer BF Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY JESS BARBAGALLO

"Whistling is freakish, like a wheeze that has been unnaturally domesticated. Writing this piece I am actively not-whistling." And so Dodie Bellamy employs the subversive tack of engaging with the whistle as both irritant and seducer in her mediation of physical want and political obligation. *Whistle While You Dixie* is a piece in two parts: the first a playful essay of whistling as a token of masculine privilege in the midst of toil, the second a nostalgic account of hitchhiking from Sarasota to Bloomington with a tall drink of water, "kind of creepy, but so fucking easy to talk to." This simplicity provides an Achilles' heel and poetic muse for our dear narrator. Bellamy recalls "his long dusty body...as slick as a whistle" and brings the reader back to her initial declaration (regarding the lure of the carefree country tune "You Ain't Just Whistling Dixie"): "Despite my resistance I feel a pervy twinge of wanting the wrong thing." This slow burn is the catalyst for her subsequent musings on work and personal growth. The pleasures of Bellamy's chapbook unfold slowly, in long sentences that seem nearly incapable of containing the vastness of her memories and desires. As she wryly puts it, "If my mother knew any of this she'd say I was nothing but trash." Bellamy makes no attempt to reconcile high and low iconography (references range from *The Seven Dwarves* to Anne Carson), instead situating herself as feminist trickster, simultaneously performing a critique of old fairytales and modern-day deconstructions of feminine tropes. She is not relieved by Carson's pronouncement that women's sounds are of "madness and witchery" because it is an idea she knows already. Too easy. Bellamy wishes to earn her hard knocks as she heads out on the road: "I was feeling like a desperate pervert. I was 23 and he was just old enough to have a driver's license—just." She is attuned to the delicacy of growing pains and even the vulnerability of budding manhood. This sensitivity complicates her reading of the hard men who formed her early conceptions of the world ("They had no morals...they farted and belched and fucked like rabbits, they had ten dollars apiece and our tax dollars paid for them to be on welfare") and the patriarchy they inevitably

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reinforced. But instead of finding ways for story to conveniently and prettily tie these complicated strands together ("In a perfectly wrought narrative he would have pulled away whistling...") Bellamy uses the imperfect space to insert her own fanciful, inventive imagery. She leaves us with one final picture, a brilliant reimagining of Disney's "Whistle While You Work" in which Bellamy posits herself as a latter-day Snow White baking a peach cobbler: "Nobody whistles. A squirrel pees on the rug, a deer shits on the kitchen floor—feathers piss shit slobber fur—my animal minions flee before it's time to clean up. They're no slaves to drudgery." It's a mess to be sure, but a liberating one of words without easy answer. As those loving friends respond to the taste of her finished cobbler in the closing lines of *Dixie*: "Wow."

**Jess Barbagallo** is a performer and writer living in Brooklyn. She is working on a novella called *Dunk Unicorn*, or *Drunk Unicorn*.

#### *Mum Halo* John Coletti (Rust Buckle Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY ALLI WARREN

In John Coletti's *Mum Halo*, the poet carries his "full body full of ands" out into the world and produces his "own little larder". This book is that larder. In his hands, the pains and joys of the everyday become salty blossoms of strength-to-go-on, a storehouse of playful subject wisdom.

Tight lines of "stiff little adjectives" quickly sound out the highlights and banalities of whole seasons. Rarely are there commas.<sup>1</sup> Each line carries equal weight. The lines, and the poems they build, do not strive for linguistic or political synthesis. They simply and powerfully appear there on the page, one after the other, self-contained yet entirely open to the power of being activated by a reader. This prosody—at the level of the line, the poem, and the book—envelops the reader in reflective openness. Never precious. Simultaneously tender and "gritty, non-committal." Kindhearted and street-smart. Where

<sup>1</sup> "A comma by helping you along holding your coat for you and putting on your shoes keeps you from living your life as actively as you should lead it and to me for many years and I still do feel that way about it only now I do not pay as much attention to them, the use of them was positively degrading." —Gertrude Stein

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the language is attuned to “nature,” it is almost always complicated by something distinctly “artificial.” This writing is set in an environment in which both civilian life and “apricot tree[s]” are under siege. Within this spectacularized, administered existence, the false binary (natural/unnatural) is shown to be (poetically) vacant. As in the poem “Prepackaged Beef”, flowers appear, and they bend, as flowers do, but they are made of wax. Human bodies and bird bodies, forests and rocks, language and love, all this pliable wax. For instance: “Still warm from the baths / Velveeta, turkey, processed lettuce” (10), “10P1 trim 36M6 daisies” (46), and “rose rose bodega rose” (65).

