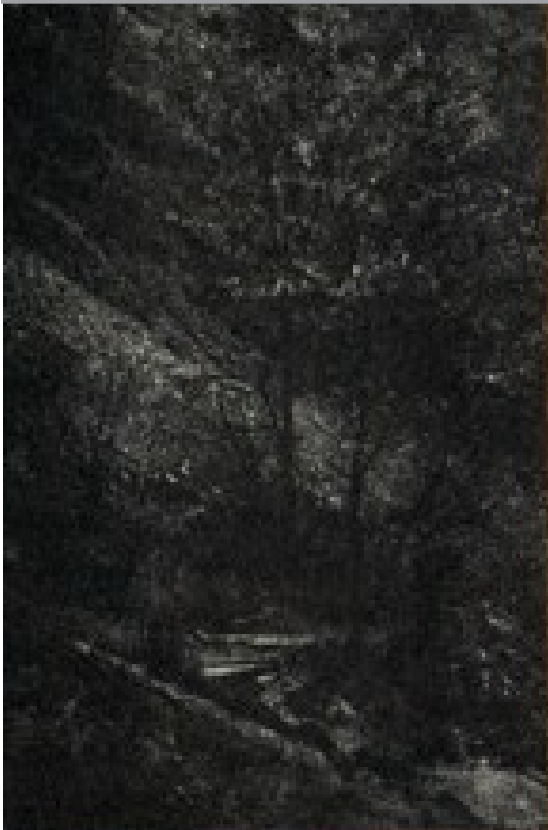


# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

[www.poetryproject.org](http://www.poetryproject.org)

## DEC/JAN 2010/11 #225

LETTERS FEATURE RICHARD OWENS ON SEAN BONNEY & THOM DONOVAN IN MEMORIAM: TWO  
POEMS & REMEMBRANCES OF MICHAEL GIZZI BY MILES CHAMPION TIM DAVIS FANNY HOWE LISA JARNOT  
BERNADETTE MAYER BRIAN KIM STEFANS CRAIG WATSON & GEOFFREY YOUNG POEMS EVAN KENNEDY CALENDAR  
EDDIE HOPELY REVIEWS CHAPBOOKS BY DANIEL NOHEJL, NATALIE LYALIN & TIM ATKINS ANNA MOSCHOVAKIS REVIEWS  
DANIEL KANE EMILY PETTIT REVIEWS DOROTHEA LASKY BRAD FLIS REVIEWS RONALDO V. WILSON RODNEY KOENEKE  
REVIEWS MACGREGOR CARD & KAREN WEISER TRACEY MCTAGUE REVIEWS ALLISON COBB STEPHEN MOTIKA  
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# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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## LETTERS

### 1. from the director

On January 1, 2011, at 2:00PM, we will start our 37<sup>th</sup> Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading. It's, of course, our largest benefit of the year. It's a benefit, and it's beloved: the most hospitable place to nurse your hangovers on New Year's Day in NYC (there are cushions to rest your heads on and soups and chili to fill your bellies). Or come if you want to bask in the most giant group reading or if you want to revel in the notion of the occasional nature of poetry, that poetry ought to be used to celebrate. I can promise a vibrant and aesthetically broad lineup of about 140 poets and performers—from the tried and true to the never before—to accompany you through the emotional landscape of a day.

Since the Marathon is a fundraising event that depends on people's energy and availability, it's always a boon when it falls on the weekend; at last, we have ourselves a Saturday! Every dollar we raise through admission/food and book sales help defray our annual programming costs, which include paying poets for their work.

This year marks the 45<sup>th</sup> year of The Poetry Project being in business, so this annual community gathering and community reunion has an added significance. It's a mammoth endeavor to organize but when you arrive you'll witness brooding Project staff and volunteers absorb total confusion and put it back out into the world almost harmoniously.

Stacy Szymaszek

### 2. from the program coordinator

Dear Poetry Community,

2011 is about to start happening and that means it's time for another New Year's Day Marathon Benefit Reading at The Poetry Project. January 1<sup>st</sup> is on a Saturday, so you'll be able to stay out really late this year. There's going to be well over 100 poets, musicians, and dancers performing—we'll get started at 2:00PM and end some time in the early morning hours of January 2. Check the calendar in this Newsletter for a tentative version of the day's lineup.

This is the 45<sup>th</sup> year of The Poetry Project's existence and this will be the 37<sup>th</sup> New Year's Day marathon reading. These are real numbers! And you, the Poetry Community, subject of much theorizing, are real too. January 1st at The Poetry Project is the time and place for praxis! Which is to say that we need you to make it happen. We need you to sell books, stamp hands, serve food, stack chairs, make change, hang signs, tap kegs etc., etc. It is work but work with friends is fun. If you're willing to volunteer a couple of labor hours you should email Nicole Wallace at [info@poetryproject.org](mailto:info@poetryproject.org). Let her know what time of day or night you're available and if there are any particular jobs you would prefer or dislike.

We could also use some commodities to go with the labor. Do you run a friendly local eatery, or a small press, or know someone that does? Or maybe you're just a really good cook or in charge of a

large press that actually publishes good poetry? If you fit any of these descriptions you should email Nicole and let her know what you'd like to contribute!

The New Year's Day reading at The Poetry Project is an important fundraising event that allows us to have the other 80–90 events that we have each year—so please help out! It's also always a really good time and I hope to see you there.

Love,

Arlo Quint

### 2. from the editor

*Agnis molo tore, consedi atquae pe natem que que prat aboretibus, ulpa consequi corum expelest eliatio quunto.* Just kidding! Means “placeholder” in saturated-fat Latin. I was just talking with someone who knows Latin. Who was that—Steve Zultanski? Jen Bervin? Lucy Ives? I bet they all do. Happy Halloween, Ovid (*carmen et error*)! That's way past, I know. I was a blonde. For about...five minutes (as long as I could stand it) (sorry Jenny) (sorry Jimmy Schuyler). Happy New Year (almost!). Have you finished *Inferno* yet? I've decided to write something meaningful. After I finish this Editor's Letter. No, but, Mr., *Inferno* is helping me through some blues, actually. Often we're on the back edge of a time Eileen Myles calls uncommodified, which is great because we know it's as rare as goose for xmas: “...amateur, kid, punk, unobserved, over, before, days marked useless, private, unshipped, so to speak life stays in the swarm of free-range sex shifting into art, back to sex, art again. This is our belief.” *This is our belief? Mhmm*, as the English mhmm. Or we travel in repairs, like Alice Notley does in her poem “Hemostatic”: “Someone could die. Before they / Anyone, left me here facing your walls. / Each minute where nothing seems to circulate.”

On Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> of October I saw Yvonne Rainer perform *Trio A*, best she could, reading simply from papers after knees to floor, at Judson Church. And it was the first time I had seen a performance there, not to mention Rainer, unbelievable. What if I had somehow missed it? Valuable cultural sites escaping our midst so frequently of late. And so these accumulations keep me grateful for the sanctuary (and I don't mean that Canadian sci-fi TV show) that the Poetry Project community provides. Community is a tired word but this isn't a panel or a talk-back so rest easy I daren't type it again. *Mortal anxiety!* Myles also mentions in her book that the line for the New Year's reading used to snake far past the door; she and co. couldn't even get in, went to get a bowl of soup. “Whoever we were, we were friends—even with the famous performers—we were a string.” This issue of the *Newsletter* is dedicated to Michael Gizzi, may he rest in peace. And I'll see you at the Marathon, after I give leave of absence to my chambermaid. (It's a maelstrom in this belief.) As Alice wrote: “I once found a city for several years. / Perhaps we founded it, down where it pumped.”

