

POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#232



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The Poetry Project Newsletter

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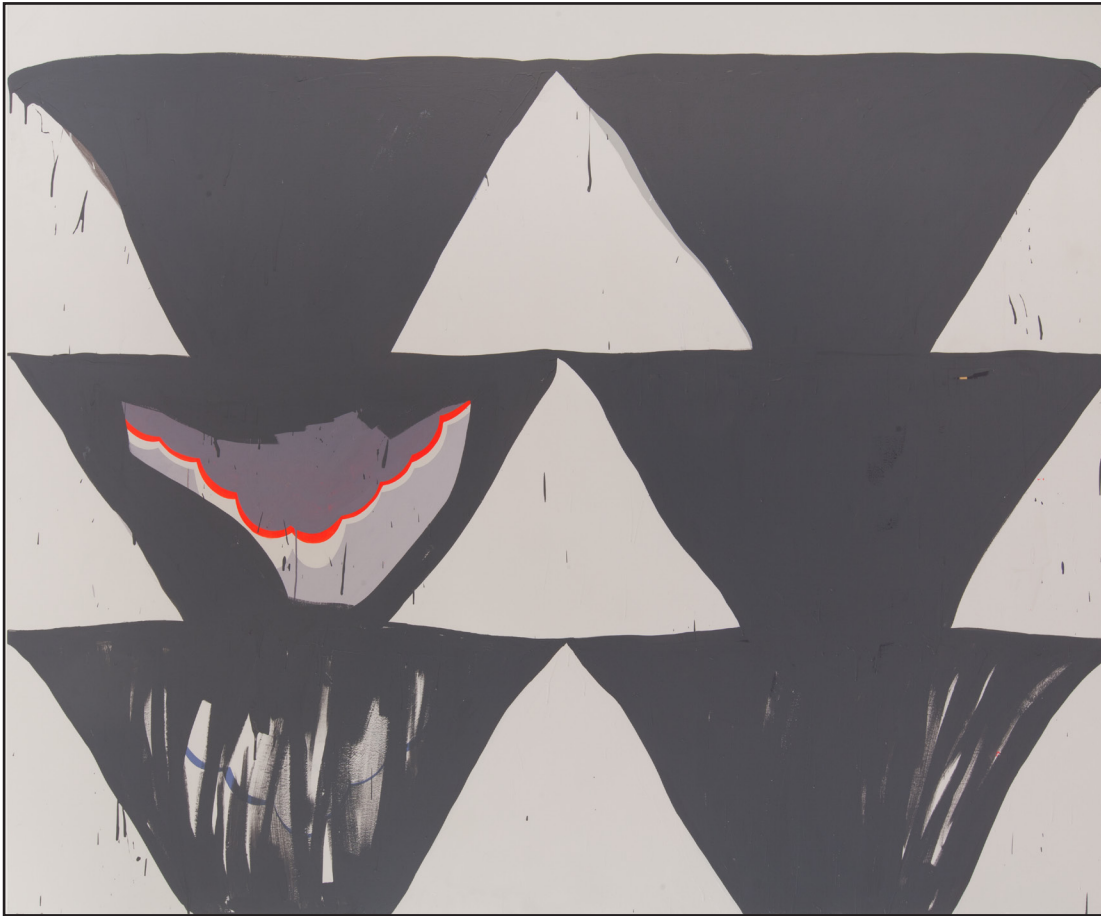
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From the Director

We just had our inaugural staff meeting, and are in the best of spirits about the season we've prepared for you. We're going through the clutter in our office and the clutter in our minds in general, to ask, *why is this here? why do we do this thing this way?*, infrastructural troopers that we are. I know, I know, you want to know *who is reading?* Just keep in mind that yesterday we threw out an office chair that surely would have lit up under a forensic lamp. See pages 22–23 to check out the events planned for fall by new series coordinators Simone White (Mondays), Matt Longabucco (Fridays) and Corrine Fitzpatrick (Talks), as well as the Wednesday events planned by the same old me. It was a challenge to lure Corrine, a former Poetry Project staff member, back into the fray, but ultimately an all-expense-paid trip to Van Leeuwen sealed the deal.

If you missed our announcement at the end of last season about "Insane Podium"—a brief, illustrated chronicle of the life and times of The Poetry Project written by Miles Champion—please visit the "History" section of our website to have a look. The piece contains great details about St. Mark's' long history of social activism and advocacy for the arts. Read it and become as obsessed with *The della Robbia Eurythmic Dance Ritual* as I am.

This October we'll launch The Poetry Project Oral History Project as a sub-domain of our website. Nicole and volunteer archivist Will Edmiston (with some help from Arlo and me) started conducting interviews last season. The work will continue for years—but that's okay, because "Since I began to organize my life around My Office / I stay a little later every day" (Lorenzo Thomas).

In addition to Simone, Matt and Corrine, I'm delighted to welcome Jo Ann Wasserman, Camille Rankine and Carol Overby to The Poetry Project's Board of Directors. Cheers and gratitude to Tim Griffin and Christopher Stackhouse for their service, as well as to Rosemary Carroll, whose many years of unsurpassed dedication served as a lighthouse through some of the foggiest afternoons.

Stacy Szymaszek



From the Program Coordinator

The summer was wonderful and the fall looks good. The office workers of The Poetry Project have returned from Wisconsin, Maine, Minnesota, Colorado and New Mexico to present you with Season 47. Changes are steady—three of our four regular series have new coordinators this year. I'd like to tell you a little bit about them and point you toward some of their variously great works.

Simone White is newly in charge of the Monday Night Series. Simone is the author of *House Envy of All the World* (Factory School, 2010) and the forthcoming *Unrest* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013). She is a powerful poet whose work gets at the complicated intersection of private life and cultural life. Because I've been making the mistake of paying attention to the Republican National Convention, I've been having those "American culture is a horrible fucking charade" and "this can't be life!" feelings a lot lately. Simone's poetry approaches this problem with a cool matter-of-factness I admire. Check out Simone reading her poem "What Do You Be Doin' All Day?" in the audio section of The Poetry Project website to hear what I mean. Matt Longabucco is curating the Friday Late Night Series. His challenge is to create an oasis in the increasingly upsetting belly-of-the-beast that is Friday night in the East Village. There's all kinds of evidence that he's up to the task. I've seen Matt transform a couple of portable toilets near a construction site into a perfect venue for great poetry. There's audio of this incredible transformation available online at the Bard Radio Station (WLHV 88.1) website that I think you should listen to. Also, Matt teaches at New York University. The other new coordinator this season is Corrine Fitzpatrick, *mon semblable,—mon frère!* She and I moved to New York City from opposite ends of the country the same week in September 2004 and have been living intertwined lives ever since. It continues as she becomes coordinator of the Poetry Project's Talk Series—a position I held back in 2008–10 when she had the job I have now. She is the author of *On Melody Dispatch* (Goodbye Better, 2007) and *Zamboanguena* (sona, 2007). Since she stopped working at The Poetry Project she's been getting out in the world more and looking at/writing about art. You can read some of Corrine's art writing at artforum.com.

Happy new poetry season!

Arlo Quint



From the Editor

This *Newsletter* started coming together as I concluded the summer on Fire Island, where I saw several drag performances—something I never do in New York. It was strange to see an already fugitive art form in the wilderness. Poetry, by comparison, seems so heavily documented. While out there I also started re-reading Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* and thought more about how we poets could benefit from more disorganized togetherness. Let's all read the chapter "Literary Communism" and have a kiki this fall.

Anarchic impulses aside, the components of this issue fit together really well. I am delighted to include one of the last (if not the last) unpublished *Drafts* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, which is such a "get" given the epic scope of her project. Please be sure to make it to one of her two upcoming events here!

I am also excited to include the art of Amy Feldman in these pages. Thanks to Chris Warrington for introducing me to her work. And welcome to our new horoscope columnist, Dorothea Lasky (!!!). Dorothea is taking the reins from the mysterious Denver Dufay, whose spot-on advice improved our lives so much last year.

I hope you enjoy the issue and look forward to seeing you at the readings and talks planned by the new series coordinators (and same old Stacy)!

Paul Foster Johnson

ART IN THIS ISSUE

This issue features the paintings of Amy Feldman (b. 1981) who works and lives in Brooklyn. Feldman received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA from Rutgers University. She was selected as the Robert Motherwell Fellow at The MacDowell Colony for 2011–2012; was awarded a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Grant; and has also received fellowships from VCUArts and the Fountainhead Foundation, The Henry Street Settlement at the Abrons Art Center, Yaddo, the Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Hyperallergic*, *NY Arts Magazine*, *Vice Magazine* and other publications. Recent exhibitions include *Dark Selects*, solo exhibition, Blackston, New York; *HOT PAINT*, Weekend Gallery, Los Angeles; *Ode Owe Owe: Amy Feldman and Ilse Murdock*, The Good Children Gallery, New Orleans; *Wobbly Misconduct*, LVL3 Gallery, Chicago; *Considering the Provisional*, JFORD Gallery, Philadelphia; *MsBehavior*, The ArtBridge Drawing Room, New York; *Paper A-Z*, Sue Scott Gallery, New York; *The Collective Show*, Participant, Inc., New York. Upcoming exhibitions include: *Salon Zurcher*, Zurcher Studios, Paris; *Assembly*, Edward Thorpe Gallery, New York; *AGGRO CRAG*, Bosi Contemporary, New York; *Boundary Hunters*, The Fosdick-Nelson Gallery at Alfred University, Alfred, NY. Upcoming solo exhibitions include Gregory Lind Gallery, San Francisco; ANNAELLE Gallery, Stockholm.

Cover: *Owed*, acrylic on canvas, 80" x 80", 2012.

Contents Page: *Landfills*, acrylic on canvas, 80" x 96", 2011.

Page 7: *innerouter*, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48", 2011.

Page 15: *All or Nothing*, acrylic on canvas, 96" x 80", 2011.

Page 26: *Of Another Order*, acrylic on canvas, 9" x 12", 2011.

Page 27: *Oral Order*, acrylic on canvas, 9" x 12", 2011.

Page 30, top: *Pushed*, acrylic on canvas, 39" x 54", 2011.

Page 30, bottom: *summer eyes*, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60", 2011.

Interview: Solar Transmissions

Shonni Enelow and Brent Cunningham

BRENT CUNNINGHAM IS THE OPERATIONS DIRECTOR OF SMALL PRESS DISTRIBUTION (SPD), an entity without which very few of our books and our friends' books would reach local bookstores and libraries, or be teachable in college classes. What this means practically is that he probably sees more contemporary books of poetry (as well as prose, drama and nonfiction) than any of us will ever see. The warehouse at SPD is a magical place. How many wide-eyed interns have spent their long, gray Berkeley afternoons communing with the literature quartered on those shelves? At least one, I can say from experience. Brent is also a poet, and his latest book, *Journey to the Sun*, was recently released by Atelos Press. Brent and I spent a few minutes shouting at each other through cellular phone lines while I tried to figure out how to record our conversation—fascinatingly, a task more difficult than it should be in this age of technological reproducibility. We finally settled in.