Now consider some lines from “Open Marriage”:

like that Nabisco building  
there, on the river  
drifting so far away I forgot  
true love’s not gentle  
triangular circle

And from “Fat Looking”:

my ear, the one that works  
has a big crossbow coming out of  
its Spanish lifter, soldier  
silhouettes planting daisies  
at the feet of their sweethearts  
567 pounds for me mother  
and a napkin for pal

And from “Flower Pot Inlay”:

clay hearts circle Fabergé  
bird-rabbits punch breeze  
oozing optical mall trestles  
my perception of violence  
mist resting autumn sky  
I like my little secret  
only hurts myself

I trust that the poet is constructing the poem (he’s not been replaced by a chat room, or another text) but the intricacies of his lyric “I” are not the sole focus. Sound floats above meaning; perspective weaves in and out of the text. When a seemingly solid point of view does appear, it’s full of *jouissance* (sorry) and concise attention to the wounds of lived life, the everyday, how each node bursts. Add to this “still green periodic O” an underlying humor, and you’ve got a winning combination of an energetic and delicate prosody. A dynamic acuity is developed through little to no punctuation, and lines of distinct but complementary metrics are given space to breathe.

Often lines end before they truly “conclude”—“Choir boys grilling steak in my”—which helps to create an interactive, creative reading experience. A thought is pinned to the meter of a line for but a moment, and then the action is carried over and reinterpreted through the next line(s). Observe this method at work/play in the poem “Little Cone”: “what a sensation having ears / professionally cleaned”.

Surely the reader enjoys this sort of contemplative yet charmingly goofy observation? The body is concretely referenced and then reflected back upon itself. Then the line breaks and shatters the window frame. Ears become *real* ears, deeply embodied in active maintenance. These sorts of twists and turns happen often in *Mum Halo*. Quick syncopated shots of inner life, walking-about, and love, and the city, and “deep black eggs”.

Poems in this collection end in the most unexpected fashion. Never totalizing or bow-tying what has come before, but meanwhile making sense of the preceding rush. Finding a nice place to sit in a crowded market. Try these on for size: “very hard to spoon a fan” (80), “look how pretty old bills were” (94), “Invisible oxen I might be perpetually” (14), “feeling those stones” (28), “only hurts myself” (41), “all the rocks looking like rocks” (45), “planning bruise for higher purpose” (50), “all your public private language” (52), “pants barely on” (53).

Or maybe it’s John’s *represented relation to the world* that resonates with me. In the poem “Old Blackbooks”, a subject is represented by the following position: “politics take on a clarity I can’t”. In the poem “The Most Beautiful Thing I’ve Ever Seen”, an “I” is represented as “scared of running out of problems”. And this starry gem is just given away: “no fear, no envy, no meanness”. These poems are introspective yet never unaware of the self’s preoccupations. Textual others (readers) are welcomed, as is the real world, and those who reside there. Held at once. It’s like two friends sharing a grapefruit on a bench in the middle of the street. One friend peeling and sectioning, the other chewing. Bittersweet fruit held out in the palm ‘til the fruit vanishes.

**Alli Warren’s recent chapbooks include** *Acting Out and Well-Meaning White Girl*. *She lives in Oakland.*

*Poems 1945–1971*  
Miltos Sachtouris  
Translated from the Greek  
by Karen Emmerich  
(Archipelago Books, 2006)

REVIEW BY W. MARTIN

In his essay “Edgar Jené and the Dream About the Dream,” the Bukovina-born poet Paul Celan addresses the defilement of language and the spirit through “evil and injustice in the world”; and he proposes a corrective: not in the unlikely rationality-induced return to an ahistorical state of “original grace,” but in the poetic renewal and freedom generated by collisions of “words and figures from the remotest regions of the spirit... images and gestures, veiled and unveiled as in a dream...”:

When they meet in their heady course, and the  
spark of the wonderful is born from the marriage  
of strange and most strange, then I will know I  
am facing the new radiance.<sup>1</sup>

Celan’s early poetry, in both Romanian and German, germinated in this surreal radiance before he began grappling with the geo-etymological sources of his later work; but he was not the only postwar (South-)Eastern European poet to engage the imagination and language of surrealism, often combined with those of inherited folk traditions (one distinguishing factor from the French movement), in response to historical trauma. A similar oneiric alchemy is operative in the poetry of other mid-century Romanians like Gellu Naum, Gherasim Luca, Eugen Jebeleanu, and Nichita Stănescu, as well as the Yugoslavs Vasko Popa and Dane Zajc, and the Greek Nobel laureates Odysseus Elytis and George Seferis; and the Greeks’ younger compatriot Miltos Sachtouris (1919–2005) shared in this local aesthetic. His *Poems 1945–1971*, translated by Karen Emmerich and published not so very long ago by Archipelago Books, demonstrates an affiliation with this community of twentieth-century European poets, many of whom—unlike Sachtouris, so far at least—are well known to American readers and writers.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan, *Collected Prose*, translated by Rosmarie Waldrop (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), 6.