Got my gloves on,

Corina Copp

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## IN MEMORIAM

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# Remembering Michael Gizzi

## Two Recent Poems

### ANOTHER TALE FROM HOFFMAN

*for Hollis*

The shadow cast by the mouse covers the entire room  
 He returns every night by the light of the moon  
 The apparition in the glass-paned bookcase  
 Unlike the mother and the mouse has no mouth  
 Impossible not to braid into pigtails the grown-up's cocktails  
 With the beakless parrot on a parrot stand  
 Or the porcelain child bound for eternity to a tricycle of blue lead  
 A pine floor the color of Caruso's Cadillac makes  
 The drawer pulls shine. On the stairs the clock smiles six  
 A head falls from the maple  
 Dresser into a beaded moccasin  
 Time slides thinly  
 Through the great basin of the skull  
 The wind's hand passes over the water  
 To slap your head if you're not careful  
 Gazing into space Mr. Sandman saws a domino in half  
 He always thinks of his children as pieces  
 He throws sand into their eyes so uncannily  
 They jump out of their heads  
 He puts their eyes in a sack and carries them off  
 To the half moon as food for his other little brood



PHOTO TAKEN SEPTEMBER 26, 2009, BY MILES CHAMPION.

“Another Tale from Hoffman” was one of the poems Michael Gizzi wrote before his death. Hollis is his grandson. Poem courtesy of Craig Watson.

• • •

## DIES IRAE

The narrator knows nothing.  
Alone and faced with accomplishment  
he prefers to leave everything.  
He has nowhere to go.

A tale someone has conjured up  
must suffice for the entirety of his existence.  
The whole affair is his responsibility.  
Does it matter that it's in different sentences?

Almost anything can happen and nothing  
will surprise anyone. There is no chance  
for a conspiratorial wink. He is throwing on the scales  
a priceless possession. Perhaps it would be better

for them to remain at the breakfast table.  
But on the white tablecloth lies a green apple  
that neither of them feels like eating.  
Only the second hand of a watch thrashes about

in the present tense. Its existence is felt  
as an uncontrollable turmoil of the heart.  
Every object stands in its place. Tablecloths  
slip from tables and sail through the air.

The narrator feels tired at the mere thought  
of the next sentence. He'd prefer to tell of things  
free of complications. But he comprehends  
the whole and knows the ending.

## IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Michael Gizzi *(continued)*

**Editor's Note:** On hearing the news of Michael Gizzi's passing, I asked some of his close friends to contribute brief remembrances for the Newsletter. What follows, then, are thoughts on Mike from Miles Champion, Tim Davis, Fanny Howe, Lisa Jarnot, Bernadette Mayer, Brian Kim Stefans, Craig Watson, and Geoffrey Young.

## Pictures of Michael

In a dream, three nights ago (October 10, 2010), Michael persuades me that a *scungilli* is actually a kind of soft, multicolored three-way adapter made out of nougat.

\*

Browsing the poetry section at Troubadour Books in North Hatfield, noticing that many of the books have, at one time or another, belonged to Michael, and that several are fulsomely inscribed to him (Michael: "Well, if it had been a better book, I wouldn't have sold it.").

\*

In Red Rock with Michael and Bernadette: getting out of the car to look at the llamas.

\*

Michael to one of his classes at Lenox High: "I don't want you to *still* be idiots when you graduate—it'll reflect badly on me!"

\*

A scrap of paper in my wallet, on which are written several book titles as a result of visiting Michael (on what would turn out to be the last time Rachel and I saw him, in Providence on August 7): *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber*, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*, *The Mystery of the Sardine*, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Don Renato: An Ideal Content* and Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Collected Stories*.

\*

Michael in the yard outside Geoff's house on Castle Hill: lean and handsome, brandishing—I almost typed "smoking"—a golf club.

\*

With Michael and Pen at Deutsches Haus, tiptoeing out the door as it becomes clear the introduction will never end, the reading never begin.

\*

Michael—the Grim Eater, Pen called him—cleaning his plate (a rare sight isn't the half of it) at Franny's on Flatbush Ave: "The best pasta I ever had."

\*

Michael telling me that, if you have to charge at someone, it's a good idea to shout "Yeaaaaarrrrggh!" at the same time, to make it harder for them to wind you by punching you in the stomach.

\*

Michael as mechanism (eternal patent applied for): the human spirit and the cosmic joke in perfect balance.

\*

Scanning Michael's bookshelves and making mental notes: to pick up Bremser's *The Conquerors*, the Mansfield Book Mart edition of *The Türler Losses*, the Dorn/Brotherston Vallejo...

\*

After writing some word salad poems, I mention something to Michael about needing to get back to what I want to "say." Michael responds by cautioning me not to go too far the other way.

\*

Michael at CVS, rifling through the musical cards in search of one loud enough and silly enough to send Hollis: "This one's got squirrels *and* vibrating barbells—perfect!"

\*

Taking Max Jacob's *Advice to a Young Poet* off the shelf last week, and only then realizing that things will never be the same, without Michael—impossible, unreliable, magical, haunted, goofy, modest, brilliant, irreplaceable Michael—to talk about them with.

\*

Opening the Jacob to find words that I recognize, but that Michael embodied: "The great thing is to live, live by imagination and the heart, to invent, to know, to play."

—Miles Champion

...

## Ham on a Rainbow

I've spent parts of the last years on a project I wanted to call "The Michael Gizzi Museum." I'd find an image from Mike's poems sticking in my mind like brisket between bicuspid and begin to wish I could hold it in three dimensions. I carved alabaster into a bottle and a pile of pills from his "Ancient Percodan." "The demo of spring's first birdsong" I saw as a reel-to-reel tape made of jay feathers. I contacted someone called a fabricator (don't you wish there were such a creature for poets?) about constructing a "Ham on a Rainbow" to glow in insult to all the stupid signs we swallow but don't even see.

There's no other poet whose images feel so—I almost wrote "right"—in this world; so simultaneously critical of the nebulous heartless bullshit that ideas perfume themselves with to make it into platforms and podiums



and poetry; and so celebratory of the language that gets these ideas said. I meant to write “bright.” For all of the talk of vernacular lingo diction idiom jargon jive patois, Mike was a builder of images. And they weren’t *deep* images either. They were bright hot, falling into cartoon flames, a gunpowder plot. Reading him was always the fourth of July, but instead of the endless asterisks we tend to send up, Mike fired “Rockefeller’s pet dime” and “a petrified florist who thinks he’s Narcissus” up in the literary night sky.

Robert Kelly advises young poets to read everything as if they found it scrawled in their own hand after a drunken night. It breeds sympathies. I once had a bunch of kids on the beach act out lines from *Can You Hear, Bird* and realized that the “Amateur Theatrical” was the ideal way to read John Ashbery. Mike’s writing was for collectors. It was like being handed something by sudden sad-eyed Buster Keatons. You’re sitting there reading, but you get to take home souvenirs: “A Nagasaki on his chest,” “A yoke of dead hummingbirds stuffed with what you tell your shrink,” “a Brazil nut believed to be/ the contraband of a minuteman.” We’ve all been curating little Michael Gizzi museums, filling rooms and ventricles with these firey heart-attacking things (one decent definition of a work of art). To make a museum is a way to read a man.

Except for now that man is dead; and I’m so grateful not to be saddled with ungainly monuments Mike would’ve hated. Everyone knows artists whose daily selves seem totally unrelated to their work: newsaholics who paint remote abstractions, lampshade goofballs chipping out dire Celanish gemstones. But Mike Gizzi’s poems feel so much like being in the room with him; are so suffused with his irascible uncompromising flatulent older-brotherly DNA that they’re truly monument enough. They make a fuss and always mop it up. They hate themselves and love you so much that you can’t help but care for them.

There are acres of writers I’d rather have slip quietly into eternity than Mike (you know who you are), and I have two fathers who haven’t acted half as fatherly. But hearing of his death was barely a surprise. How was this hilarious handsome high-school quarterback tree surgeon babe magnet devourer of books and movies and records, this *TOTAL NATURAL* so not right for this world; especially when so many schmucks and shysters and fakes and blubbermouths slide into their slot? Whatever it was makes me realize that Mike wasn’t on the board of his own museum. And it makes the so constant trill of demise in his poems into an inextricable backbeat. Here’s one firework finale from his last collection; may it light up how we miss him, day for night:

“So we got this apartment on Jockey Street. They used to race houses there.