– Shonni Enelow

SE: Let's start basic. What do you think an interview with a poet should do?

BRENT CUNNINGHAM: I published, with Hooke Press, an interview I did in 1998 with Robert Creeley, who was a particular paragon of an oral history of poetry that is just marvelous if you can do it. Very few people can spend as much time talking and still intrigue other people as Bob could. He told a lot of stories about other poets and quoted them directly—he had a fabulous memory—and if a person can do that, an interview can be a chance to maintain a kind of lineage of poetry. Creeley used the word “information,” which I liked a lot: such-and-such a person had “the information.” I think that harkens back to a time without email, when there weren't as many ways of connecting with people, so you really held onto those transmission lines to others who were interested in this admittedly very obscure art form. The interview can give you a context, names you can follow up on, information.

SE: I'm happy you mentioned transmission, which appears throughout *Journey to the Sun* in very interesting ways, the first time towards the end of the “Invocation” where the spaceship, if I understand it right, is partly a metaphor for the transmission of poetry from writer to reader. I wanted to ask you how you see those lines of transmission; if the spaceship is one way to imagine it, what are the other ways?

BC: That shows up in a lot of different places in the book. First I should say that I—like a lot of poets, I think—have a life-long fascination with obscure texts. It goes back to when I was young. Any time a canonical book was assigned I wanted to read the *other* book, the book the critics dismissed, the author's letters, the almost forgotten things. And I still have a tendency to choose the most obscure work by a given writer. I think this has to do with an interest in that peculiar combination of solitude and connection you get while reading more obscure texts—like it's just you and this other person transmitting something across time, using words as vehicles across history. In one stripped-down theory of poetry there's almost this notion that, if you shape or craft it correctly—or if you make it aerodynamic in a certain way—you'll transmit it into the future. In general my interest in “transmission” comes, in part, from wanting to interrogate and resist the simplicity of that idea.

A lot of the reason a text survives is just pure luck, or because of what's acceptable to power at a given time. Poetry used to like to see itself as important because it was going to endure, it was going to be around for a thousand years, but I don't think that's particularly helpful for poetry or people. It's truly a bad idea to jettison your immediate social relations, to give up the living sociology of the art form, out of some misguided notion that some future scholar will reveal the transcendent truth or quality of your work.

Of course, “transmission” also has something to do with my working life as well, being at least an off-rhyme with “distribution.”

SE: Speaking of SPD for a moment, what kinds of perspectives do you get from working there that other poets and writers might not have?

BC: I’ve certainly learned a vast amount about the back-end world of bookselling, including how much is really involved when someone seemingly stumbles across a title in a store. I also went through—as I think any poet would—a long, alienating process as I was introduced to the brutal fact of poetry’s marginality in the book industry. Overall I feel that working at SPD has helped me as a poet, especially in terms of having precise and realistic expectations for my own writing, but it has also worked somewhat the other way as well. In publishing there’s always a lot of buzz about new technologies, a lot of marketing froth about how such-and-such a product or delivery method is going to change everything. The poetry I care about, as well as the philosophy and political theory I like to read, keeps me grounded and skeptical. No matter how much some corporate entity wants to see ebooks or “interactivity” as profound, fundamental cultural shifts in and of themselves, genuine change will always be traceable to social and economic realignments. It can be really helpful, in this business, to remember that the rest is just lipstick.

SE: What present problem is *Journey to the Sun* addressing?

BC: I think I was trying to figure out an answer to a basic problem, which I guess I just hinted at: what is the nature of change? What is the nature of thinking the new? How do you



take the current state that we’re in, that has so much injustice but is also real, is what we live in—how do you go from the known, the seemingly reasonable, to something we can only currently imagine?

I’m reading David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, and his basic thesis is that our economic relationships are so deeply interwoven into our history that there’s no part of our lives uncorrupted by how we think about debtor/lender transactions. We tend to believe we have these other areas in our lives, like love and art, that are outside such transactions, but Graeber demonstrates they aren’t. The subtitle to *Journey to the Sun*¹ mentions poetry, public education and messianic time—so art, education and religion—which, at least theoretically, might be outside the debt structure. But, as Graeber shows, it’s just so supremely difficult

to think outside the earth you’re on—as if there’s only the narrowest keyhole of utopian possibility. *Journey to the Sun* is partly about thinking toward what that utopian space might be, how to even begin thinking about getting there. Can anyone think outside the earth?

SE: In *Journey to the Sun* the earth is a suburb, with “businesses,” “drive-ways,” “homes,” “products”—this, in conjunction with space travel and the resonances with Russian Formalism and Russian Futurism, makes me think about the Cold War. What do you think is the poet’s relationship to the nation?

BC: The book is about ideas, but it is also autobiography. Insofar as it is a Dante-esque journey, my Virgil is George Westinghouse, the great American capitalist entrepreneur whose company, Westinghouse, was

NOTES:

1. The full subtitle is *Wherein the Author recounts his travels, at the tender age of Thirteen, to the Source of All Life, accompanied by his father’s employer, Mister George Westinghouse, and not neglecting the Author’s youthful opinions on the matters of Publick Education, Poetry, and Messianic Time.*

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so deeply implicated in the ideological battles of the Cold War. My dad worked for Westinghouse almost all his life. I think I was trying, in a way that used to make me somewhat uncomfortable, to think about autobiography, and to admit to the fact that I grew up in the suburbs under the sheltering power of corporate capitalism.

As for the poet's relationship to nation, I suppose that depends on the poet, but I would say that one thing I have felt very powerfully in the last few months is that there really are a lot of ways in which being a poet can prepare you for political involvement and resistance to the state. That seemed silly to say a few years ago—it certainly seemed silly in the 1990s, and prior to the recent economic collapse. But recently, I've found that these little social groups we poets have made for ourselves are not just good for figuring out what bar to go to. They can also be good for getting together to dis-

cuss what happened last night with those tear gas bombs, or for taking up a collection to get somebody out of jail. The question of how you put things into language is important for making a good poem, sure, but it's not irrelevant to political activity.

My sense of the nation—well, actually, right now it's hard for me to see "nation." It just seems like a subset of corporate capitalism. And this certainly has to do with the Cold War, the last ideological argument in which the communal had a shot.

SE: Let me ask a different question. Do you think poets today are concerned with new forms? Another way of asking this question: is there still a formal avant-garde in a true sense? Are poets still trying to push form or are we in a historical situation where that's not important or interesting?

BC: I think it's important. I think of myself, broadly speaking, as a formalist. Not in the "new formalist" way, but in the way that comes from Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian formalists whom I first discovered through Barrett Watten and Lyn Hejinian, also Roland Barthes, Frederic Jameson in his book *The Prison-House of Language*, many other sources. In my understanding Shklovsky would say that there's no way to stop innovating formally because that's what the art is to begin with.

Material life creates specific pressures on any work of art, no matter how abstract. And form, as I think of it, is just the response to those pressures. Those pressures create shape. They create the things that you can and can't do as an artist, or seemingly can't do until you innovate. It can be anything—it can be, for example, the material fact that something is going to be published online. The social pressure, in that

P. Inman: *per se*

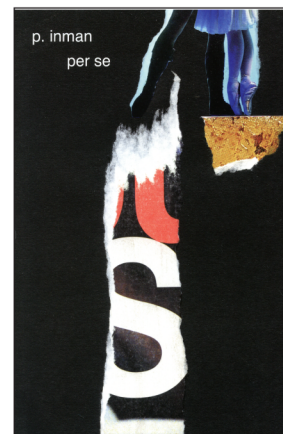
P. Inman fractures the conventions of language in order to build everything up again from a more elemental level. In *per se*, the composers Luigi Nono, Hans Lachenmann, and Morton Feldman provide musical structure for his jazz-inflected words in motion. The book lives in the tension between the free, multidirectional movement of words and the highly organized macro-structures.

"In Inman's work 'the dialectic of sound and silence has moved several logical steps beyond Beckett.'" —Joan Retallack, "Post-scriptum-high-modern"

"Inman 'destablizes the polarities of form & content... By fully semanticizing the so-called nonsemantic features of *langue*, Inman creates a dialectic of the recuperable & the unreclaimable, where what cannot be claimed is nonetheless most manifest."

—Charles Bernstein, *Artifice of Absorption*

Poetry, 88 pages, offset, smyth-sewn, original paperback \$14



Elfriede Czurda: *Almost 1 Book/ Almost 1 Life*

[Dichten=, No. 14; translated from the German by Rosmarie Waldrop]



This volume contains almost all of Elfriede Czurda's first book (with the untranslatable title *ein griff* = *eingriff inbegriffen*) and all of her second, *Fast 1 Leben*.

Elfriede Czurda comes out of the experimental Wiener Gruppe. She is especially fond of letting repetition and permutation shift words through their whole gamut of meanings — and sometimes beyond. However, she is also not averse to thumbing her nose at any rigidities, even those of the experimental imperative. In *Almost 1 Life* (novella? politico-cultural satire?), the ruling avantgarde has licenced "monomania" as official language and punishes misuse by expelling the offender — into reality. Which is where Czurda positions herself. She combines exploring language with exploring the social power structures embedded in it — all with lots of fun and humor.

"Czurda makes strongly visible the fragmentary, arbitrary, non-linear... whole chains of associations flood the reader, or language itself breaks apart. [Her] powerful language is always political."

—Michael Fisch, *Die Berliner Literaturkritik*

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case, might be how much money it takes to create a print book. So that's a real pressure with a formal result: the text is digital. All the way over to a vocabulary choice: "I'm going to use this term to make this poem because I live in a society where that term is going to be available to people." So if people are writing poetry, and if they are intelligent and sensitive to the world, they're going to have to formally innovate, because they will want to register being alive in time.

To me, you push your brain in an attempt to write or create something. You push and you push even as you wonder what you're doing, or what difference it can make. And the moment you break through—which is also the moment where something might actually change—is for me always a formal break. "Oh, I know, I can put my poems into hexameter." Or: "I'm going to paint my poems on the undersides of cars." Whatever it

is, it's never really a breakthrough on the level of content. It's not a thought. For me, it's related to that "lightning flash" that Walter Benjamin talks about. "Of course! Why didn't I see it earlier! I'm going to use all these exclamation points! That solves everything!"

SE: Those exclamation points are a great technique, because they're at once so familiar and so strange, and in such "bad taste." I'm always revising my emails to limit my exclamation point usage. But then I feel like I sound dour. It's this funny contemporary borderline of acceptable emotional expression. What were some other techniques you relied on?