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to *Felician*, which her sister Isolde Moser (the co-executor of her literary estate) introduced this way: "The following letters by my sister Ingeborg date from 1945–46. They are unsigned, were never sent, and are addressed to an imaginary 'you': to 'Lover, dear,' 'My only friend,' 'Distant friend,' and finally 'Felician.'" What's interesting is Moser's care not to speak of these letters as a work of fiction, but rather as real letters to a fictional addressee. No wonder the writer knew that her letters would never arrive at their destination: "I go astray in everything."

Moser goes on to observe that *Letters to Felician* shows how Bachmann "strives for, and finds, a male authority, but one which does not repudiate the female ego." But Bachmann's writing, and what one knows of her life, suggests that this address to an authoritative male figure was something that never succeeded as she hoped. "I direct all my energy to you for nothing," she wrote to Felician. "This is our destiny. Never to reach each other"—like letters gone astray. Likewise in the long unsent letter she wrote to Celan in the early fall of 1961, "this is, once again, not the right time to say a number of things that are difficult to say; but there is no right time"—for her, the Today in which what one wants to write can coincide with what the other reads never came to pass.

Six years older than Bachmann when they met in 1948, Celan was not yet the renowned poet he would soon be—his "*Todesfuge*" was published

that same year—but he was already a poet while she was a 21-year-old philosophy student only starting to publish her first poems. He was just passing through Vienna. "The surrealist poet Paul Celan," Bachmann wrote to her mother, "who is very fascinating, has, splendidly enough, fallen in love with me, which adds a little spice to my dreary work. Unfortunately he has to go to Paris in a month." His first writing to her was the poem "*In Ägypten*," which would later be included in the collection *Mohn und Gedächtnis* in 1952, a poem that plays with the dichotomy between "*die Fremde*" (the foreign or "strange" woman) and the Jewish ones, Ruth, Miriam, and Noemi—like that between Margarete and Shulamith in "*Todesfuge*." Perhaps the Jew from Bukovina who'd lost his parents to the Nazis could not be but ambivalent toward a young Austrian, albeit one who felt her childhood had ended the day the Nazis invaded her home town of Klagenfurt; later, her novels would anatomize what Michel Foucault would call (apropos not of Bachmann but of Deleuze and Guattari) "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior"—and above all, as Bachmann herself put it in an interview in 1971, "in the relationship between a man and a woman."

It was in Paris, of course, that Celan would spend his life, while Bachmann remained in Vienna until she moved to Rome in 1953; but between these lovers was more than a geographical distance. Already in his first surviving letter,

from January 1949, Celan is asking Bachmann to "try for a moment to forget that I was silent for so long and so insistently." Meetings between the two were sporadic, yet the relation continued fitfully until 1952. The two poets met again at a conference in 1957, by which time Celan was already married to Gisèle Lestrange; the affair recommenced, more intensely this time, only to burn out six months later. Yet for several years the friendship continued, with occasional meetings that sometimes also included Gisèle—who'd known of the affair—and Max Frisch, with whom Bachmann began living late in 1958. When Celan published *Sprachgitter* in 1959, the copy he sent her contained twenty-one handwritten dedications of specific poems to her, and her copy of the 1955 edition of *Mohn und Gedächtnis* includes twenty-three such dedications of poems dating from the period of their first affair; the great poet of the Shoah, of mourning, was also, we are reminded, a poet of the most intense eroticism.

The letters are half passion and regret, half business. No lover's quarrel was so tempestuous that at the same time they couldn't express their literary comradeship by sharing advice about dealing with publishers, reviewers, and the like. And it was a review rather than love that poisoned the friendship beyond healing. When a critique appeared of *Sprachgitter* that Celan believed to be motivated by anti-Semitism, neither Bachmann nor Frisch responded as Celan thought they should; it was especially galling



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that Frisch had advised him to beware mixing up wounded vanity with deeper issues. "I do not know whether it is true of you," Frisch wrote, "but I know how glad I sometimes am to learn that a critic who offends my ambition is a shady character politically." Celan's need for support became a kind of blackmail: "Your letter," said Frisch, "does not ask me—your letter gives me a chance to prove myself if I react to the review... in the same way as you." Neither Bachmann nor Frisch, though their letters evince genuine concern for Celan, responded as he required, and so, he wrote, "As hard as it is for me, Ingeborg—and it is hard for me—I must now ask you not to write to me, not to call me, not to send me any books; not now, not in the months ahead, not for a long time. And please, both of you, do not force me to send back your letters!"