But we’re not going to jaw about Ovid or the rosy steps of mother, her microscopic brand of honey. We expect you to understand.

See you over the next hill.”

—Tim Davis

• • •

## Assembling Michael

Even when I think about the last time I saw him at the bottom of thin and crooked stairs, he is a reason for hilarity. If I looked into his eyes, we both cracked up. His poetry was like broken glass from every angle and he seemed to push it around and away and not care where it fell. That is, he was a real poet. One night recently I dreamed that Clark and he and I were walking through a blood-red city. We were lost, completely. We didn’t know which city it was, or how to identify it by the bricks. It was a riot. Which building meant what? We were laughing the whole time and this was only two nights after I heard he had died. So why were we together in a dream? Just because we were before? And what was the joke? Boston? Providence? No, there were no names to anything and nothing fit.

—Fanny Howe

• • •

I met Michael in 1992 when he invited me to give a reading in the Berkshires with Lee Ann Brown. I wish I could remember more of the night, but I can only retrieve fragments—a gathering at a small town restaurant, a neon-lit parking lot, cold autumn air. He probably said “Lis. Let’s go have a smoke.” I know I rolled him a cigarette. I’d guess we talked about Bob Dylan.

It’s now that I realize how vigilantly he supported my career, publishing some of my earliest work in *Lingo* magazine and offering me readings wherever and whenever he could. He’d call and say “I want to get you here. I want to give you some money.” When my husband Thomas started a new project, he was there again, organizing a solo show at a Providence gallery, finding good homes for the work. He loved creative endeavors purely as expressions of life. He seemed oblivious to the politics of poetry and art. He changed the subject when people gossiped. There were dingbats in the world, but he didn’t dwell on them. He told us once of a co-worker who got on his nerves. He said he prayed for him. The guy never bugged him again.

In our household he was Uncle Mike. He made us family without asking us to help him and without worrying we’d take anything he couldn’t give. When he was struggling emotionally, he’d disappear for a few months. “I’ve been isolating,” he’d apologize. Then he’d be with us again, brilliantly present, hysterically funny, articulating every syllable he spoke like a football player plowing down the field. He and Thomas indulged in marathon bookstore browsing sessions. He and I compared tree-trimming techniques. When he was with our daughter it was as if his only purpose on earth was to make her giggle.

There’s some solace in knowing that his poetry is as brilliant as he was, and there’s some comfort in trying to emulate his generosity, but most days we’re simply faced with the task of negotiating his absence from our lives.

—Lisa Jarnot

## IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Michael Gizzi *(continued)*

Michael Gizzi, lover of dictionaries and of slang was a moke who is ghost mos def. We used to get lobster-salad sandwiches at Schermerhorn's in Holyoke when we went to Bob Willig's bookstore, Troubadour books in North Hadley, to sell our beloved collections to beloved Bob, and Michael would get jealous, practically irate, because I'd drink a plastic cup of white wine.

Right after Michael died it rained for three days here. Then it rained a bit every day, it still hasn't stopped, but now the sun's come out. Does that mean Michael's now passed into a different state? If Michael's in the place for dead poets, I'm sure he and Catullus get along well.

Michael grew up in Schenectady but the Berkshires became his neighborhood. When he taught at Lenox High School, home of the sports team The Millionaires, his students would cover for him if he was late for class. He even found a good poet among them, Chris Carnevale. His father, Anthony, a GE person, died suddenly in a plane crash and none of the Gizzis ever recovered. Peter Gizzi is writing a book about it. When I lived in NYC, Michael and Peter used to come to my house and say things like, "Ok tell me what Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* means." So I would try.

I've written a lot about the Berkshires. I helped Ed Bowes work on Alice's Restaurant, I lived in Great Barrington and later in Lenox because it was a place you could live without a car and Hawthorne lived there. It was when I wrote about Lenoxdale that Michael got most excited. Lenoxdale was then the run-down and lower-class neighborhood near Lenox. There, at the Eldorado Club were whores and dope. It was neither spiffy, rich nor historic. It was at the time dangerous and there Michael and I moved in together, if only in our imaginations (Hawthorne had one too).

It's been hard not to think of reasons why Michael wouldn't have died, and it's hard to avoid the thought that if poets were revered in the U.S. like they are in other countries, perhaps Michael's life wouldn't have been so impossible. Perhaps it takes a very contrary person to attempt to write poetry in a culture that's oriented to money and celebrity seemingly only. To consistently not get paid or even welcomed in your own society is a form of ostracism and that's hard to bear. It's hard to imagine anyone more devoted to poetry than Michael; it's hard to imagine anyone poorer who had a job as a tree arborist and teacher. In this society poets are only feted by other poets, it's as if they're working for the wrong people.

If Michael had received a guaranteed annual income and was constantly invited to great dinners where people would vie to create dishes he'd want to write about, he might have had a different life in which its depressing frustrations not only could not take over but would recede in the face of the fascination of the present moment. The Department of Homeland Security would be in charge of the happiness of poets, knowing this was the only way to assure even a rumpled peace in this society, and thus, dare I say in the world. Michael did his work against the odds and lasted as long as he could—bravo!

In June Michael's ashes will be scattered in the ocean off Rhode Island.

His books include:

*My Grandfather's Pants*, Bench Press  
*Carmela Bianca*, Bonewhistle Press  
*Bird As*, Burning Deck  
*Avis*, Burning Deck  
*Species of Intoxication*, Burning Deck  
*Just Like a Real Italian Kid*, The Figures  
*gyptian in hortulus*, Paradigm Press  
*Continental Harmony*, Roof Books  
*Interferon*, The Figures  
*No Both*, Hard Press/The Figures  
*Too Much Johnson*, The Figures  
*Cured in the Going Bebop*, Paradigm Press  
*My Terza Rima*, The Figures  
*McKenna's Antenna*, Qua Jazz  
*New Depths of Deadpan*, Burning Deck

—Bernadette Mayer

• • •

I first saw Michael read at the Ear Inn in the early nineties. Now here was something different. He seemed like a big guy to me at the time—muscular, with a deep voice, wrestling with the syllables, very funny, and with a keen b.s. detector, like the ones they made back home—not what I thought of as a typical “poet” at the time. I was envious of my friend Tim Davis, who got to know him before I did—Tim seemed to get to know all of the extraordinary, unclassifiable people, the ones who traversed the wilds beyond the gravity and self-consciousness of cities, before I even had the nerve to say hello. Over the years, during my time in New York, I did get to know Michael; somehow, it became an in-joke for me to call him “Uncle Mike.” I don't know if it's because of our mutual Catholic upbringing—he would often refer to me, and other people, as “my son” as if he'd just exonerated them in the confession booth—or that most of my best friends in my hometown were tough Italian kids, but he anchored a whole side of my personality that might have floated away in the highly contested, multivalent, intellectual community of poets in New York at the time. Perhaps it was just the urge, and the energy, to be oneself that Michael seemed to exude—he once told me that he tried acting at one point in his life (I think I had told him I thought he'd make a good actor, needling him to be in one of my videos), and he said that he just couldn't stand mouthing someone else's words. (I eventually filmed him improvising poetry while disemboweling a burnt piece of raisin toast.) I should mention that we all fell in love with Pilar, especially after one memorable reading at the Zinc Bar—Michael and Clark Coolidge switching off like old friends around a campfire—and a large group of us went out to eat, the tables having to be rearranged into all sorts of Ts and Is to take us, and she sat at the head of this contraption like it was her wedding—well, it

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Leslie Scalapino

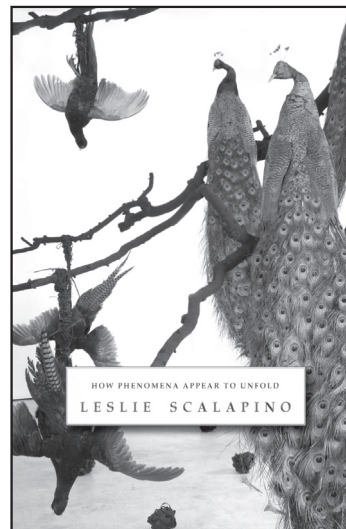
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Where critics used to debate, as if it were a real thing, a difference between form and content, so now they would separate “theory” from “practice,” and thus divide a poet from his or her own intentions and poetry from its motives. But in fact poetic language might be precisely a thinking about thinking, a form of introspection and inspection within the unarrested momentum of experience, that makes the polarization of theory and practice as irrelevant as that of form and content, mentality and physicality, art and reality.