BC: My main technique was to try to fight against my sense of what a "good" poem sounds like. I have an especially intense compulsion toward having a nice order to the poem, cleanliness, charm, where everything drops into place and sounds

"right" to me. A lot of writers refer to this as your "ear." Creeley used the term a lot—I think he probably got it from Williams—and I feel like I know what they mean. But at the same time it seems like one of the most privileged and mystical beliefs in all of poetry. Isn't it strange that so many writers who are so fiercely critical of socially inherited ideas, so mistrustful of normative modes of culture, will meanwhile accept a transcendent notion like the idea that their poetic "ear" has the ultimate authority to make decisions? Isn't your "ear" a product of culture too? Still, it's not easy to go against the ear, in part because what else is there? What else are you? It was a real fight to stop myself from editing out lines that didn't sound quite right, to leave in the messy, the wild, the poorly conceived, and also some of the misspellings and wrong punctuation. But over time I think I got a little better at it. ■

Draft 113: Index

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Words become heated up as if they were to start to glow again in the disenchanted world, as if the promise hidden in them had become the motor of thought.

– Theodor Adorno, “Ernst Bloch’s *Spuren (Traces)*”

ERROR: syntaxerror

OFFENDING COMMAND: —nostringval—

STACK:

false

-mark-

false

-mark-

/OtherSubrs

-dictionary-

/Private

-dictionary-

-dictionary-

– HP Laserjet 1200 Series, personal communication, 2011

A

see not-A

see also The

Abraham

Abyss

Accidentals

Adorno, Theodor

Age of Ash

see also long 20TH Century

Aiglio

Air

Alphabet

“Andante con Scratchy”

Angel

see Jacob

see Stranger, Ladder

Answerlessness

Aphorism

Apple

Archive

As if

Astonishment

Avant-texte

Awkwardness

Azure

password, thread, sky

Babel

Bad Dog

Bees

Benjamin, Walter

Between

Birds, various simple varieties

Bits

Black Hole

Bliss

Blue

Body English

Book

see Livre

see also Mallarmé, Stéphane

Borders

Both/And

Brambles

Bread

Bricolage

Bridge Passage

Butterflies

admiral

cabbage white

fritillary

little blue

mourning cloak

swallowtail

see also *Farfalle*

Cabotage

Calling

Calque

Canzone

Charrette
 Children
 Chutzpah
 Clog Almanac
 Clouds
 Clutter
 Citation
 Codes
 Coffee
 see also Tea (before 1990)
 Collage
 Comics
 gap
 gutter
 segment
 Constellation
 Contingency
 Critique
 Crost
 Culture, overcoded
 overloaded
 overcommitted
 overcooked

 Danger
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 Dizziness
 Dogs (Lady-dog; Molasses, aka Mo)
 Doors
 Dot
 Doubt
 Down
 Dread
 Dreamlife
 canine
 human dreaming
 odd
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NOTES:

In 2006, Jim Carpenter, applications-development consultant and lecturer in computer programming and systems design at The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, constructed a remarkable set (with statistical breakouts) of word frequency data on the first 57 Drafts. I thank him for satisfying our mutual curiosity—each for quite different purposes. I used some of his findings here. I am also quite grateful to the group of committed writers for the *Jacket2* feature on my work posted December 14, 2011, who collectively confirmed some of the thoughts presented in this work. The first epigraph comes from Theodor Adorno, “Ernst Bloch’s *Spuren [Traces]*,” in *Essays, Vol. I*, p. 204. The second epigraph is an autonomously printed communication from my HP Laserjet 1200 Series, sending me a little backtalk, in 2011. The “Andante con Scratchy” is in Charles Ives, *String Quartet No. 2*. This poem is on the “line of 18.”



Stutter

Daniel Tiffany

Djuna Barnes' great verse drama, *The Antiphon*, takes place in the tumbling cloister of Burley Hall, the ancestral home—in a state of flamboyant neglect—to which Miranda Burley has lately returned. In the opening lines of the play, standing amidst a “paneless Gothic window” and a “ruined colonnade,” Miranda floats her stumbling speech:

*Here's a rip in nature; here's gross
quiet,
Here's cloistered waste;
Here's rudeness once was home.*

Between Miranda and her coachman Jack Blow, a stammering dialogue ensues. He inquires into the “prank of caution” bringing her home, and observes, “There's no circulation in the theme... / The very fad of being's stopped...,” finally pronouncing the derelict scene to be “Mute as *Missae pro Defunctis*” (mute as the holy mass for the dead). In the first ten lines of Barnes' verse, then, the spectator witnesses a strange correspondence between tumbling pediments and the verbal impediments—the prank of caution, the “rude” speech, the gross quiet—of the verse-choked protagonists. Architectural, social and verbal ruins coincide on the stage.

I'd like to test the derelict scene of performance (on the page or off) by referring briefly to a film, *The King's Speech* (Colin Firth snagged an Oscar for his performance in it), which dramatizes relations between verbal stammering, sovereignty and social disability. In one scene, the wife of the Duke of York tries to comfort her husband (soon to be King George VI) by explaining that she resisted his marriage proposals until she realized that—in her words—he “stutters so beautifully” that he would never become king, thereby preserving them

from a life of “tours and duties.” Aside from the unexpected (and dialectical) social advantage of stuttering noted by the Duchess of York, one cannot help but wonder at the import of the phrase, *to stutter beautifully*: where is the beauty in the failure of speech—a rip in nature—in gross quiet?

Stuttering beautifully might save one from a life of hollow ceremony, but it is also socially disorienting—disabling—and may deprive one of access to various kinds of authority. In this sense, every word spoken by the stutterer is a *shibboleth*, a word disclosing and isolating the outsider. For the stutterer, all speech is self-consciously performative and inherently dramatic: a trial, an ordeal that may reveal at any moment the handicap—the backwardness—of the speaker. Stuttering beautifully therefore implies not merely the involuntary revelation of one's identity as a social anomaly, but the voluntary embrace of that condition. Verbal disabilities clearly exceed, under these circumstances, the implications of the abject, becoming a socially and imaginatively productive event.

To think about the correlation between poetry, performance and stuttering, one must begin by acknowledging from a therapeutic perspective that recitation, chanting and singing neutralize in many cases the condition of stuttering. No satisfactory explanation exists for this universal and uncanny effect, yet one might reasonably conclude, based on the physical evidence, that stuttering as a formal principle is somehow fundamentally at odds with poetic performance. This conclusion becomes untenable, however, if one entertains the possibility that poetic prosody (repetitions, rhyme, refrain, etc.)—whether in performance or on the page—may be understood

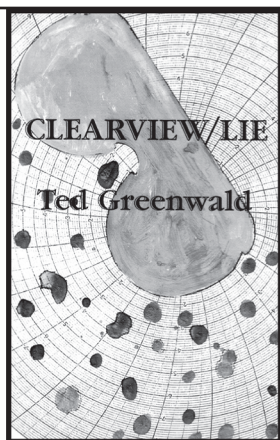
as a form of stammering. From this perspective, neutralizing a stutter by singing or reciting succeeds by imposing a voluntary, or constructed, stammer in place of an involuntary one—a homeopathic remedy: a cure known as *hair of the dog*, referring to a method of treating a rabid wound. The correspondence between stuttering and poetic performance may also help to explain the common difficulty of performing poets' theatrical texts, not only in the sense that the masque, or closet drama, of the poet often deliberately strains the limits of theatrical presentation, but that it may, like stuttering, forestall performance altogether.

The thesis that stuttering imposes on the speaker a social disability, marking one as a social anomaly, an outcast—a condition replicated in the verbal ruin of the poet's text or theater—finds support in the etymology of the word “beggar,” which derives from the French term, *begue*, for stutterer. Hence the beggar is named for the chattering solicitation, the anonymous chant, he or she directs toward strangers in the street. In fact, the beggar's chant—converted into a poem—is one of the principal genres of the canting tradition of songs composed in the jargon of the criminal underworld, a vernacular countertradition churning beneath the surface of canonical verse since the very beginnings of poetry written in English: a miscreant poetics exposing—and exceeding—the aesthetic properties of the abject.

The canting lyric of the beggar equates singing with stuttering in a manner recalling the enigmatic effects of song on the halting tongue of the stammerer. In this context, the abject and promiscuous stammering of the beggar becomes a performance in public space devised in the name of captivation and haphazard

gains. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines cant in its most basic sense as "a low whine or rattling made by beggars": a preverbal complaint experienced by the passerby—by the elite—as a stuttering, public plea; a verbal snare. Even more striking, although the stuttering line converts sovereignty into beggary (as one finds in *The King's Speech* and in *The Antiphon*), it also reveals the verbal sovereignty of the beggar's rattling plea: a song in the form of a question, disarming the stranger in the streets.

Daniel Tiffany is the author of six books of poetry and criticism, including Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance (University of Chicago Press, 2009). His fourth book of poetry will be published by Omnidawn Books in 2013. He is also a translator of writing by Cesare Pavese, Sophocles, and Georges Bataille. He is a recipient of the Berlin Prize for 2012, awarded by the American Academy.



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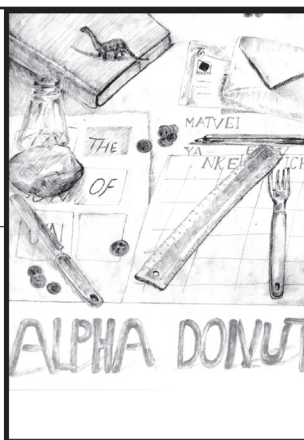
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Better Off Dead: The Poetry and Politics of Gwendolyn Brooks and CAConrad

Justin Sherwood

1.

In 2012, a student in an MFA poetry workshop in New York City asks her instructor if Occupy Wall Street is something she ought to concern herself with as a poet. The instructor responds that Occupy Wall Street is something she ought to concern herself with as a human.

2.

2012 is an election year in the United States, so we spend considerable amounts of time listening to and analyzing political rhetoric. We have been particularly focused on political rhetoric as it relates to women's reproductive rights and the rights of gay Americans.

In June, Michigan Representative Lisa Brown was banned from speaking on the floor of the Michigan House of Representatives for saying the word "vagina" in a debate over a proposed ban on abortions after twenty weeks of pregnancy. Her fellow representative Mike Callton responded to her usage of the word by saying, "It was so offensive, I don't even want to say it in front of women. I would not say that in mixed company."

When President Obama came out in support of gay marriage, conservative news source *Fox Nation* framed it as a declaration of a "war on marriage."

We are wary of indirect speech, hyperbole and metaphor. We are trained to be critical of political rhetoric because there is often a substantial differential between what is said and what is meant. We are trained in the same way to read poetry.

3.