Within a week he was taking it back, excusing a "cry for help" but in a manner that could only offend—"you do not hear it, you are not within your own heart (where I expect you to be), you are...in literature." The correspondence limped on for another two years, but hopelessly. The unsent letter Bachmann wrote sometime after September 27, 1961, was its clear-eyed epitaph. "You want to be the victim," she wrote. "You want them to have your ruin on their conscience." In hindsight, Bachmann's words seem prophetic. Celan and Bachmann are two of the outstanding poets of the twentieth century—Celan, perhaps the greatest of all. But the reception of his work has been marred by a tendency to see him simply as he demanded to be seen: as the eternal victim, the entirely pure man surrounded by "cowardice, mendacity, infamy" (as he wrote to himself of Frisch's letter). His blind spot was the certainty that what makes for fascism was entirely outside himself. Bachmann was in many ways more clear-eyed. One closes this book admiring her more than before, but wanting to read Celan more warily.

**Barry Schwabsky** is art critic for *The Nation* and co-editor of international reviews for *Artforum*. His most recent publications of poetry are *Book Left Open in the Rain* (Black Square Editions/The Brooklyn Rail, 2009) and *12 Abandoned Poems* (Kilmog Press, 2010).

*The Port of Los Angeles*  
Jane Sprague  
(Chax Press, 2009)

REVIEW BY DIANE WARD

*The Port of Los Angeles* gathers together Jane Sprague's writings around "the flow" that transcends goods and information, chemistry and economics, unending consumption and poetic place. More than a place of destination or home, the Port of Los Angeles is a continual presence in Sprague's life that becomes a metaphoric transformation machine—"whether we wanted this or not // it was there // was us // defining us we // all the time now". To live and write within the reach of the Port is to be subsumed by transcendent, shifting scales of physicality and connectedness that offer Sprague the opportunity to critique "Citizen Jane" in a "sullied biosphere". This biosphere is where we observe that "glacial ice... / shears off melting / science see it explode". But this is not a controlled experiment, and Sprague's critique necessarily seeps beyond discrete binaries (science and subject, observer and observed, cause and effect) and begins to encompass the transformation of the observed within the "observable environment", that thing out there that contains us and all *our* things. The resulting field of focus includes the subject as context, as well as the context as subject. *The Port of Los Angeles* is situated in the gap between what "science sees" and what the objectified can "know"—

its multi-directional exploration of movement transforms itself just as it transforms its context.

Sprague moved from upstate New York to Southern California where "we found ourselves perfectly pitched at the edge of globalism / the lip". Her new life—"our perfect hemmed-in-ness"—was now contained in a small beach bungalow in a neighborhood developed on a series of islands built from landfill in the thoroughly dredged Alamitos Bay at the mouth of the San Gabriel River. This manufactured place was conceived as the "the dreamland of Southern California." Sprague's neighborhood of Italianate street names sits within a network of canals populated by small boats, a perpetually simulated tableau of leisure. From here, Sprague observes the Port—the busiest container port in the U.S., receiving mass-produced goods from China, shipping out the recyclable detritus of consumption (such as cardboard) back to China, while producing toxic levels of air pollution and exponentially elevated rates of cancer.

*The Port of Los Angeles* is not about a place or the permanence of objects, just as the Port is not a destination, but a node, a place of connection. These connections result from the incessant flow that seems to "flatten" distinctions. The environment, the goods, and the inhabitants' physicality are devoid of difference ("same hand / same sound / same nation city street..."), forcibly "parsed into sectors or boxes of labeled and specific function..." and destabilized ("a word beyond patience"). And yet,



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“whether we agreed or did not agree with the expansiveness of our we / ... whether we agreed or did not agree we were electric bodies fitting space”. An acknowledgment of connectivity between traditional opposable binaries grows throughout this book. There is the anthropomorphic “a long thick / finger of grease” that exists alongside human designations for environmental processes or zones that are mapped back onto the human “...spines to the earth / our littoral zone” so responsibility’s cause and effect are conflated into “our speciest / garble speech / us fat pronoun / unmaking ourselves”.

*The Port of Los Angeles* is itself a “long-distance reclamation project” within these flows as they turn the pieces of a fractured existence back onto themselves. “California insinuates itself through our veins through our beds...” and through the conflation of “small spaces for ships small pockets for junk”. There is an increasing identification of the externalities that result from the will to capture the power of movement and the thrill of impermanence, “the constant hump and suck of the waves / as the derricks continue to drill...” “...their hopeful tap tapping waiting for oil / waiting for our arrival...” Sprague is “riddled with this sense of waiting / to arrive / to be filled / ...to own / or release...” — “a new dream / super containers / extreme engineering / extreme global village”. The “consumers being consumed” by the myth of California in which the “goods were durable / cheap / and well fashioned” — “servants to the nap / of our jeans”.