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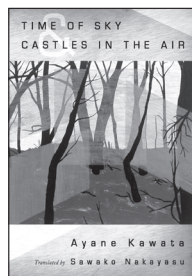
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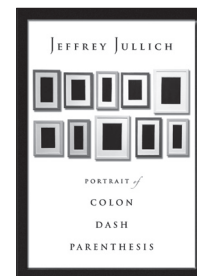
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## IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Michael Gizzi *(continued)*

seemed to me at the time that she was the reason we were there. When I was finally involved in a great relationship, with the seemingly perfect woman, and I visited him in Providence at his place on Parade Street, he took me aside and said: “Don’t fuck this up.” (My mother told me the same thing, using the same words.) It wasn’t until I moved to Providence that I got to know him better. He told amazing stories—I can’t recount too many of them here, as they could be salty, and the innocent could be implicated (Andy Kaufman, for example). We could be perfectly frank with each other—it was the tone of his voice, the way he’d lay something difficult and honest on you, that I most have resonating in my head. I literally use Michael’s tone when I am trying to get at some nut of reality (in actual conversation or interior) that I would otherwise step around gingerly. You hear it in the poems—except there, it’s in the subtext battling the text for primacy. He knew when I was in the dumps, and told me, but I couldn’t always tell when he was in the dumps, since, if you followed him around one day, it seemed he knew everybody and liked to banter (“Thank you, my son”—to the guy in the mail room). He had an amazing taste in books, and probably never read a book that he didn’t actually want to read (after his school years, of course). He lent me some gems that I would never have discovered in reviews, in the classroom, or through other writers—none of it fashionable, some controversial—things I would later brag about having read. I’ve been saving up things to say to him for a few years now—“visiting Michael Gizzi” was one of the first things I mentioned as to why I was going east last June—and now need the poems more than ever. I loved him, and will miss him.

—Brian Kim Stefans

• • •

*May you keep this memory, the one you never see.*

Dear Mike, how’s the weather? There’s too much of it here and the goose eggs keep falling. I’m waiting to feel something new—anger, hurt, defeat—but this place smells like a secret, the kind that’s always forgiven. Don’t get me wrong—it’s not quiet in this silence and there’s still enough windage to balance even a diminishing vocabulary. I’m still sifting the debris that is either ash or volition but nothing in between. Why does a life’s sediment turn to sentiment when the better question is how to dodge a bullet while standing in front of an oncoming train?

The day we met you were up a tree trying to avoid the party; thirty-some-odd years later you talked me into buying a chainsaw so you could climb my overgrown apple trees and sprain your back cutting them with the precision and delicacy of a card shark. On Thanksgiving Day you stood out in the Berkshire cold blowing a trumpet in sweet, syncopated passages; you told me later you didn’t know how to play the trumpet. And one day there was a bear cub on the phone pole across the street—it

was no big deal, you said you knew him well. Maybe that’s how you welcomed your grandson two years ago—a pair of bears swinging like monkeys through the rough-sawn trees you loved to climb.

Yesterday you dropped a pile of books on my head then disappeared behind a radiator. I could feel you laugh and want to play with someone as bodiless as you are now. I’m still in the space that thinks about loss as a measurable vacancy. In life your goal was simple: “toughest kid on the block with a heart of gold.” Now I find flecks of that gold throughout every landscape—words, people, places, music.

We’re not done yet. I can’t quite comprehend not being able to talk to you again so every day I list the subjects we need to discuss. At least my conscious mind knows you’re safe and I can just make up the rest. For now you’ve left me standing waist deep in space that, for a moment, is unable to fill itself. And the weather remains, as you forecast, “Eggs possibly heavy at times.”

—Craig Watson

• • •

## TEN SNAPS

Walking a London street, November 1999. We are heading for our reading at the gallery Platform, organized by Miles Champion (whose monstrosity great *memorized* introduction of us will be more memorable than the reading itself, even if the performance of it is nearly derailed by a late-arriving Stephen Rodefer). Mike has a spring in his step, he’s moving like a prize-fighter. He says, “I’m feeling it.”

We’re sitting at a table in my backyard late June 2010, doing a close reading of the poems he will include in *IN THIS SKIN*, a chapbook he will make to give to Pen Creeley for her sixtieth birthday, early July, in an edition of ten, with cover image by James Siena. A day after giving it to her, he has replacement surgery on the knee that was wrecked in college when, as a 180-pound running back (career-ending moment), he was tackled hard by some bruiser, and carried off the field.

August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1990. In the Ping Pong Room (table removed to barn, Clark Coolidge’s drums set up), the band is my brother Robin on keys, Clark on drums, Ben Rodefer on guitar, a Japanese man studying at the Berklee School of Music on bass. And Mike reads Kerouac’s “San Francisco Blues” to our party of happy revelers fed on champagne and poached salmon, a wedding reception that ends only when neighbors complain of the noise (my trumpet?).

Ten years ago in nearby Spencertown, NY, at the Academy, there is a Sunday afternoon concert featuring Clark and Mike reading poetry with

a jazz quartet led by the tenor saxophonist Allen X. Mike and Clark take turns, the band responding to the sound of their variously angled word attacks. At a certain point, Clark, in perfect time (came outta nowhere!), improvises a blues (formally impeccable, funny and bright), which knocks everyone out, though it is not, sob, recorded (except perhaps in Kerouac's bibulous heaven)!

Shoulder to shoulder we sit for spells late afternoons on the old green sofa in Mike and Barbio's Lenox apartment on Cliffwood Drive, looking at manuscripts, the coffee table in front of us piled with books and his ashtray, Barbio in her third-floor studio working on a huge collage, Mike's high-school teaching day done, his AA meeting not til later. Early drafts of his *Interferon*, *No Both*, and *Too Much Johnson* are attended to, as well as my *Cerulean Embankments* and *Lights Out*. We read sections aloud, we cut, we splice, putting big exclamation points next to hot stuff, helping each other get things right (constrain excesses, nail images). Our motto at the time: "Get in, get out."

On a visit to Clovis in Australia, late January 2010, Mike, Pen and I take a train out of Sydney to join the wonderfully generous poet Robert Adamson and his wife Juno at their house on the Hawksbury River in Brooklyn, New South Wales (a long bridge crosses the river there, a fact which contributes somehow to the tiny town's unlikely name). After a scrumptious lunch in their patio with hanging vines, olives, oysters, wine, etc., Bob takes us out on the Hawksbury in his boat. Down-river a few miles he stops, and points to the mouth. "You're looking at the South Pacific out there." The January summer sun is shining, the boat speeding, the engine whining, the day sublime. Pen and Mike begin to entertain return fantasies.

In a Providence bookstore, 1999, checking out a series of classic noir reprints, we notice that James Ellroy has written the intro to one of them. We read his super-hip bit, love it, buy the book. Why? We will steal the Ellroy to use as introduction to Mike's *Too Much Johnson*. All we have to do is change a few words to get it to fit our context. At my insistence (the

Dada of it all requires it!), we sign the intro with Ellroy's own name. (After all, he'd written it.) Mike worries that someone will bring this shameless pilferage to Ellroy's attention and that the notorious writer will send a beefy dark limo to Lenox and have Mike expunged.