It is an important year for politics, not only because of the upcoming presidential election. With employment numbers stagnating and income inequality on the rise, it has been a difficult year to be alive for most people. Even, unusually, for educated people who live in urban enclaves and call themselves poets. In light of this fact, the Poetry Society of America launched a series called *Red, White, & Blue: Poets on Politics*, and asked poets throughout the country to gather together for public forums to discuss poetry and politics. Poets gathered in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City and Washington, DC to discuss questions including, "What sorts of forms are best for some sort of political thinking? How are they political?"

4.

Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover, both of California, refute these open-ended questions by answering yes and no.¹ They argue that poetic form has nothing and everything to do with the current political climate, and that poetry is and is not political. Spahr and Clover conclude their response by writing, "Maybe we are saying something as improbable as it is simple: that being a poet, if it is to be in any way meaningful, doesn't mean being a person who engages the world through poems. It means being a person who is in the world and for whom writing poems is one possibility in trying to figure out what is needed."

Poets are political actors, and one way to act politically is to write poems. That is only one way that poets act, and there are or ought to be other ways. But there are ways in which poets can do political work, in poems, in a more nuanced and complicated way than other political actors.

5.

Asking whether or not poets ought to be concerned with politics, and if so how, and if not why, is silly and profound. And it isn't new. Barbara Johnson, in her essay "Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion"² considers the intersection of poetry and politics through the rhetorical device of apostrophe. Apostrophe is a figure of speech by which a speaker or writer suddenly stops in her discourse and turns to address some person or thing, either present or absent. Johnson addresses the long history of male poets who use apostrophe to animate such things as the west wind (Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind") and a possibly fictional but definitely figurative woman named Agatha (Baudelaire, "Moesta et Errabunda"). She then argues that the use of apostrophe by female poets complicates the rhetorical gesture because women have the biological capacity to bear life, and some of the women who use apostrophe use it to animate subjects whose absence is a result of the speaker's decision to abort them.

6.

Considering the unique position of animating a subject in a poem that the speaker is responsible for aborting, and the ways in which such a gesture is political, Johnson writes: "It is often said, in literary-theoretical circles, that to focus on undecidability is to be apolitical. Everything I have read about the abortion controversy in its present form in the United States leads me to suspect that, on the contrary, the undecidable is the political. There is politics

precisely because there is undecidability. And there is also poetry.”

7.

Spahr and Clover argue that politics and poetry aren't separable in any meaningful way unless we are fooling ourselves.

Johnson argues that politics and poetry exist because of undecidability, and one way that we navigate the undecidable is by fooling ourselves, rhetorically, through apostrophe.

8.

Johnson's case study for the possibility of poetry to navigate difficult, even impossible political terrain is Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "the mother" from *A Street in Bronzeville*.³ "the mother" begins with the line "Abortions will not let you forget." The poem was published by Harper & Row in 1945. If it is considered offensive by some for a female legislator to use the word "vagina" in a political debate about abortion in 2012, consider the potential political fallout of such a line being published twenty-eight years before *Roe v. Wade*. Brooks' poem is not politically volatile in a partisan sense. In fact, the poem has been used to argue both for and against abortion rights. The poem is politically dangerous for attempting something only possible in poetry: animating a subject who has been aborted in order to explain that there were no good options, that the mother had no choice. It is worth noting that Brooks' impossible feat of staging a conversation between a mother and her abortions serves as a powerful corrective to the often male-dominated debates about abortion.

9.

Johnson argues that when Brooks writes, "I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children," she is rewriting the male lyric tradition. By Johnson's account, Brooks is "textually placing the aborted children in the spot formerly occupied by all the dead, inanimate or absent entities previously addressed by the lyric." Johnson argues

that Brooks is able to write from this position because of her status as a woman, because of her biological and psychological capacity for bearing life, and while Johnson does not address the racial dynamics of Brooks' position, black women in America have their own, separate history of being condemned as mothers.⁴ Brooks writes about a mother's conflicted feelings towards her aborted children but never ultimately decides whether or not her decision was the right one. Brooks writes, conditionally,

*I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
Your luck
And your lives from your unfinished
reach,
If I stole your births and your names,
Your straight baby tears and your games,
Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults,
your marriages, aches, and your
deaths,
If I poisoned the beginnings of your
breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I
was not deliberate.*

What Johnson deems "undecidability" in theoretical debates about abortion is shown by Brooks to be the paradoxical position of being without choice and still having to choose. Brooks demonstrated her mastery of paradox in numerous poems, including the "involuntary plan" devised by the poor in the book's preceding poem, "kitchenette building." But in "the mother" the choicelessness of the disenfranchised is most apparent. Abortion is not a choice to make. Still, as Brooks demonstrates, mothers must choose.

10.

Men (and here I include myself) cannot and do not understand the gravity of giving life, or deciding on an abortion. Men make that clear each time they call upon themselves to discuss issues of reproductive choice in public. (Take, for example, Missouri Representative Todd Akin's recent claim that, "From what I understand from doctors, [pregnancy resulting from a rape] is really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.")

Men have and continue to write about the death of children in sensitive and nuanced ways, but, as Johnson writes, "when a woman speaks about the death of children in any sense other than that of pure loss, a powerful taboo is being violated....[This] points to the notion that *any* death of a child is perceived as a crime committed by the mother, something a mother ought by definition to be able to prevent." For a woman to write about the death of children with any ambivalence is seen as a dangerous political act, and when the woman accepts any amount of culpability for the death of a child, it is utterly taboo.

11.

The crux of Barbara Johnson's argument is that the different rhetorical possibilities for men and women writers to animate and abort subjects in their poems stems from the writers' different biological capacities for bearing life. The gendered dimension of Johnson's argument is therefore necessarily binary: women writers' use of apostrophe to animate subjects is complicated by their biological capacity for giving birth, while men's use of apostrophe to animate subjects remains solely in the realm of rhetoric and theory. But what if a queer poet who complicates the male/female binary takes up the issue of abortion in a poem? What if that queer poet chooses to identify with aspects of masculinity and femininity? And further, what if the queer subject actually identifies with abortions?

12.

In *The Book of Frank*,⁵ CAConrad creates a drag descendent of John Berryman's Huffy Henry of *The Dream Songs*, who philosophizes, talks to animals and has a complicated relationship with mortality. Frank and his compatriots have the existential elasticity of cartoon characters. When Frank actually meets Huffy Henry, he recounts how he "zapped him / with a miniaturizing gun," then "decapitated the / old boy with a pinch" and finally "sent the little fucker's / screaming head up to / the great knee of Orion". But by the next page, Huffy Henry is back before Frank being threatened anew.

13.

CAConrad's or Frank's capacity for understanding the complexity of animation allows for him to experiment beyond the experience of ordinary existence; it allows for him to go to dangerous places beyond Saturday morning cartoon terrain. Why? We meet Frank's mother in the first poem of the collection, when she introduces Frank to his father as "your awful son Dear / your son has no cunt." The poem on the next page begins, "Frank hated the 9 miscarriages / kept in jars of formaldehyde." We learn that Frank's mother prefers to feed her dead children rather than her live child. "Mother burped each one / spooned peas against the glass". Frank's mother explains to him at the poem's end, "you are too big for a jar my child / you will betray me the rest of your life."

14.

Gwendolyn Brooks' mother must accept the choice she made to abort her children even as she had no choice, while CAConrad's/Frank's mother must cope with a living child whom she cannot contain as well as those that she lost. Frank is the opposite of the pined for, aborted child. Frank is the child who lived to his mother's regret. Frank is the wrong gender, or no gender. For Frank and his mother, gender is not a choice to make. Nor is life, nor is death.

15.

Frank's difficult relationship with living to disappoint his mother persists throughout the book, and in the poem beginning on page 16, Frank imagines wresting the power of abortion away from her by assuming it himself. After being embarrassed at school by his mother, who shows up with newly grown, ink-oozing tentacles, Frank plots his revenge:

*'when I die,' Frank prayed,
'I will never return
if I must*

*it will be as
abortions
it will be as if I had not'*

16.

As Eileen Myles argues in her afterword to the book, "To return as *one* abortion would be vulgar, broad, the threat of an angry Goth kid. But coming back as a sea of them constitutes instead a community of loss." In fact, when read alongside the second poem in the collection, returning as abortions might result in Frank receiving the attention that his mother's nine miscarriages receive. Imagining life as abortions is absurd, and it is also profound. As abortions, Frank might receive the kind of devoted, wracked-by-undecidability kind of care that Brooks' mother lavishes on her "dim killed children." As abortions, Frank might be less dismissible than a boy without a cunt.

17.

Remarking on Frank's prayer to come back to his mother as abortions, Eileen Myles concludes, "He's saying something theoretical *in poetry* through the mundanity of *stuff*." He is also saying something political.

Myles writes in her afterword that part of CAConrad's achievement with *The Book of Frank* is presenting the reader with the experience of "hearing one time, many times, that *you* don't matter. You can't *make* or exist, that you can't *be*." Is Frank a fortunate child for being alive to hear these things? Children hear these things, often queer children, often boys born without cunts. Frank hears these things and wishes he was abortions. Does he imagine abortions to be as doted upon as his mother's miscarriages? Does he imagine

the devotion of Brooks' mother? What possibilities exist for a child who is born only to be told that he cannot exist? And what possibilities exist for the queer poet who writes abortions and miscarriages who are more adored than living children?

18.

What Gwendolyn Brooks and CAConrad do with rhetoric in poetry is political work. They imagine the full complexity of mothers having children or abortions without choice. They imagine the possibilities and limitations for creating life and destroying life without ever deciding which is better or best. Neither poet is writing only to or about their political present. Brooks' 1945 poem was taken up by Barbara Johnson in a politically volatile moment for women in 1987. The personhood bills that Johnson refers to in her 1987 essay are being proposed in state houses around the United States in 2012. These ballot initiatives would endow fetuses with more rights than their mothers. CAConrad tested theories about whether queer children or miscarried children are more adored in a book published in 2009. It will never be a good year for women facing the decision of whether or not to keep their children, or for queer children who are told by their parents that they are the wrong gender and therefore cannot exist. Poets will continue to explore this terrain whenever they are writing, in whatever form, and their poems will have the potential to present arguments in a way that is more complex than any other political speech.

Justin Sherwood is a recent graduate of The New School MFA in Creative Writing program, where he was selected for the 2012 Paul Violi Prize in Poetry. He is a founding member of the Feminist Writers Organization and currently serves as an Assistant Editor for Construction Literary Magazine.

NOTES:

1. Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr. "Two Poets on Politics." www.poetrysociety.org.
2. Barbara Johnson. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
3. Gwendolyn Brooks. *Selected Poems*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1963.
4. Kathryn Joyce. "Abortion as 'Black Genocide': An Old Scare Tactic Re-Emerges." *The Public Eye*. 2010.
5. CAConrad. *The Book of Frank*. Seattle, WA: Wave Books, 2009.