For Sprague, the goods are the journey “all over / it’s in us” as we “go forward / but it’s back”. This is a cautionary tale in which the technological ability to connect leaves only “held memories of naming and also the names / spoken secrets only the objects heard”. But it is also a Whitmanesque vision: “I was all these things at the same time / moving forward backward still”. A vision of release from the separateness that enables the desire for objects to grow all-encompassing so that “holding my image to myself I was all these things at the same time // and none of it at all.” *The Port of Los Angeles* sings the undoing of the here, and deposits it as a plop of enmeshed being in which “we are mixed / and became more so / but also singular — “mixing singular / alone”.

**Diane Ward’s most recent publications include #8 in the *Belladonna Elders Series*, *No List (No List)* from *Seeing Eye Books*, and *Flim-Yoked Scrim* from *Factory School*. She is currently in the graduate program in geography at UCLA.**

### *Look Back, Look Ahead: The Selected Poems of Srečko Kosovel*

Srečko Kosovel

Translated from the Slovene by Ana Jelnikar & Barbara Siegel Carlson  
(Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010)

REVIEW BY VLADISLAV DAVIDZON

Though the great and good Tomaž Šalamun makes a passionate case in *Look Back, Look Ahead’s* blurb for the resemblance to Rilke (“[They] couldn’t be more different, but they aren’t, they’re brothers. They died the same year. They worked and lived eight miles apart. One in Duino Castle, the other in Karst”), it is customary to begin writing about the Slovenian modernist Srečko Kosovel by comparing him to Rimbaud. Mostly, the comparison is apt, as similarities abound; Rimbaud desublimated his anarchic and ferocious creativity for less literary buccaneering and never wrote a line after 21, Kosovel burned out at 22. Both witnessed first-hand the ravages of war and had in common an arch infatuation with landscape, the emigration from countryside to city, uncompromising truancy (“Cops are people of the lowest quality”) and the anarchic—leading to the production of a body of sparkling juvenilia whose formal characteristics constitute the zeitgeist and the deepest concerns of the age. Like Rimbaud, Kosovel was darkly prolific and left 1,000 poems, pieces and fragments.

The austere region of Karst, for which he had the deep love of a native country boy, and whose pines he helped seed under his father’s tutelage, is the fundament of his earthy poetics. It furnished his imagery and tethered him to a proto-patriotic and particularised identity that counterpoised his equally deeply set disdain for nationalisms of all kinds. He is a classical protest poet and a poetic classicist at once. In fact, Kosovel might be understood almost entirely through the prism of the historical context. The Austro-Hungarian empire, to his right—dourly regnant, polyglot, decrepit, giving birth to a thousand enervated melancholics and spiraling into terminal decline—and the encroaching Italian fascist irredentism over his left shoulder; the failure of a liberal Europe is a theme running through the book. “O lies, lies, European lies!” and “At 8 there’s a talk / on human ideals. / The newspapers print photos / of Bulgarian hangings”. Italian fascists had begun the process

of repressing the restive Slovenian minority in Trieste and its environs. It is in this crucible that Kosovel forges what is to become an integral piece of a resurgent national Slovenian literature. The poems remind us that Ljubljana and Trieste were outposts of Viennese modernism no less fertile than Sarajevo or Lvov.

The volume arranges the poems more or less chronologically (one is led to deduce by the evolution of the style and chapter division, no dates are given), the precocious and precious lyrics to the villages and pines of Karst giving way to expressionist confabulations and paeans to trips to the circus. Afterwards, onto Tagore and French Symbolist-inspired Imagism, “As if the whole world / sunk into blueness / the whole world / blue and green”, and then slightly Futurist concoctions topped off with profusions of the Balkan Zenitism. There are no cleanly delineated boundaries between “epochs” in his poems. The process of recombinant modernization is laid bare within the structures of the poems, here and there syntactically impressionist lines stitched into expressionist form evolve from the beginning of the poem to the end. Modernist mutation in action.

The modernist project being everywhere the same, man having fallen from grace, the poem “Rhyme” starts simply with “Rhyme’s lost its meaning.” From there we arrive logically at the “Kons” [“Cons”], constructivist poems laced with a jagged synchronicity; short, sharp bursts of explosive combustion and syntactic collage by turns political and anti-fogey-dadaist. If he had lived long enough, he might have become either a kind of Max Jacob avant-garde collage Factionalist or a political fury proper à la Mayakovsky.