We're cooling our evening jets on a wide porch at a hotel called the Villa Serena in the Dominican Republic on January 4 and 5, 2007. We can see spotlights on the palms, and out in front of us, a moon upon the water. We start writing *The Teak Obsessions*, a collaboration in which we take turns adding one word at a time to an endless succession of disparate sentences (à la Rohrer/Beckman). We're sitting back on comfortable chairs, two gentlemen from nowhere, midst gales of laughter and ponderous groans.

Mike in my living room, 1990. He's sitting in an upholstered yellow chair, wearing clunky winter boots, reading the manuscript of *Just Like A Real Italian Kid* to a roomful of friends, because I'd wanted to hear him sound its impeccable tender bed-wetting patois genius before publishing it.

On a Martha's Vineyard beach, visiting the vacationing Coolidges mid-September 2009, we suddenly get up from our towels (after a swim and a water-treading group-conversation soak) and bolt down the beach, dropping from the soft sand where our towels lay to the packed sand at water's edge, running like long-distance kids (and all those years I thought his bum knee kept him from such sport).

—Geoffrey Young



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## ESSAY

## PRISON-HOUSE OF COMMONS: SEAN BONNEY VIS-À-VIS THOM DONOVAN

RICHARD OWENS

It should be taken as no accident that two of the Anglophone poets most devoted to *publicly* working through a sense of *the commons*—a commons—commonly present their thinking as *it unfolds* not in academic or popular journals but on free and interactive blogs: British poet Sean Bonney at *Abandoned Buildings* (<http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.com>) and American poet Thom Donovan at *Wild Horses of Fire* (<http://whof.blogspot.com>). A diverse range of other poets in Norte Hummerica have also given themselves to rigorously thinking the commons—Rob Halpern, Beverly Dahlen, Stephen Collis and David Wolach among them—but none have, so far as I know, relied as heavily on web-based publishing services like Google's Blogger to circulate this thinking. And here I sense the vehicle that delivers Bonney's poems and Donovan's criticism embodies almost precisely the same contradictions each confront in their thinking—that is, the very instrument that allows each to circulate their work to the widest possible audience also shackles and mediates it, distorts and compromises it, generating a tension that challenges the potential efficacy of the work. But the risk Bonney and Donovan court in addressing the commons by way of a fundamentally compromised and widely devalued digital publishing service alerts us to the rigid material limits we—as poets, artists and critics—are forced to work within and through.

Barring the digital divide—an urgent conversation unto itself—blogs are ideally open and available to “all,” the digital extension of a cultural and intellectual commons ostensibly built on an ethics committed to free access and, more importantly, free exchange. But the freer the exchange and the more widely it circulates, the lower its market value, and so the vulgar site of mediation through which Bonney and Donovan offer us a thinking of the commons limits their ability to use that thinking toward marketable ends beyond itself (viz. promising careers in academia or the culture industry are seldom built on blogging). What is most common in market-based economies is scarcely ever most desirable; like air or the vernacular, that which is most common is most vulgar, most readily available and, unless masked, largely without exchange value. But the will in Bonney and Donovan toward devaluation, the deliberate making-common of their work via blog publication is, I believe, an essential component of the work that invites a more productive reading of it.

For Bonney—a poet largely disconnected from the conversations on commoning and somatic practice that have been taking place in New York, the Bay Area and Vancouver over the last couple of years—*The Commons* begins with an April 27, 2008 post at *Abandoned Buildings* announcing “a work in progress” that includes twelve poems. In the tenth of these first twelve

poems, Bonney writes: “History is irrelevant with / —archaic credit reference here— / the sun has been disconnected / & we, with our downturned mouths / are maidens, / our credit ratings threaded with flowers.” The figure of circulation, the feminization of labor and the consequences of flexible accumulation ride hard here. The appeal to virginity marks the passage into a fundamentally distinct moment in the ongoing development of capital and whether we call it post-Fordist, post-68, the moment of cultural capitalism or postmodernism, the transition is identified with ritualized, gendered violence. The Earth's relation to the cosmos—the whole—is severed and the limits of the body are threatened.

The question of the body—the situatedness of the body in a making-common or commoning as somatic practice—resides at the center of Thom Donovan's sense of the commons. In a July 22, 2010 post at *Wild Horses of Fire*, Donovan insists: “I think that ‘commoning’ and ‘somatics’ are intimately linked through a shared sense that the body is a commonwealth, and not merely a thing isolated from its ecology—the others who surround it and nourish it. Health is a common goal of commoning and somatics; so is wealth, wealth which is able to establish well-being between as many human beings as possible...” Donovan follows this identification of the commons and the body with a crucial point, “I would extend somatics to the various prac-

tices which would access and make active lyrical valuables—the qualities of a lyric prosody—in the interest of a critical project directed at forms of biopower—the way that the state administers the body in the interest of labor, reproduction, warfare, and governance.” The commons, after all, are people too—bodies in the world, a vulgar mass, as the Messenger in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* relates: “and the commons made / Ashower and thunder with their caps and shouts.” Just as firewood, building materials and game were drawn in common from the Dogtown Commons Charles Olson laments the loss of in *Maximus*, Donovan suggests efficacious “lyrical valuables” can be drawn from the bodies that offer them in response to those forces that persistently threaten to subjugate the body. For Donovan—if we can keep from bending Agamben too far—the body appears to be a bounded system articulated with and dependent on a wide range of other bounded systems such that the ruptured boundaries of one presuppose the threatened boundaries of every other.

I say bounded because an attention to opacity, to impenetrability, may allow for extending Donovan’s theorization of commoning as somatic practice and invite productive readings of his and Bonney’s poetry—a coming-up-against the limits of a body that refuses us entry; a coming-up-against we accept rather than resist; a giving-into not unlike Rob Halpern’s theorization of patency, “a poetics of receptivity” that privileges passivity over activity, receiving and accepting over unraveling, decoding and, in the end, appropriating.

To be common, that is, does not always mean available, much less accessible. In Bonney’s *Commons*, and the larger corpus of his work, we encounter a

sort of unavailability—an opacity—head on: disjunctive leaps, synaptic breaks and the wrist-breaking torque of unanticipated enjambments. But in Donovan’s poetry we find precisely the inverse. In Donovan’s poetry we have an almost unbearable excess of semantic and syntactic availability one might easily mistake as nothing more than a lineated extension of his criticism. And the more one reads Donovan’s poetry, the more the work invites through the excess of its availability a desire toward the impossibility of total availability and openness. Not unbounded openness as such but a desire toward openness, a desire to make oneself so, to enter into an otherwise impossible open:

So hack spirit, hack me up  
Take my name or don’t take it  
Multiplicity see if I care  
Division matters because we are born  
That strived-for-never-in-fact-  
Existing-ever-imminent-commons  
In our swagger in fact matters.

In late September Donovan gave a talk in Vancouver along with Stephen Collis and Rob Halpern as an extension of *Project on the Commons*, a project the Nonsite Collective (<http://www.nonsitecollective.org>) describes as “a framework for situating some recent activities and discussions ... around the question of ‘the commons’ and ‘commoning’ as critical alternatives to neoliberal enclosures.” Donovan’s talk—posted October 11 at *Wild Horses of Fire*—takes up Fred Moten’s *In the Break* (University of Minnesota 2003), focusing on the productive possibilities in Black (American) Radical Aesthetic practice. Homing in on Moten’s attention to figurations of resistance in Black art, Donovan writes, “By talking back, through response but also antagonism, the object produces itself as subject; slave subjectivity flickers

with both its human and its commodity status.” The “flickering” Donovan points toward here is especially crucial inasmuch as it, at one and the same time, announces subjectivity by resisting the forces that objectify *and also* resists the total legibility, the total transparency, of the object itself. Without reducing slavery or segregation to cheap analog or gravely misreading Donovan’s appeal to Moten, it is worth attending to that irreducible aspect of an art object—whether text or performance—that refuses total legibility, that remains somehow bounded and impenetrable, utterly ir-retrievable, an object among objects. Resistance is not merely opposition but also imminence; the body, the poem, the art object, the commons as bounded systems with limits that must be delineated and protected or reconsidered and recreated rather than transgressed and expropriated.