UPCOMING POETRY PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Poem as Process, Procedure, Prosthesis erica kaufman

Tuesdays / 7-9PM / Begins October 2
10 Sessions

This workshop will begin by exploring “the writing process” and the ways in which writing is a practice of discovery, a practice that revels in the unfinished and incorrect, the risky and redemptive, the automatic and the adversarial. After probing and pushing our own processes, we will move into the realm of chance and procedure—writing against, over and through our own impulses—virtual, animal, cyborgian, internalized, prosthetic. This workshop will play with the idea of the “prosthesis” as an “addition”—a way to flesh out and challenge our process through the use of form, ritual, exercise and experiment. We will read from and work with texts by Fred Moten, Eileen Myles, John Coletti, Gertrude Stein, CAConrad, Glenn Ligon, Leslie Scalapino and others. **erica kaufman** is the author of *censory impulse*. She teaches at Baruch College and is a faculty associate of Bard College’s Institute for Writing & Thinking.

Baroqueify!

Nada Gordon

Fridays / 7-9PM / Begins October 5
10 Sessions

What if more actually is more? How can we create writing that is more sumptuous, more intense, more curvaceous, more elegant, more obscure, more grotesque and more *beautiful*? Let’s traverse the ornate forms of the baroque in pursuit of a more intensely ornamental language. Using others’ texts as starting points, we will supplement, enhance, copy, modify, twist, mangle and decorate words, syntax, structures, tropes and concepts to maximize sublime bewilderment. We will read some essays on theories of ornament (and anti-ornament) to inform our investigations. Writers whose works we will explore may include Rabelais, Donne, M. Cavendish, Loy, Huysmans, O’Hara, Koch and Coolidge, as well as Stacy Doris, Lisa Robertson, Brandon Brown, Adeena Karasick, Dana Ward, Corina Copp,

Julian T. Brolaski, Charles Bernstein and Julie Patton. “Nonpoetic” sources for poem construction will be encouraged. Not a traditional “poetry workshop,” Baroqueify! will mainly focus on analysis, discussion and reverse-engineering of texts by others, as well as mindcurling writing exercises. Our seminar will conclude with work on performance strategies to enhance the baroque sensibilities of the writing. Come decorate this fucked-up world with me! **Nada Gordon** is the author of *Scented Rushes*, *Folly*, *V. Imp*, *Are Not Our Lowing Heifers Sleeker than Night-Swollen Mushrooms?*, *foriegnn bodie*, and *Swoon*. She has blogged for nearly ten years at ululate.blogspot.com, the initiatory sentence of which reads, “The impulse to decorate is, as always, very strong.”

Poetry Lab: What Can a Poem Be?

Todd Colby

Saturdays / 2-4PM / Begins October 6
10 Sessions

What can a poem be? We will attempt to answer this question while creating new modes and forms of poetry just outside the dominant culture. In this class we will create a safe place to take chances, to openly speculate and participate in the ongoing dialogue that ensues. There will be weekly experiments and assignments and a lot of in-class writing. We will tumble together through collaborations and mutual innovations. We will explore poetry through play, joy, openness, immediacy, profound ideologies, music and art. We will take risks that allow us to reinvent ourselves as poets every time we sit down to write. We will create poems that do not resemble or sound like poems, all the while being totally committed to the idea of broadening the borders of the possibilities of poetry. We will leap off a platform constructed by Henri Michaux, Reggie Watts, Djuna Barnes, Bill Knott, Fernando Pessoa, Hannah Weiner, E. M. Cioran, Ben Marcus, Gertrude Stein, Andy Kaufman, Sei Shonagon, Joe Brainard, Walter Benjamin, Diane Williams and more. **Todd Colby** is the author of four books of poetry published by Soft Skull Press. He keeps a blog at gleefarm.blogspot.com.

Workshop Memberships are now available for \$375 and include a one-year Individual Membership (\$50 level) as well as tuition for any and all spring and fall classes. If you wish to enroll in a single workshop only, tuition for one 10-session workshop is \$250 for the 2012–13 season. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Caps on class sizes, if in effect, will be determined by workshop leaders. If you would like to reserve a spot, please call (212) 674-0910.

EVENTS at THE POETRY PROJECT

MONDAY 9/24

ERIC BAUS & WENDY S. WALTERS

Eric Baus is the author of *Scared Text* (Center for Literary Publishing), *Tuned Drones* (Octopus Books) and *The To Sound* (Verse Press/Wave Books). With Andrea Rexilius, he co-edits Marcel Chapbooks. He lives in Denver. **Wendy S. Walters** is the author of *Troy*, *Michigan* (Futurepoem Books, forthcoming), *Longer I Wait, More You Love Me* (Palm Press, 2009) and the chapbook *Birds of Los Angeles* (Palm Press, 2005).

WEDNESDAY 9/26

BEAUTY IS A VERB: THE NEW POETRY OF DISABILITY WITH JENNIFER BARTLETT, ELLEN McGRATH SMITH & NORMA COLE

Jennifer Bartlett is the author of *Derivative of the Moving Image* and *(a) lullaby without any music*. She is co-editor with Michael Northen and Sheila Black of *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*. **Ellen McGrath Smith** teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and in the Carlow University Madwomen in the Attic program. Her poetry has been recognized with an Academy of American Poets award and a 2007 Individual Artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. **Norma Cole's** new book of poetry, *WIN THESE POSTERS AND OTHER UNRELATED PRIZES INSIDE*, has just appeared from Omnidawn Press. Other books of poetry include *Natural Light*, *Where Shadows Will: Selected Poems 1988–2008* and *Spinoza in Her Youth*.

FRIDAY 9/28, 10PM

100,000 POETS FOR CHANGE OPEN READING

100,000 P.F.C. (www.100TPC.org) gathers poets from around the world to celebrate poetry promoting change. This past year, people made their way to Wall Street to read poems and hold signs as they experimented with social structures and reimagined the future. In honor of the many experiments in inclusivity conducted by the occupiers: upon arrival, readers will choose a word. When a poem is being read and you hear your word, you will stand up and begin to read a poem until one of your words signals another reader to begin reading. Bring a range of poems and stretch that vocabulary, as every time your word is said you should read a different poem. \$8 suggested donation.

MONDAY 10/1

OPEN READING SIGN-UP AT 7:45PM

WEDNESDAY 10/3

ROSMARIE WALDROP & MARJORIE WELISH

Rosmarie Waldrop's *Driven to Abstraction* was published by New Directions in 2010. Other recent books of poetry are *Curves*

to the Apple, *Blindsight*, *Splitting Images* and *Love, Like Pronouns*. Her collected essays, *Dissonance (if you are interested)*, were published by University of Alabama Press. She lives in Providence, where she co-edits Burning Deck books with Keith Waldrop. **Marjorie Welish** is the author of *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems*, *Word Group*, *Isle of the Signatories* and, most recently, *In the Futurity Lounge/Asylum for Indeterminacy*. She is the Madelon Leventhal Rand Distinguished Lecturer in Literature at Brooklyn College.

MONDAY 10/8

SPECIAL EVENT: AROARA: IN THE PINES

Andrew Whiteman (Broken Social Scene, Apostle of Hustle) and Ariel (Land of Kush) have formed a new group, AroarA. In this performance, their first in New York City, they will sing excerpts from *In The Pines* by Alice Notley, which they have converted into faux folk song forms. Please come and help them sing Alice's poetry back into its "cathedral." Admission is \$10.

WEDNESDAY 10/10

TOM PICKARD & CHUCK STEBELTON

Tom Pickard's last three books of poetry, *Hole in the Wall (New and Selected)*, *The Dark Months of May* and *Ballad of Jamie Allan*, were all published by Flood Editions. *Ballad of Jamie Allan* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. **Chuck Stebelton** is author of *The Platformist* (The Cultural Society, 2012) and *Circulation Flowers* (Tougher Disguises, 2005). He works as Literary Program Director at Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee.

FRIDAY 10/12, 10PM

NOEL BLACK & ERIN MORRILL

Noel Black founded (with Ed Berrigan) *LOG Magazine* and published Angry Dog Midget Editions in the late 1990s. He is the author of *Uselysses* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011). **Erin Morrill** founded Trafficker Press in 2007 with Andrew Kenower. She is a queer poli-femme with a diastema whose sun is in Sagittarius with a Scorpio moon and Cancer rising. She is tremendously indebted to poetry.

MONDAY 10/15

FRANCINE J. HARRIS & KATE SCHAPIRA

francine j. harris' first collection, *allegiance*, was published in Spring 2012. She is a Cave Canem and Callaloo fellow and a Pushcart Prize nominee who received her MFA from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she lives, teaches and writes. **Kate Schapira** is the author of four full-length books of poetry, including *The Soft Place* (Horse Less Press, 2012), and seven chapbooks. *Little Eva*, *the Insomniac from Mars* is forthcoming from dancing girl press.

WEDNESDAY 10/17

JOHN GODFREY & JOHN KOETHE

Of **John Godfrey's** nine collections, four are published in this century: *Push the Mule* (Figures, 2001), *Private Lemonade* (Adventures in Poetry, 2003), *City of Corners* (Wave, 2008), and *Tiny Gold Dress* (Lunar Chandelier, 2012). **John Koethe's** new book, *ROTC Kills*, was just published by HarperCollins. His previous book, *Ninety-Fifth Street*, received the Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets. He has also received the Frank O'Hara and Kingsley Tufts awards and is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

FRIDAY 10/19, 10PM

BETHANY IDES & CECILIA CORRIGAN

Bethany Ides' poetic projects for the page include *Approximate L*, a sci-fi-leaning prose poem (Cosa Nostra Editions, 2008) and *Indeed, Insist (a mystery)* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2005). Ides co-directed the Gilded Pony Performance Festival in 2006 and co-founded *FO (A) RM*, an interdisciplinary journal of arts and research. **Cecilia Corrigan's** work has been published in *The Journal*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Awl*, *The Nicola Midnight St. Claire*, *Glitterpony* and *Emergency Index*. Her forthcoming book *TITANIC* was awarded the Plonsker Prize and will be published by &NOW Books.

MONDAY 10/22

CONCEPTUAL WRITING BY WOMEN: TALK BY RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS & VANESSA PLACE; READINGS BY KATIE DEGENTESH & DIVYA VICTOR

Rachel Blau DuPlessis is the author of the long poem *Drafts*. **Katie Degentesh's** first book, *The Anger Scale*, was published by Combo Books and was recently featured in the Poetry Society of America's New American Poets series. **Vanessa Place** killed poetry. – *Anon.*, via Twitter. **Divya Victor's** publications include *Partial Dictionary of the Unnamable* (Troll Thread Press), *PUNCH* (Gauss PDF) and *Goodbye John! On John Baldessari* (Gauss PDF).