Like Mayakovsky, there is the terrible tension and oscillation between the deathly serious needs (literal in both cases) of the lyrical soul, and pressing concerns: The spirit was strong, the body weak, and the bones it was said, crumbled. Kosovel in romantic exuberance died of cold-caused meningitis, caught waiting on a rainy and freezing train platform after a riotous reading and argument over his masterful “Ecstasy of Death.” “—Everything is ecstasy, the ecstasy of death— // Exquisite, so exquisite will be Europe’s death: / a luxurious queen in gold”. In the annals of romantic literary deaths this was a rather respectable one.

Kosovel’s place in the Slovenian canon, always assured for his plaintive early lyrical poems,

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underwent a radical transfiguration and heady reevaluation with (his friend and literary executor) Anton Ocvirk's 1964 publication of Kosovel's *Integrali '26*, a collection of his constructivist and experimental poems previously thought to be mere fragments. The collected works appeared only in the mid-1970s. The steady discursiveness bordering on laggardness with which the poems have been unearthed, revealed, collated, published, recognized and assimilated in his own native Slovene is mirrored in the belatedness of almost a century by which he has found his place in the world republic of letters, when many lesser modernists are familiar figures. (Though French broad-mindedness and assimilative prowess had him translated already in the late twenties, and a collection of the "new" material was brought out by Editions Seghers as early as 1965.)

The ever-intrepid Ugly Duckling Presse has brought into English something very much like the perfect primer volume to Kosovel, outfitted but not overburdened, with the touchstone apparatus of critically necessary context that

previous publications have lacked. A brief but informative introduction, translator's notes, index of terms, facing original texts, manuscript illustrations and afterword provide us with something approximating a scholarly critical edition without the conventional stuffiness of one.

*Vladislav Davidzon* Was born in Tashkent and left Uzbekistan as a political refugee for Moscow and eventually NY. He currently lives in Paris, where he is pursuing studies in political philosophy and international relations.

*The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom*  
Leslie Scalapino  
(The Post-Apollo Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY KARINNE KEITHLEY SYERS

The structure of Leslie Scalapino's *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom* is like a massive French braid with no single column, made by multiple hands without reference to up or down. Like the *Gazelle-Dihedrals*, creatures with "open organs all visible," Scalapino's prose roams

with bewildering, exhilarating density. Intense and forceful as high water, it demands we learn a kind of patient submission if we are to skate its surfaces, navigate its thickness and find our own gait over its contour. We submit at the peril of being completely awash but with the reward of an intense aesthetic experience of infinite interconnectivity.

Reading, I cannot stop thinking of fiber, of thread, of wool when it felts and small fibers entangle each other. Entanglement is a guiding principle of my own experience of reading, both in terms of the text's time-sense—where a future beckoned reveals the nonexistence of the future, the present, or the separated thing: "single events, that don't exist anyway, are paradise"—and also in terms of the text's topography. In this sense it is one of the few literary experiences I have had of space-time.

The landscape's scatter is not made of single events but of always-connecting occurrences, many of them ringing out of last year's news,

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some out of paintings, and some out of the dictionary that Scalapino combed with procedural *alexia*, or word-blindness (“not as a mental disorder” but as “trance-like stream overriding meaning, choice, and inhibition”). She effects a kind of experiential demonstration of string theory at the level of the sentence. The titular dihedral is the angle taken between two intersecting planes, measured by lines at right angles to those planes. Scalapino continually intersects planes of reality, folding Mumbai bombings into Henry Darger paintings into words alexically called out of the unknown future.

The sentences are of many more than three dimensions, and the result is a kind of topography that, if the reader will glide across it, joins what is, was, and could be, with what is, was, and could be imagined. Almost always zoomed in at close scale, there is little way to anticipate what is coming. This means that the usual way to read prose sentences is useless: the eye can make no purchase on any single transfer of meaning across subject and predicate. The only way I found to read was to stay slow, close, and audible. Recognition of recurrent figures—among them the base runner, the deb, the Distaffer and the race horse Amor Asteroid—is simultaneously stabilizing and disorienting, as they accrue avatars, renewing the possible recombinations of their meetings across so many possible and actual worlds.

I frequently think, while reading, of my own insufficiency as a reader, and how demanding Scalapino is in her severe love of language. It takes discipline to stay close and patient. The fragmented and enfolded language both is and isn't in sentence form, and I frequently find myself caught up in a kind of flash flood inside of these unruly containers, tumbling too fast to catch the images. So the book teaches me how to read it, and that learning is something like learning a physical discipline in the breaking necessary to traverse the space from the vantage of analytical distance to the experiential (non)interior.