And so: a gesture toward registering opacity as the resistance of the art object, willful or otherwise, to splaying itself open, rendering itself transparent and making itself “useful.” Here, with recourse to Jean-Luc Nancy’s sense of community, what we can and do share—what we hold in common—is unsharability itself, an utter opacity that resists that species of synthesis which tends to resemble communion more than commoning and is never more than illusory.

The fulcrum, I believe, is this: the dialectical “flickering” Donovan appeals to via Moten is a movement that allows the art object to disclose its commodity status—that is, its opacity—*against* its own fetishization, *against* a presumed transparency, against that which allows it to circulate on the market fluidly and without interruption. A commodity betrays itself—removes the grease from its gears—when it

discloses the reified character of its situatedness as a commodity. Under late capitalism the art object is always already a commodity, though the disclosure of its commodity status through itself—the unveiling of its veiled but nonetheless determinate relation to, say, a pasteurized gallon of milk, a third generation iPod or a retail cashier—announces within it the trace of a desire for and toward subjectivity and against its commodity character.

Turning back to Bonney—not just his *Commons*, but the broad range of his work; from *Blade Pitch Control Unit* (Salt 2005), through *Baudelaire in English* (Veer 2008), to *The Commons*, a series that freely circulated as a pdf after the completion of the project was announced at *Abandoned Buildings*—we see a clear recognition of the instrumentalized body, a body

without legibility but inscribed in advance by the matrix of social relations within which it resides. Often in Bonney's work we witness the resignation of this body to these social relations. In "Lyric Poetry: Surveillance," an earlier poem from *Blade Pitch*, Bonney writes: "[sir. I am a stranger in this town. I am / eaten well at the flings. come let me / be your money. be your land. your / paper.]" The thrust of this moment—an uncharacteristically lucid moment in a poem that otherwise refracts and magnifies the opacity of its own material conditions—lays bare for the reader the interpellated will of a subject-made-object wholly surrendering to the conditions of its own reification for the sake of its own survival. This moment in the poem—one of the few lucid passages in the work Bonney simultaneously calls out and contains with brackets—is unspeakably

horrifying. But the very disclosure of this surrender is that aspect of a flickering that contains within itself the will toward a subjectivity which refuses its commodity character.

The blog *Abandoned Buildings* takes up where *Blade Pitch* leaves off, and the majority if not all the poems by Bonney that appear in journals like *Cambridge Literary Review* or the Veer Books anthology *Veer Off* first appeared and are still available at *Abandoned Buildings*. The earliest postings to the blog feature visual images, photographs and prose passages eventually collected in *Baudelaire in English*. In one prose passage Bonney writes, "there is a lyric I in these poems & it is annoyed by perpetual efforts to destroy it. the I is now an interferer, an inconvenience, a potential parasite within the clean capitalist body." Here

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**Renee Gladman**

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“Let them sleep for in a matter of hours new events will replace these old ones. The nice breeze blowing in from the sea will grow stronger and send them all scrambling for their things. A lush gray will efface the now blue and pass its hand over them, bringing rain. The city will suddenly appear on the beach, first crowding, then displacing the beach-goers. Its intrusion will be unthinkable.”

— Renee Gladman, *Newcomer Can't Swim*

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“When I developed the film in New Delhi, the x-ray of a marine skeleton was superimposed upon her left arm. Her elbow as thick as a knot. I said it was cartilage—the body incubating a curved space, an animal self. Instead of hands, she had four streaks of light. An imprimatur, she saw me and flinched.”

— Bhanu Kapil, *Humanimal*

Kapil's "prose document" enacts a kind of body mapping/fieldwork across personal and historical scar tissue that stretches notions of the body in pain, of physio-social constraints (in class, architecture, and linear time), and also of the human-hybrid potential.

## NewNewNew

**Susan Gevirtz**

*AERODROME ORION & Starry Messenger*

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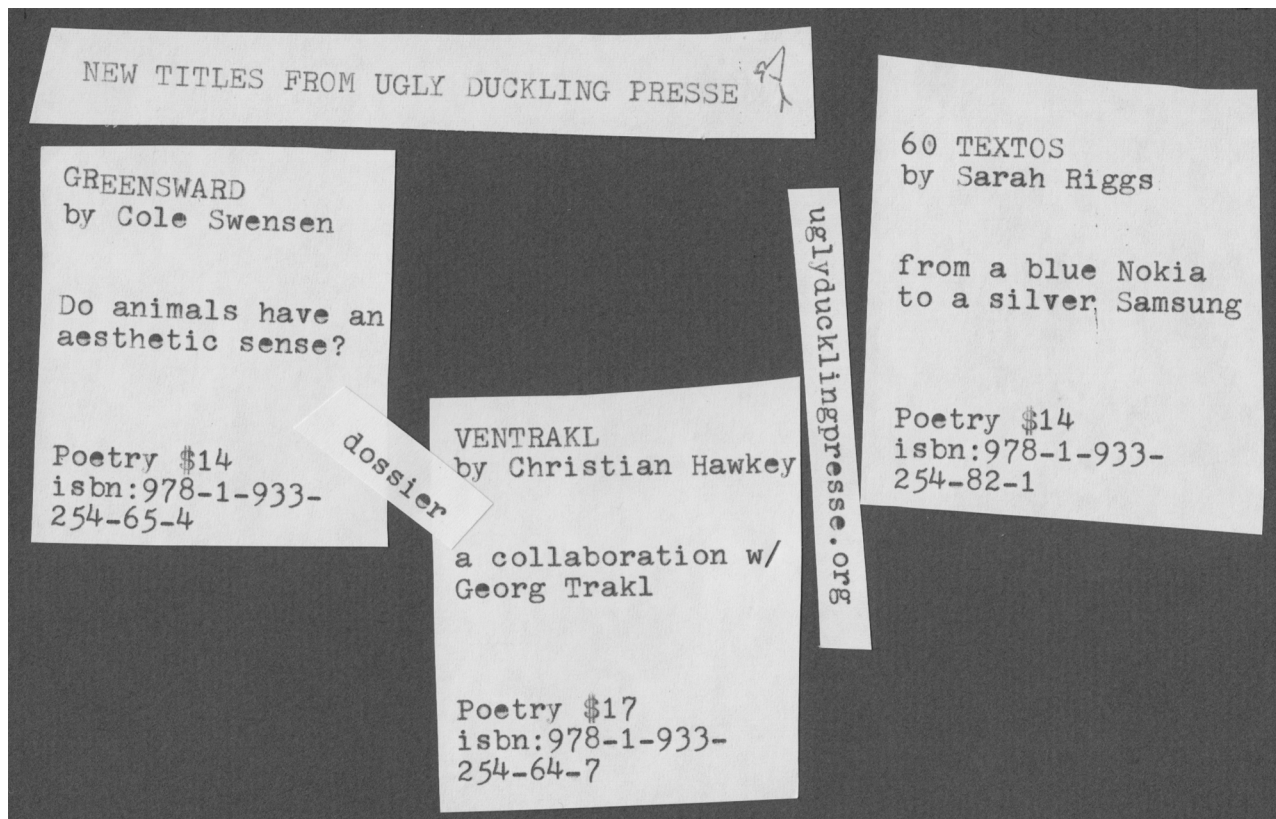
“It is well known that brevity is essential to any discussion of the sky. Thus for the sake of brevity we will divide the sky into its fractions: the Ptolemaic sky, the afternoon sky, the weatherless sky, the seared sky of summer, the skewered sky of winter tree tops, brother to the Titian sky, sister to the drawn-out sky, Father of the perspectival sky, Mother to the smoke-stacked skyline of London in 1870.”

— Susan Gevirtz, *Starry Messenger*

“The sky, more depthless and wider than the sea, has been a field of imagination, not of trespass, long before the Pleiades were painted on the wall of the Chauvet cave 30,000 years ago. Only 150 years ago Hölderlin could call it the “eyes blue school” and wander it at will. Now it is a situation, not a field. Now, Susan Gevirtz says, we are always inside it.”