WEDNESDAY 10/24

BRENDA HILLMAN & GIOVANNI SINGLETON

Brenda Hillman is the author of eight collections of poetry, all published by Wesleyan University Press, the most recent of which are *Cascadia* (2001), *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005) and *Practical Water* (2009). With Patricia Dienstfrey, she edited *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (Wesleyan, 2003). **giovanni singleton** is a poet, teacher and founding editor of *nocturnes (re)view of the literary arts*.

Her debut poetry collection, *Ascension*, has been awarded the 81st California Book Award Gold Medal.

MONDAY 10/29

BRIAN BLANCHFIELD & ANTHONY MADRID

Brian Blanchfield is the author of *Not Even Then* (University of California Press, 2004), and has new poems in recent or eventual issues of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, *The Nation*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Paris Review* and other publications. **Anthony Madrid's** poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI Online*, *Boston Review*, *Fence*, *Gulf Coast*, *Iowa Review*, *Lana Turner* and other journals. His first book, *I Am Your Slave Now Do What I Say*, was published in April 2012 by Canarium Books.

WEDNESDAY 10/31

JOCelyn SAIDENBERG & LYNNE TILLMAN

Jocelyn Saidenberg is the author of *Mortal City*, *Cusp*, *Negativity*, *The Dispossessed* and *Shipwreck*. She is the founding editor of Krupskaya Books and has curated literary events and performances for New Langton Arts, Small Press Traffic and Right Window. **Lynne Tillman's** fourth collection of stories, *Someday This Will Be Funny*, was published by Red Lemonade Press. Her novels are *American Genius*, *A Comedy*; *Haunted Houses*; *Motion Sickness*; *Cast in Doubt*; and *No Lease on Life*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction and a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year.

FRIDAY 11/2, 10PM

CATHERINE TAYLOR & JULIA BLOCH

Catherine Taylor is a Founding Editor of Essay Press, a publisher of book-length, innovative and hybrid-genre essays. She is the author of *Apart* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012). Catherine received her PhD from Duke University and teaches at Ithaca College. **Julia Bloch's** poems, essays and reviews have appeared in *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Aufgabe*, *P-Queue*, *Sibila* (translated into Portuguese) and elsewhere. She is the author of *Letters to Kelly Clarkson* (Sidebrow Books, 2012) and an editor of *Jacket2*.

MONDAY 11/5

EMILY ABENDROTH & SHANE MCCRAE

Emily Abendroth's recent publications include *Exclosures #1-8* (Albion Books), *Toward Eadward Forward* (Horse Less Press) and "Property : None / Property : Undone," a broadside and multimedia collaboration (Taproot Editions). **Shane McCrae** is the

author of *Mule* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2011), a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and *Blood* (Noemi Press, 2013), as well as two chapbooks, *One Neither One* (Octopus Books, 2009) and *In Canaan* (Rescue Press, 2010).

WEDNESDAY 11/7

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS & TONY LOPEZ

Recent poetry and visual works by **Rachel Blau DuPlessis** are *The Collage Poems of Drafts* (Salt Publishing, 2011) and *Pitch: Drafts 77-95* (Salt Publishing, 2010). *Surge: Drafts 96-114* is currently being completed. *Her Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (University of Iowa Press, 2012) is part of a trilogy of works about gender and poetics. **Tony Lopez** is an English poet best known for his book *False Memory* (The Figures, 1996; Shearsman, 2012). His most recent collection, *Only More So* (UNO Press, 2011), is the latest of twenty-five books of his poetry, criticism and fiction.

MONDAY 11/12

TALK SERIES: ARIEL GOLDBERG: ON THE ESTRANGEMENT PRINCIPLE

Last spring **Ariel Goldberg** completed part one of *The Estrangement Principle* (selections of which appear in *Aufgabe 11*) and slow-mailed it out to interested readers, from whom she solicited responses. According to her website, it's "an essay that thinks about the labeling of art as queer as well as what further bounties or problems might arise for art and queerness when they live together." Discussion ensues. Goldberg writes and performs poetic criticism. Recent publications include *Picture Cameras* (NoNo Press) and *The Photographer without a Camera* (Trafficker Press).

WEDNESDAY 11/14

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE & ANNE TARDOS

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge is the author of twelve books of poetry, including *Empathy* (Station Hill Press), *Nest* (Kelsey Street Press) and *I Love Artists* (University of California Press). A book collaboration about weather with artist Kiki Smith was published by Galerie Lelong in 2012 and a volume of poems is forthcoming from New Directions. **Anne Tardos'** recent books include *The Dik-dik's Solitude* (Granary, 2003), *I Am You* (Salt, 2008), and *Both Poems* (Roof Books, 2011). She is also the editor of Jackson Mac Low's *154 Forties* (Counterpath, 2012) and *Thing of Beauty* (University of California Press, 2008).

FRIDAY 11/16, 10PM

SARA MARCUS & MICHELLE TEA

Sara Marcus' first book, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, was published by Harper Perennial in 2010. Her poetry has been published in *Encyclopedia*, *EOAGH*, *With + Stand*, *Death*, *The Art of Touring* and elsewhere. **Michelle Tea** is the editor of Sister Spit Books, an imprint of City Lights. Her most recent publication is the anthology *Sister Spit: Writing, Rants and Reminiscence from the Road*, which she edited. She blogs about trying to get pregnant for xoJane.com

MONDAY 11/26

ARACELIS GIRMAY & JENNY ZHANG

Aracelis Girmay is the author of the poetry collections *Teeth* (Curbstone Press, 2007) & *Kingdom Animalia* (BOA, 2011), & the collage-based picture book *changing, changing* (George Braziller, 2005). **Jenny Zhang** is the author of the poetry collection, *Dear Jenny, We Are All Find* (Octopus Books, 2012.) Her fiction, nonfiction and poetry have appeared in *Jezebel*, *Glimmertrain*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Guardian*, *Diagram* and *Vice Magazine*.

WEDNESDAY 11/28

SRIKANTH REDDY & SARAH RIGGS

Srikanth Reddy is the author of two books of poetry, *Facts for Visitors* (2004) and *Voyager* (2011), both published by the University of California Press, and a book-length work titled *Conversities* written in collaboration with Dan Beachy-Quick (1913 Press, 2012). **Sarah Riggs** is the author of *Autobiography of Envelopes* (Burning Deck, 2012), *60 Textos* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010), *Waterwork* (Chax Press, 2007) and *Chain of Minuscule Decisions in the Form of a Feeling* (Reality Street Editions, 2007). She has translated the work of Isabelle Garron, Marie Borel, Etel Adnan, Ryoko Sekiguchi and Oscarine Bosquet.

FRIDAY 11/30, 10PM

CHARLES WOLSKI & SHANA MOULTON

Charles Wolski writes fiction and poetry. His most recent work, *Check Out My Lifestyle*, a collaboration with Arlo Quint, is forthcoming from Well Greased Press. He lives in Brooklyn. **Shana Moulton** has exhibited or performed at The New Museum, SF MOMA, MoMA P.S.1, Performa 2009, The Kitchen, Electronic Arts Intermix, Art in General, The Andy Warhol Museum, The Wexner Center for the Arts, Wiels Center for Contemporary Art in Brussels and other sites.

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

Book Reviews

Atalanta (Acts of God)

Robert Ashley

(Burning Books, 2011)

Review by Kendra Sullivan

Robert Ashley is a composer and poet, a snake-charmer of anecdote, American vernacular, the everyday and the mundane. *Atalanta (Acts of God)* is the second installment in his operatic trilogy that begins with *Perfect Lives* and ends with *Now Eleanor's Idea*.

Atalanta (Acts of God) is named after a building named after a myth. Its stories unravel as a result of "A manuscript. / Author unknown? / An opera that was never seen nor heard. / About a flying saucer. / Came to earth."

The plot begins when Atalanta, "a girl-child," is left on mountainside to die. Raised by a bear, she thrives in the wild. In view of her beauty and achievements as a huntress, her father wishes her to marry a local prince. She agrees, on the condition that her future husband must beat her in a footrace. Many fail and die.

This is the year of the big race.

By big we mean big

The prize is inestimable.

By race we mean race.

The loser loses all.

Welcome.

Hippomenes distracts Atalanta during the race with three golden apples and wins. How could this happen? Transformed into leopards after making love in a temple, the couple is condemned to a life of fruitless lust.

Still cursed, Atalanta becomes the Odalisque, at once the ideal "object of desire" and a sovereign enclosed within the *oda*, meaning "room," isolated "from all but her entertainers and retinue." She is also the ultimate audience, empowered to give and take the actor's life based on his performance. Three men are called upon to entertain the Odalisque. She must choose among them. "The loser loses all." They are: "Max Ernst surrealist painter. / He stands for the pictures we see. / Willard Reynolds storyteller. / He stands for the stories we are told. / Bud Powell composer pianist. / He stands for the music we hear."

The opera is divided into "Max," "Willard" and "Bud," representing image, narrative and music. Each candidate has a Love Song: "NO NEVER NO," "YOU GOTTA HOLD ME TIGHTER YEAH" and "GIVING LOVE AWAY." Based on a technique invented by Ashley's longtime collaborator "Blue" Gene Tyranny, the songs create a sound environment of musical interludes, agitators and accompaniments throughout.

Each chapter begins with the subsection "It's a Girl" and ends with "Problems in the Flying Saucer." What stretches out in between is something like a countryside with no consistent terrain. Some topics explored in chronological order are:

"Max": A ball-bearing manufacturer on a hill and his subjects in the surrounding valleys; "Sphericity / absolute to our / Sense of it"; speech and meaning; time and relative position; the Sargasso Sea; "Tiny circle / more and more now / Strange lights / In the sky"; a brief liaison between a police officer and a traffic violator; an alien crew trying to understand how time interfaces with place and how to decontaminate their ship of illness "imagination."

"Willard": A choice between "the most ordinary among us"; a desire to play professional baseball thwarted by curveball that doesn't break; an exploration of agriculture, land use and "the surface as a concept materialized... by the notion of the boundary"; the river, the point in the river, now hidden by smoothness, where something strange happened referred to only in stories; a mule in a tree; the Tennessee Valley Authority; the "feeling of making a mistake— / Precisely of having slept through the beginnings of something"; fortune and misfortune; love and defiance; peach pits mistaken for flying saucers; the arrival of local law enforcement; the extra man in the Depression Era; the rise and fall of the tomato soup empire in America.

"Bud": A woman with "perfect compassion for herself..."; moving forward though "nothing fits. / Or makes sense to us"; identifying ourselves with the machinery crashing down; making music; a conversation in a foreign

language on a train; a concert in France; a sense that we are not inadequate at all; a wife; her sister.