Sometimes I wish I could have some kind of magic lantern iteration of the book, and that say for thirty nights I could go to sleep listening to a few chapters while the text crawls illuminated across my ceiling. This incursion into the edges of consciousness is perhaps the great good of the book, besides its astonishing beauty and compassion and plain refusal to demarcate the serenity of an aesthetic “emerald dark” from the world's violence: it invites you to a rare space, a

pelagic space of mind. It occupies a register of fiction insofar as you might put your being into its imaginative space. But this is a fiction hovering in the actual world, the rung overtone series of quotidian emergencies.

There are theoretical threads within the work, but the pleasure of it is the intense materiality of its images. For a work made by procedural blindness, it is all about seeing, and it is this experience of seeing, and the way analysis breaks open new ways to keep seeing, that makes the work so magisterial, so epic, so much like a Divine Comedy stripped of verticality and splayed laterally for the new globalized mind. All of literature couldn't sustain this porosity of visual consciousness. I imagine the experience of the text is an analog to what Marina Abramović experienced in “The House with the Ocean View,” when she fasted in silent exposure, staring back for 12 days at the visitors to performance. Scalapino too offers a rare experience, a tactile, visual, organs-open float-zoom through our suffering world:

Daffing tortoise cylinder light continues beside her emerging from the ocean where the small eye in crinkled pink folds-rimmed as of an elephant eye weak at the key-hole Cheney's pink-crenellated sac for the eye is in its flesh case there—that of the man who'd lay bomblets to be picked up by children glowers looking like flowers explode to torture tortured altered here then his weak small eye in mid-seeing appears dim in one's palm. (81)

**Karinne Keithley Syers** lives in Modjeska Canyon, California. She writes things that resemble plays from a distance, most recently *Montgomery Park*, or *Opu*—which was produced at *Incubator Arts* (formerly the *Ontological-Hysterical Theater*). She founded the *53rd State Press*.

*Cop Kisser*  
Steven Zultanski  
(Book Thug, 2010)

REVIEW BY MATHEW TIMMONS

In first reading Steven Zultanski's *Cop Kisser*, I read what looked to be the easier poems first, and came back later to the ones that looked hard. There's something about the book's structure and the nature of the work itself that encourages skimming. There are basically three types of poems in this book that I'll describe in an overly generalized way. There are list poems,

the “political” poems (“This and That Lenin”, “Maol”, “Cop Kisser”, “Lenin Minus One”, and “Hell”), and lastly the odd mass-culture reference, pop poems.

I'll go through the list poems first, as it's fairly easy to describe them. “My Best Friends” follows a self-referential formula: “Steven ‘insert clever nickname here’ Zultanski / buys a ‘insert beer name’ for / Steven”. The poem begins: “Steven ‘Personal Growth’ Zultanski buys a Pabst for” and ends with “Steven ‘The Receiving End’ Zultanski who buys an O’Doul’s for Steven ‘Self-Validation’ Zultanski”. “Mao’s Moms” works like so: “My mom helps Mao’s mom steal ‘ABC’ while Mao’s Mom helps my mom steal ‘XYZ’”. The ABCs and XYZs pit Chinese vs. American cultural products. In five sections, the piece goes from food to nature, clothes, cars, art, and historical landmarks; and ends with culturally nonspecific insects. “Me And My Brother Pee On Each Other” alphabetically lists candy bars: “My brother pees on my Almond Joy Bar / so / I pee on his Butterfinger Bar / so / he pees on my Chunky Bar”. They don't actually pee on each other, but on each other's candy bars.

The second section, “Bloodless Grammatical Units”, consists of five poems that work like the earlier poem, “My Best Friends”, repeating Zultanski's name in each iteration of their formula. The first poem, “Naps”'s formula would be: “Steven ‘cute baby nickname’ Zultanski / dreams of cradling his ‘developmental stage of a baby in the womb from egg to placenta’ / as he suckles at the nipple of / Steven”. “Nuts” is described by the formula: “Steven ‘name of all the U.S. presidents in order’ Zultanski / fell from the ‘name of U.S. coins in the order they were minted’ tree / into the field of that nut / Steven”. As the poem progresses, a few presidents' names appear as the names of coins. “Nails” moves up in rank from “Private Steven Zultanski” to “Commander-in-Chief Steven Zultanski” as each digs his nails into body parts of the next, moving from palms, wrists and arms to spine, skull and brain.