— Susan Thackrey





Bonney seems to suggest that the very cultural critiques of subjectivity that successfully demystified the fundamentally metaphysical relationship between author and text, text and reader, have, in the wake of 1968, been fully reabsorbed into the object of their critique: capitalism itself. Rather than an aid to capitalism, the lyric “I” is now an obstacle that discloses and thus disrupts the relationship between commodities. Just as the fetish character of the lyric “I” under Fordism served to mask the relation of the art object to a broad set of social relations that extended well beyond any one author, the reintroduction of the lyric “I” in a period of post-Fordist flexible accumulation foregrounds an opacity—an “I” not you—that disavows the flattening tendencies char-

acteristic of neoliberal economic policy and cultural production. As such, this “I” suddenly inconveniences rather than aids an otherwise intellectually sanitized capitalist body.

The unsharability of this “I”—its sovereignty or boundedness; its illegibility—is, then, what one comes up against in Bonney’s work. And through its unsharability the work refuses commensuration and thus valuation—no specific exchange value can be assigned to it if, after all, it is incommensurate with every other object, if it is an object unto itself, opaque and impenetrable. This opacity presents itself in the very poems themselves, Bonney’s “translations” of Baudelaire. These poems are and are not visual poems and texts, somehow familiar but utterly il-

legible, sharing with us precisely that which cannot be shared. And it is from the almost total interiority of his Baudelaire that Bonney then enters into *his* Commons, *The Commons*, a constellation of spaces that, like the lyric “I” or deindustrialized production plants, have long since been abandoned through the self-negating movement of privatizing tendencies that persistently mask and flatten the far more affirming forms of privateness we hold in common.

**Richard Owens** is the author of *Embankments* (Interbirth 2009) and *Delaware Memoranda* (BlazeVOX 2008). Recent work has appeared in *Cambridge Literary Review*, *Kadar Koli*, *P-Queue*, *Shearsman and Sous Les Pavés*. He edits *Punch Press* and *Damn the Caesars*.

## POEMS

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## Three Poems

EVAN KENNEDY

that I make way then bring things, that I bring things then praise so, so that this is a way, so that these are my things, all my things, and all moments I have them being sweet, or sweet enough, or discouraging, that these are the sweet, that these are the discouraging, that these are my clothes clothing my frame, that this is my small light lighting the sweet and discouraging, as when that street may arise, and however it may cede, or when I remove my clothes, and however I will sleep, I will sleep at a time that will take up enough, I will sleep then make way at a time that will take up enough, I will sleep then make way then sleep at a time that will take up enough, that is, I expect to be taking up much

where was it where all was wishing me well, and their good wishes were known amongst them, and I was aware of the wishes, or I was mostly aware, or I was even unaware but was still wished well, at any rate I was among them, and it was between wilderness and civilization, I was among them and expressive, expressive and thankful, I was spot on in the thanks I gave to them, they were given these thanks so sent me on, on well, on toward you, with all my bones, even those bones most important to me, where was it where I was feeling dapper and so sent on, dapper and so approaching, approaching and so wishing I was still well, after all my encounters, the encounters named at the start, or named in the duration, or named after I was all through, or named never at all and oh boy never likely to recur, and you I approach, do you still wish, still wish me well in this country when it's civil, and when it's half savage, and when it's perhaps on its way toward a wholeness of savagery, with teeth and bones and encounters enacted, do you still wish, and wish well

made to exceed beasts, I take all that's made to exceed them, exceed them in warmth, in swiftness, in charm, and when on your way, you hear a warm, swift, charming voice, it might be a voice that's mine, a voice that's mine that's asking whether this or whether that can aid me in exceeding beasts, in exceeding all these beasts, all these, all, as I'm asking on my way, can it be made then taken, taken then shown, shown then exceed all beasts, as I stay warm, swift, and rather charming, and rather warm how my home includes what I like keeping, and rather swift how my way includes what I like seeing, and rather charming how my voice includes what I like speaking, what I like speaking amongst you beasts to exceed



PHOTO BY RONALD PALMER.

***Evan Kennedy** is the author of a few chapbooks, including *Us Them Poems (BookThug)*, and a video-poem, *Voyage by Donkey*, with Zbyszek Bzymek. His work has appeared in *Try!*, *The Equalizer*, *Tight*, *Poetry Project's The Recluse*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. A full-length collection, *Shoo-Ins to Ruin*, is forthcoming from *Gold Wake Press*. He oversees *Dirty Swan Projects* out of San Francisco.*

# POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

## 12/1 WEDNESDAY

Rick Snyder & John Yau

**Rick Snyder's** full-length collection *Escape from Combray* was published by Ugly Duckling in 2009. His chapbooks include *Paper Poem* (Dusie, 2006), *Flown Season* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2004), and *Forecast Memorial* (Duration, 2002). His recent work can be found in *Aufgabe*, *EOAGH*, and *Paperbag*.

**John Yau** is the author of sixteen books of poetry, four books of fiction, and numerous monographs and catalogs on a diverse range of artists, including Suzan Frecon, Leiko Ikemura, Jasper Johns, Wifredo Lam, Joan Mitchell, Nasreen Mohamedi, and Hiroshi Sugimoto. He is the co-publisher of Black Square Editions-Brooklyn Rail Books, and is an Arts Editor of *The Brooklyn Rail*.

## 12/3 FRIDAY (10 PM)

Paige Taggart & Michael Vallera

**Paige Taggart** lives in Brooklyn. Her chapbook *Polaroid Parade* is forthcoming with Greying Ghost Press. She has an e-chapbook, *Won't Be A Girl*, with Scantily Clad Press. She was a 2009 NYFA Fellow. **Michael Vallera** is a sound/visual artist currently based out of Chicago, Illinois. His work in both contexts focuses on slowness and symmetry. He has recorded for Immune Recordings, Catholic Tapes, Complacency Records, and Reverb Worship. He is a member of the duo *Cleared*, with Steven Hess, and has performed with David Daniell, Sinkane, Mike Weiss and Rhys Chatham.

## 12/6 MONDAY

Kostas Anagnopoulos & Emily Pettit

**Kostas Anagnopoulos** is the founding editor of Insurance Editions, and his chapbooks include *Daydream*, *Irritant*, *Some of My Reasons* and *Various Sex Acts*. His first full-length collection, *Moving Blanket*, was published this year by Ugly Duckling Presse.

**Emily Pettit** is the author of two chapbooks: *HOW* (Octopus Books) and *WHAT HAPPENED TO LIMBO* (Pilot Books). She is an editor for *notnostrums* (notnostrums.com) and Factory Hollow Press, as well as assistant editor at *jubilat*. Her first full-length book, *GOAT IN THE SNOW*, is forthcoming from Birds LLC.

## 12/8 WEDNESDAY

Linh Dinh & Steve Healey

**Linh Dinh** is the author of two collections of stories, *Fake House* (2000) and *Blood and Soap* (2004); five books of poems, *All Around What Empties Out* (2003), *American Tatts* (2005), *Borderless Bodies* (2006), *Jam Alerts* (2007) and *Some Kind of Cheese Orgy* (2009); and a novel, *Love Like Hate* (2010).

**Steve Healey** is the author of two books of poetry, *10 Mississippi* and *Earthling* (Coffee House Press).

## 12/10 FRIDAY (10 PM)

A Reading for Harp & Altar

This reading celebrates the release of the eighth issue of Brooklyn-based online magazine *Harp & Altar*. Edited by Keith Newton and Eugene Lim, *Harp & Altar* has emerged over the past four years as an important new source for innovative and risk-taking literature, publishing poetry and fiction alongside criticism and reviews of writing and art. **Keith Newton** will give a brief talk about the magazine, and readings will be given by *Harp & Altar* contributors **Jared White** and **Shane Book**.