Here, there is a systemic rupture in the poem, a suite of stories about *au pairs* written by Jacqueline Humbert, one of Ashley's long-time performers. (She appeared at Max Ernst's alter ego "Lap Lap" the bird in a prior opera.) The *au pairs* suffer from emotional breakdowns and rebel against or marry their employers. Some expose their wards to sexual danger and one even burns down her the home of her former host family. Based on fact, they represent the perspective of outsiders on the inside: "the *au pairs* have one idea about what is going on and their employers have another."

In an interview I heard Ashley say, "You can't tell a long story symmetrically." This story reads like "the mystery of the place where, according to history, a complex kind of structure—also hidden as work—is part of the plan of the river." In his afterword, he states: "There are present and past tenses but there is no before and after in the plot. In the way it works today, a plot is simply the reason that the singing characters are all in the same place at the same time."

The opera is lawless, endless in variation, and inconceivable, except (in an image supplied by Ashley) as three discrete but identically proportioned solar systems with interchangeable suns, moons and stars. In it, "one can become inured to the fact of the reality, but the reality itself is always new."

Bud asks, "Can music, then, substitute itself for the enactment of struggle in other parts of our lives?" Can poetry, then, substitute itself for music? I believe in Robert Ashley.

"The flying saucer is here to stay. / And we are in the saucer."

Kendra Sullivan is painter, bookmaker, poet and boatmaker based in Brooklyn.

Then Go On by Mary Burger

"The formal inventiveness of Mary Burger's writing in part derives from her questioning of received ideas but also from the sheer pleasure she seems to take in following what the sentence can do within the "as-yet as-ever still-undetermined space between send and receive."
— Carla Harryman

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Aufgabe 11

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Utopia Minus

Susan Briante

(Ahsahta Press, 2011)

Review by Jeffery Berg

Susan Briante has a gift and obsession with scale and the paradoxical ("Starlings in the magnolia tree crackle"; "a helicopter floats") within the modern ruins of American landscapes, yet her work is never pedantic. She expresses resistance, fascination and need for the material world ("The problem is that I always want two / things at once") and its mostly destructive yet complex relationship with nature ("monarch butterflies scatter across the Metroplex"). The title of the collection is found within the book's epigraph, from land artist Robert Smithson's *Guide to the Monuments of Passaic New Jersey*: "...the suburbs exist without a rational past without the 'big events' of history....A Utopia minus a bottom, a place where the machines are idle, and the sun has turned to glass."

Utopia Minus is a book tinged with wry humor ("O Sunglass Hut, we hardly knew you!") and haunted by remnants and soon-to-be-remnants of American consumerism: the dumps, the rebooted strip malls, the factories and shut-down industrial complexes ("the Texas Instruments complex, still empty, humming"). There's specificity, uniqueness and seduction in Briante's images and a close-up view ("I was a lonely child, loved looking / at things no one would notice") of detritus similar to William Carlos Williams' "Between Walls." (Briante also hails from New Jersey.)

Sometimes Briante observes nature trying to fight back as in the "chalices of rain" over the "Target/Best Buy/Payless Shopping Center" and the "blue jays" who "tear an afternoon to rags" and in the poems which are addressed to officials—which sometimes lightly satirize their wonkish titles like "Mr. Chairman of Ethics, Leadership and Personnel Policy in the U.S. Army's Office of the Deputy of Staff for Personnel." In these letters, Briante seems unnerved by the country and laments world events while systematically describing them through the lens of nature ("Madam, do you ever get the feeling there's something wrong with how / things are run? Rwandans bury their children by the dozen. Tropical / depressions spiral through the afternoon. And when a cardinal spits out / his high, hard song, are we responsible to him as well.") This "high, hard song" is also mimicked in the sound of a nail gun—this tool to rebuild and hold in place—as she repeats the phrase "Stop the war, stop the war..."

A seminal poem in the collection is "Here in the Mountains," which begins as an ode to idyllic surroundings but then literally stops in the next stanza to recall the speaker's anthropological human-ness ("I have not seen a stoplight for days") and then moves into one of the most striking, sad and ironic passages in the book: "Black bears come down from the mountain to feed at the county dump / amidst plastic toilet seats and crumpled windshields. Like me and the / flies, they reject traditional notions of beauty." By envisioning the scene of the dump as Manhattan in the

1970s, she ends the poem in parentheticals by naming "this boulder" feminist Bella Abzug and "this birch tree" Lou Reed. It's an arresting moment that is indicative of her reverence and complicated view of both nature and humankind.

Jeffery Berg writes poems and lives in New York.

The Death of Pringle

Justin Katko

(Flim Forum Press, 2012)

Review by Jeff T. Johnson

What do the motherfuckers want? Everything—that is: It All.

THE FREE PRINGLE, a chip, made of curved and pressed potato substance, dusted with salt and spewing speech, is perhaps the only hope (along with the semi-effectual POETS THREE who operate as the chip's troubadours) for a free people besieged by teraformalization. For their part, THE PEOPLE, sated with free lunch, are not so concerned with the potential loss of autonomous space. THE MOTHER FUCKERS have an orb, some magic dust (if reports are to be believed), and a TOTAL COPY of the SONY [sic] BONO MEMORIAL PARK. Their plan seems to involve application of the dust to the en-orbed simulacrum, so that it becomes, like, everything. Or everyplace—the total package and only option: the full-on Walmartification of urban



planning and social programming. Here's how Justin Katko, in *THE ARGUMENT OF THE DEATH OF PRINGLE*, projects our picture:

*UPON THE ACCUMULATION OF POWER
2 THE CRITICAL DEGREE, IT IS THE
VILE MOTHER FUCKERS' INTENTION
2 SUBLIMATE THE TRANSPARENT
SPHERE'S OUTPUTS IN2 THE ONTO-
LOGICAL FUNCTION OF THE ATMO-
SPHERIC DUST, SATURATNG THE
NEWLY TRUNCATED SKY WITH THE
PURE STUFF OF THE VIRTUAL. THE
ENTIRE REGION WOULD BECOME THE
AUGMENTED TOTAL COPY OF THE
SONY BONO MEMORIAL PARK, SCALED
UP TWO THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED
AND EIGHTY ONE TIMES ITS ACTUAL
SIZE.*

Oh, and the sea will be filled with rotting meat grown both rank and emancipated from the Earth, to be navigated (we shall nearly learn, for the tale is told in a subsequent,

unfinished, indeed abandoned book) by *THE BIG MERMAID*. She tunnels her way through the meat in a most tubular manner, as the meat reconstitutes in her wake. Yum!

Right, so there's a lot going on, and it goes on in nothing but ALLCAPS, at least in the poem proper (our nostalgia for lowercase is waved at from captions along the margin). Credit Katko's virtuosic grasp of his hyperdystopic idiom that the typeface carries loads of nuance. *THE DEATH OF PRINGLE* is nothing if not fun to read, particularly after you have sampled the included recordings, and have been infected by Katko's affectual array. (I defy you to cast a dry eye at the plaintive, lyrically sublime performance of "Radical Accounting LIVE!") The forty-two-minute recording is more album than book on CD, featuring Katko's original score and scrupulous (if unhinged) performance. It's out there in a galaxy sharing constellations (and/or portals) with Del tha Funky Homosapien, Don Van Vliet, Mark E. Smith, Why?, *Pee Wee's*

Playhouse and They Might Be Giants. Once you find Katko's wavelength, you'll tune into his fine tuning.

What is the language of *PRINGLE*, beyond exquisitely rendered? We are in a futurama jargon informed by, among a myriad of place-things and other word-objects, our riding shotgun with *Gunslinger*, sited by one Edward Dorn (of whom Katko is now a Cambridge-educated scholar). We are in Providence, Rhode Island, up against the screen, where Katko developed *PRINGLE* in the Literary Arts Program at Brown University. The piano player is in silhouette against a projection of his own opera. He is singing of a Pringle—yes, a chip, but an epic one. We are in a junk-food-fed digital mediascape, barely dodging data-chip hermeneutics.

In May 2008, I happened into Brown's McCormack Theater with a couple of friends who were visiting the program. I was unprepared for what I was about to see, and it took awhile



for the Beavis in me to stop chuckling and listen up to this super-sharp dude. About a year later, after I moved to Providence and came into sympathetic orbit with Katko (whose spontaneous conversational riffs on vasty-deep thinkership are as unforgettable as they are impossible to reconstruct), he casually revealed that I had seen the first full performance. HOLY SHIT THE BED, as I PRINGLE SAID.

Listen, you won't get any closer to *PRINGLE* in this column. Besides, it's gone. Katko cancelled a plan to write a six-part super-poem after completing this first installment. What remains of the grand narrative are bits and pieces collected in the second half of *THE DEATH OF PRINGLE*, as presented by one of our true visionary publishers, Flim Forum Press. What's available to us is a fragment—a chip, if you will—but if you let it in your processor, it will scale up way beyond full size.

Jeff T. Johnson's poetry is forthcoming or has recently appeared in Boston Review, smoking glue gun, dandelion magazine, and The Organism for Poetic Research's PELT. Other writing has appeared in Sink Review, The Rumpus, Coldfront, and elsewhere. With Claire Donato, he collaborates on SPECIAL AMERICA. He lives in Brooklyn, is Editor in Chief at LIT, and edits Dewclaw. He teaches at The New School and St. John's University. For more information, visit jeffjohnson.wordpress.com.

***The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century*
Christopher Nealon
(Harvard University Press, 2011)
Review by Gregory Laynor**

There's a lot that I want to quote from Christopher Nealon's book about poetry and capitalism, but what I most want to quote is a

sentence Nealon quotes from a John Ashbery interview from 2005. It's from an interview with *The Guardian* in which Ashbery recalls protesting the Vietnam War: "I went to the huge Central Park demonstration against the war when we marched to the UN, although me and my friends did stop off at a hotel bar to have a few margaritas on the way."

One way to describe *The Matter of Capital* is as an assemblage of excerpts of poems from poets not usually quoted together. "A Language of New York," "A Supermarket in California," "A Poem for Speculative Hipsters," "A Long Conversation," "A Textbook of Poetry," *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*—the book maps what Nealon calls a "multi-authored literary 'matter'" enmeshed in capital and its disasters. The book is about how poets have imagined capital and about how poems (as textual matter) record catastrophe.

The book is also a book about gay poetry and capitalism. What I'd really like to do is recite

for you the chapters on John Ashbery and Jack Spicer, or even the whole book. But for now, in my little review that's more like a collection of favorite quotes than a proper review, I'll try to highlight Nealon's discussion of how Ashbery and Spicer both "developed a sense of poetry as a minor art, requiring camouflage and dispersal to survive."