Some of the mass-culture references, in [what I'm calling the] pop poems, also employ lists in a different manner than the ones discussed above. The first half of “Anal Cars / Art Garfunkel” lists car names paired with the word “Anal”: “Anal Ram...Anal Outback...Anal Grand

## BOOK REVIEWS

Cherokee.” The second half lists titles of famous artworks plugged into the name “Art Garfunkel”: “Seedbed Garfunkel...Guernica Garfunkel... Merzbau Garfunkel...Flag Garfunkel.” It’s striking how natural the “Anal Cars” and “Art Garfunkels” sound. “Poem for Dick Butkus” isn’t a list poem exactly, but it includes many short lists of figures from pop culture alongside Dick Butkus. It’s a flarfy piece that plays off the silliness of Dick Butkus’s name. “My Best Poem” begins “I love you, Officer Dick Buttanski” and contains the stanza “I love it when you / call me names, / and the implied meanings / of said names / suddenly emerge as / my most / characteristic features.” Zultanski’s name appears throughout the book over 275 times, often with nicknames attached for description. Throughout the second section of the book Zultanski empties out the significance of his name through repetition and by branding the poems “Bloodless Grammatical Units”.

“Personages”, the last poem I consider one of the mass-culture poems, is more lyrical and goes through a list of customs observed across the world while teasing out ideas on morality and the artist’s identity: “Whatever / is / contrary / to / established / manners / and / customs / is / immoral. ... it / is / of / the / most / enormous / importance / that / immorality / should / be / protected / jealously / against / those / who / have / no / standard / except / the / standard / of / custom” (85-86). “The / dead / weight / of / human / inertia / hangs / on / the / artist’s / back. / He / must / be / original, / courageous, /

inspiring, / and / all / that. / I, / artist, / stop / enlightenment.” (109–111) Zultanski points to the customary understanding of the artist, from the enlightenment on, as an original genius and the paradoxical idea of shaking that identity, which would itself be an inspiring, original act.

As we move inevitably into the “political” poems, it seems a good time to point out that about 250 different people are mentioned throughout the book. Steven Zultanski’s name, to repeat, is mentioned roughly 275 times, Lenin about 125 times, Mao about 100 times, and Dick Butkus about 20 times. The “political” poems are longer, lyrical works, though they all use micro-structures here and there. “This and That Lenin” begins, “This Lenin likes Marx / yet that Lenin dislikes the tsar / yet this Lenin likes Woodrow Wilson / yet that Lenin dislikes Stalin’s excessive rudeness” (11). “Cop Kisser” begins, “This little piggy loves to kiss my neck / and this little piggy loves to kiss in the rain / and this little piggy goes out of his way to kiss only lightly and call me Stevie” (71). There’s also much talk of terms like revolution, class, worker, etc., and not always with absolute reverence. For example, in “This or That Lenin”: “So hold out your hand, / generate heat, / hold it out to materialism. We will / begin with being, abstract being: / to make practice into a criterion of truth.” (12) Though this bit has a very practical, real tone, the reader isn’t given a proscriptio for collective action, but then that isn’t what the “political” poems are about.

Zultanski shrugs off the political poems throughout the political poems. He’s tempted to scrap the whole thing in “This or That Lenin”: “Ask me about / what I can do with you. I can jump up and holler ‘who-hoo!’ / I can dart fifty paces forward. I can be / slightly annoying, like effortless love or a funny-sounding squeak. / I can shut. / I can write all this out or scrap the whole project. These are my / non-options.” (20) “From Hell”, the last poem of the first section of the book, the longer section by far: “If ever there was a good thing, / then this isn’t it / because this isn’t real— / it’s a thought-experiment. / Picture this: a hole in one.” (164) The thought-experiment is both the poem “From Hell” and Hell itself. Zultanski isn’t didactic, even in poems where you would expect it, about Lenin or in “Mao!”, “Cop Kissers” or even “From Hell”. That’s where these “political” poems are more complex than at first glance. These poems are about their namesakes Lenin, Mao, Hell and the cops, but they’re also about how these figures are figures that are twisted beyond recognition into caricatures and yet still retain some “meaning.”

“There’s a thousand / yous. / There’s only one / of me. // I take this to be / axiomatic. // The straight-up banality / of insight throws light onto that which had previously appeared / to be throwing light, but is clearly throwing something merely approximate / to light.” (167) Zultanski often hides more than he reveals. Through formulaic micro-structures deployed throughout the book, he is able to loudly shout “Mao!”, to tell us all the things this Lenin likes and that Lenin dislikes in pages of politically motivated, apolitical, political poetry. Zultanski turns away from reactionary party politics, while talking directly about the hell of wage-slavery and similar issues, bringing classic revolutionaries onstage for tragicomic effect. Zultanski’s *Cop Kisser* is absolutely hilarious; it makes fun of the stock figure of the leftist poet and yet it is the work of a committed leftist. *Cop Kisser* is a deeply political book, if only because it’ll make you laugh.

*Mathew Timmons* is most recently the author of *The New Poetics* (Les Figues Press). He lives in Los Angeles.

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