What I keep returning to in the book is Nealon's description of Ashbery's "posture of minority" (I drew an asterisk next to it and underlined it and drew a squiggly line under the underline). In Ashbery's poetry of the 1970s (New York financial crisis), Nealon notices a recurring theme of feeling small and vulnerable and of somehow "wandering away" from catastrophe. And in Ashbery's devotion to the "minor poetry" of "The Other Tradition," Nealon hears "a wish not to be party to violence, which shades into a wish not to be responsible for it, which shades into a wish not to know about it."

Which brings me to Jack Spicer, "vigilantly alert to crisis, almost seeming at times to want to trigger it." Nealon writes that "if each poem, for Spicer, serially indexes the category 'poetry,' it also points to crisis—each poem stages forms of swiftness and distraction designed to land a blow that is a kind of 'counterpunch' to 'the human crisis' that is so easy to ignore, or to miss."

I like how odd the mix is of poets discussed in the book—Jennifer Moxley and Wendell Berry and Lyn Hejinian and Claudia Rankine and W. H. Auden and so on. And I like Nealon's suggestion that "it is not only the poetries of witness and documentation, or movement poetries, that are worrying over the destiny that capitalism is forcing us toward." And I think that worry is something, if not enough.

Gregory Laynor is studying and teaching at the University of Washington in Seattle. His reading of Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans appears on UbuWeb.

Dear Prudence
David Trinidad
(Turtle Point Press, 2011)
Review by Bill Kushner

*I would say the writing of poems is like
dancing on ice
In the crisp dark night that has no stars.
("Evening Twilight")*

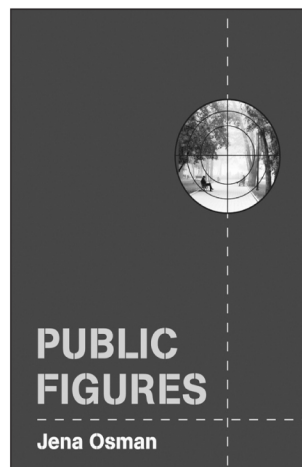
Well, there is a whole lot of dancing and shaking going on in this great big wedding cake of a delicious book. Trinidad, growing up gay and somehow straying along the way into sex, drugs, and rock and roll, believes in putting it all out there and leaving it on the page, and that is my kind of poet.

Shall we first get to his long poem, "A Poem Under the Influence"? In style and form, it appears to be an homage to gay poet James Schuyler, a kind of passing of the baton, inspired in part by Schuyler's own great long poems "A Few Days" and "Morning of the Poem." Schuyler's humor, his honesty and simplicity, his guile in keeping those long poems going and going and going, are matched by Trinidad's own brand of

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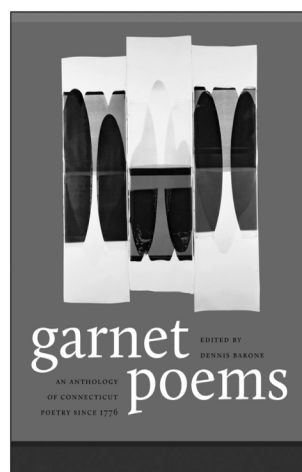
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goofy humor. He loves the word "pink" and he seems devilishly intent on throwing it into line after line, playing fast and loose in this shimmering ballet of words.

In his prose poem "AIDS Series," Trinidad writes of visiting dying poet Tim Dlugos at Roosevelt Hospital:

For years I lamented the fact that I wasn't able, as he was dying, to talk with him about what was happening. It would have felt intrusive for me to bring it up. Eileen said she just held Tim's hand and told him she loved him. That was helpful to hear. The next time I visited him on G-9, I did the same. Tim said, 'I love you, too.' It was late afternoon, and we sat, mostly in silence, as the light faded. I remember everything as gray.

In a poem dated 1988, "Driving Back from New Haven," he refers again to Tim, an angry Tim, who says, "I resent / it. I resent that we were not raised with / an acceptance of death. And here it is, / all around us. And I fucking resent it. / I resent that we do not know how to die."

Trinidad himself does not turn away from the dying of the light. In the most chilling poem I have ever read, "The Shower Scene in Psycho," Trinidad reels off both the bloodbath in the movie "Psycho" and switches back and forth from "Psycho" to the Manson gang murders of a pregnant Sharon Tate and her friends. Trinidad's technique here is impeccable and most impressive. I must pause here to contemplate the wide impact that all the great gay poets from Whitman on have had on shaping the cultural destiny of American

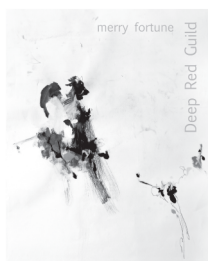
poetry. Trinidad's eyes go everywhere, so there's the fun poem about the feud between Bette Davis and Joan Crawford; and the fun poem in which Diane Arbus is commissioned to photograph Jacqueline Susann and her husband, Irving Mansfield, and demands, of all things, that they change into their swimsuits and pose with her on his lap. They did as Arbus directed, but later complained that the resulting photo was "undignified."

So many poems in this book have such a lovely shine to them because Trinidad is so in love with colors, all colors, all singing and dancing and shining away before your eyes. His poem, "A Poet's Death" dedicated to Rachel Sherwood (1954–1979) evokes his friend Rachel so clearly and lovingly: "In Wales, something fearless / woke you up, you drank, wrote, fucked. Now, stuck in / the suburbs, we talked poets, punk rock. This / was the late seventies, disco's zenith. / We both wanted to look like Patti Smith." That's the thing about so many of Trinidad's poems, that painterly visual style of his. His poem "Watching the Late Movie with My Mother" is another great painting rendered so tenderly yet vividly; vividly, you are there. "Often, she fell asleep / before the end and I'd have / to nudge her: 'The movie's / over, Mom. Go to bed.'" Trinidad's real/reel life, a poet's life, is quite bravely and honestly revealed to us. Trinidad's many dishy autobiographical poems and his family tree poems such as "Great-Grandmother Smith" are all simply and yet elegantly told. The poems begin and do not end until you are sung/told the whole truth.

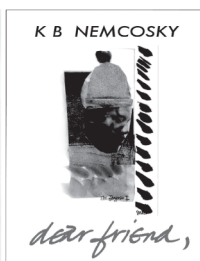
Then there are his showbiz poems like "Meet the Supremes," where Trinidad's life and the life of Flo, the one Supreme who was shattered by the group's famous breakup, somehow intertwine: "Little did I know, as I listened / to 'Nothing but Heartaches' and 'Where Did Our Love / Go,' that nearly twenty years later I would hit / bottom in an unfurnished Hollywood single, drunk / and stoned and fed up, still spinning those same / old tunes." Somehow or other, Trinidad got back up on his feet and perhaps even sprouted a pair of invisible wings. This supremely supreme book is a living testament to the true grit, talent and resilience of one of my favorite songbirds.

Bill Kushner is the author of *Walking After Midnight* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2011).

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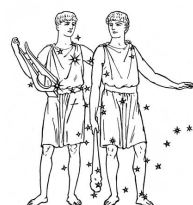
Aries (March 21 – April 19)

You really are on fire this month. Try to set your sights on the best thing to burn. This is a lifelong endeavor for you. Still you must learn there isn't enough ice cream pie in the world to cool it down. So go gentle rider, wide into the night.



Taurus (April 20 – May 20)

You will feel extra cuddly this month. I wouldn't fight it. There is a sale at Duane Reade currently for stuffed koalas. Purchase ten of them and stuff them in your shirt and you'll never feel lonely again.



Gemini (May 21 – June 20)

We all know how much you secretly like to watch TV, but seriously stay away from it this month. The lizards are making their way through the wavelengths and you sure don't want to be the one to get caught. Whenever you feel like a little freeplay on the boobtube, ask a nice Pisces to play the flute for you instead.



Cancer (June 21 – July 22)

You are always going on about baking and that's cool cause everyone likes to eat. But the next time you want to stay in this month, rent a mountain bike and take it up a hill. They say the best cacti grow at the highest peak. Get all of it. Bring it down here. You can share it with everyone.



Leo (July 23 – August 22)

God you're hot and everyone thinks so. Buy that nice pair of sunglasses that go great with your hair and, why not, also get that gorgeous green dress. Wear them both next Sunday and I'll pick you up in my convertible and we'll go driving down the lonesome California highway. I'll sing you a song I wrote about how much I want you. And we will never feel empty again.



Virgo (August 23 – September 22)

You have a very elegant home, but you might as well get another one. Take your Cancer or other Virgo significant other to the real estate agent this Tuesday and get a really good deal on an ample place in a sensible part of town. After you sign the papers, enjoy some butter nut crunch at Baskin Robbins, then hit up the home store. Purchase glittery blue paint for the walls. This will make it easier to paint a mural of the ocean.



Libra (September 23 – October 22)

You spend a lot of time contemplating the universe, but for now, why not enjoy yourself and go on a cruise. Go ahead and invite all of your friends. Make purple and yellow invitations with tiny blue flowers and send them express. You will find out who your real friends are when the cruise sets sail.



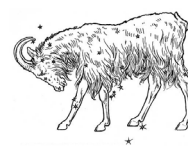
Scorpio (October 23 – November 21)

Everyone knows how much you want them. But what about the stars? They feel very undernourished by you this month, dear Scorpio. Ask your Cancer lover to make your favorite vegetable dish and wrap it well in airtight containers. Then leave your body (it's such a nuisance) and catapult your self and the containers to the power cell. It can take the food to the rest of the night sky. And once you are up there, you should stay there. It's a dark world down here and we all know you were meant only for brightness.



Sagittarius (November 22 – December 21)

You should never give up, no matter how much you want to this month. You have very sexy legs and you'll want to stretch them per usual. So do so for a day or two. Hiking far away is nice this time of year, I hear. But after this, give yourself time for a bath or two. Preferably with a few other people. O you wild one—we love you so!



Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

You are always dreaming up a new plan. But this month you will dream up your best one yet. Ask a wealthy friend for some funds. Also, ask the ghosts you know for seeds to plant the hair with. Grow your fur down to your ankles. It looks good on you.



Aquarius (January 20 – February 18)

People like you but never more so than when you smile in your funny hat. You try to wear those normal jeans, but you aren't fooling anyone. Invent a new kind of eggplant this month. Wear those strange socks with the hidden bells. After I drive Leo in my car on Sunday, I'll pick you up in my time traveler. This should happen by the third Monday of the month. We can be anyone. I made a birdhouse for us. I've been waiting for you all night long.



Pisces (February 19 – March 21)

You are a really good friend but this month you should ask your friends for some love back. You will move into a new apartment quite literally. Also in a literary way, your potential will rise to new heights. Go after the money, I say. No, but I know you won't listen to me. You always were after the fame. Make a name for yourself this month, sweet Pisces.

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