## 12/13 MONDAY

Rosa Alcalá & Elizabeth Fodaski

**Rosa Alcalá** is the author of a poetry collection, *Undocumentaries* (Shearsman Books, 2010), and two chapbooks, *Some Maritime Disasters This Century* (Belladonna, 2003) and *Undocumentary* (Dos Press, 2008). She is Assistant Professor in the Department of Creative Writing and Bilingual MFA Program at the University of Texas at El Paso. **Elizabeth Fodaski** is the author of *Document* (Roof Books, 2010), and *Fracas* (Krupskaya, 1999). She lives in her native New York City and teaches English at Saint Ann's School.

## 12/15 WEDNESDAY

Julie Carr & Nicole Cooley

**Julie Carr** is the author of *Mead: An Epithalamion* (Equivocal), *100 Notes on Violence*, and *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines*. She's been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Sawtooth Poetry Prize and the National Poetry Series. She teaches at the University of Colorado at Boulder and is the co-publisher, with Tim Roberts, of Counterpath Press.

**Nicole Cooley** grew up in New Orleans. Her most recent collections of poetry, both published in 2010, are *Breach* (LSU Press)

and *Milk Dress* (Alice James Books). She directs the MFA Program in Creative Writing and Literary Translation at Queens College—The City University of New York.

## 1/1 SATURDAY (2 PM)

37<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON BENEFIT READING

Poets and performers this year include: **Suzanne Vega**, **Taylor Mead**, **Ted Greenwald**, **Philip Glass**, **Rebecca Moore**, **Robert Fitterman**, **Rodrigo Toscano**, **Samita Sinha**, **Sara Wintz**, **Adeena Karasick**, **Alan Gilbert**, **Bill Kushner**, **Bill Zavatsky**, **Bob Rosenthal**, **Brenda Coultas**, **Brenda Iijima**, **Brendan Lorber**, **Brett Price**, **Charles Bernstein**, **Christopher Stackhouse**, **Citizen Reno**, **Cliff Fyman**, **Corina Copp**, **Corrine Fitzpatrick**, **Curtis Jensen**, **Dael Orlandersmith**, **David Freeman**, **David Kirschenbaum**, **Ed Friedman**, **Eileen Myles**, **Elliott Sharp**, **Alan Licht w/ Angela Jaeger**, **Albert Mobilio**, **Alex Abelson**, **Emily XYZ**, **Eric Bogosian**, **Erica Kaufman**, **Evelyn Reilly**, **Filip Marinovich**, **Arlo Quint**, **Gillian McCain**, **Janet Hamill**, **Jeremy Hoevenaer**, **David Shapiro**, **Dorothea Lasky**, **Douglas Piccinnini**, **Douglas Rothschild**, **Drew Gardner**, **Dustin Williamson**, **Jeremy Sigler**, **Jessica Fiorini**, **Jibade-Khalil Huffman**, **Joanna Fuhrman**, **Joe Elliot**, **King Missile**, **Jonas Mekas**, **Josef Kaplan**, **Julian Brolaski**, **Julianna Barwick**, **Kathleen Miller**, **Katie Degentesh**, **Kelly Ginger**, **Ken Chen**, **Kim Lyons**, **Kristen Kosmas**, **Laura Elrick**, **Lauren Russell**, **Lenny Kaye**, **Leopoldine Core**, **Lewis Warsh**, **Marcella Durand**, **Merry Fortune**, **Michael Cirelli**, **Michael Lydon**, **Murat Nemet-Nejat**, **Nathaniel Siegel**, **Nicole Peyrafitte & Family**, **Nina Freeman**, **Paolo Javier**, **Poez**, **Penny Arcade**, **Secret Orchestra w/ Joanna Penn Cooper**, **Shonni Enelow**, **Stephanie Gray**, **Sue Landers**, **The Church of Betty**, **Thom Donovan**, **Todd Colby**, **Tom Savage**, **Tracie Morris**, **Valery Oisteanu**, **Wayne Koestenbaum**, **Will Edmiston**, **Yoshiko Chuma**, **Kim Rosenfield**, **Mike Doughty**, **Nick Hallett**, **Elinor Nauen**, **Jim Behrle**, **Karen Weiser**, **Anselm Berrigan**, **Nicole Wallace**, **Edwin Torres**, **Eleni Stecopoulos**, **Patricia Spears Jones**, **Stacy Szymaszek**, and more TBA.

*This event will be held in the sanctuary. General Admission: \$20, Students/Seniors: \$15, Members: \$10.*

**1/3 MONDAY OPEN READING**

Sign-in at 7:45 p.m.

**1/5 WEDNESDAY****Stephanie Brown & Patricia Spears Jones**

**Stephanie Brown** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Domestic Interior* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008) and *Allegory of the Supermarket* (University of Georgia Press, 1999). She was awarded an NEA Fellowship in Poetry in 2001 and the Margaret Bridgman Fellowship in Poetry at the Breadloaf Writers' Conference in 2009. **Patricia Spears Jones** is an award-winning African-American poet, editor, playwright, teacher and former Program Coordinator at The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. Her poetry collections are *Painkiller*, *Femme du Monde* and *The Weather That Kills* and the chapbooks *Mythologizing Always* and *Repuestas!*

**1/7 FRIDAY (10 PM)****Beau Sievers & Ed Steck**

**Beau Sievers** is a composer, improviser, and music cognition researcher. His music stages confrontations between people and formal systems, and has been performed by Doug Perkins and Alex Waterman. He holds a Master's degree in Digital Musics from Dartmouth College, where he studied music composition with Larry Polansky and Newton Armstrong and cognitive neuroscience with Thalia Wheatley. **Ed Steck** is from South Western Pennsylvania, currently living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His work addresses issues of corporate and government confrontation on the everyday by using leaked military, government, and corporate documents and manuals: testing how the authoritative language of the document interacts, battles, or diminishes naturalistic language.

**1/10 MONDAY****Jen Bervin & Christian Hawkey**

Poet and visual artist **Jen Bervin's** work brings together text and textile in a practice that encompasses large-scale art works, artist books, poetry, and archival research. Her books include *The Dickinson Composites*, *The Silver Book*, *The Desert*, *Nets*, *A Non-Breaking Space*, *The Red Box*, and *Under What Is Not Under*. **Christian Hawkey** has written two full-length collections (*The Book of Funnels*, 2005; *Citizen Of*, 2007) and three chapbooks. A fourth chapbook, *Ulf*, has just been published by Factory Hollow Press, and his newest book, *Ventrakl*, is a mixed-genre

exploration of the life and work of Georg Trakl (Ugly Duckling Presse, Fall 2010). He teaches at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

**1/12 WEDNESDAY****Charles Borkhuis & Paula Cisewski**

**Charles Borkhuis** is a poet, playwright, essayist, and screenwriter. His books of poems include: *Afterimage*, *Savoir-fear*, *Alpha Ruins*, and *Proximity* (Stolen Arrows). He was a finalist for the W.C. Williams Poetry Award and is a recipient of a Drama-Logue Award. **Paula Cisewski's** second collection, *Ghost Fargo*, was selected by Franz Wright for the Nightboat Poetry Prize and published in 2010. She is also the author of *Upon Arrival* (Black Ocean, 2006) and of three chapbooks: *How Birds Work* (Fuori Editions, 2002), *Or Else What Asked the Flame* (w/ Mathias Svalina, Scantly Clad e-chap, 2008), and *Two Museums* (MaCaHu Press 2009).

**1/19 WEDNESDAY****Nick Piombino & Lisa Robertson**

**Nick Piombino's** latest book is *Contradicta: Aphorisms* from Green Integer, with illustrations by Toni Simon. "*Contradicta: Aphorisms* is... almost impossible to put down" –Ron Silliman. Other books include: *fait accompli* (Heretical Texts), *Free Fall* (Otoliths), *Theoretical Objects* (Green Integer), *The Boundary of Blur* (Roof). **Lisa Robertson** is currently writer-in-residence at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, after three years in the Bay area. Her most recent book is *R's Boat* (University of California Press). The Canadian journal *Open Letter* has a special issue on her writing in the works.

**1/21 FRIDAY (10 PM)****Leopoldine Core & Corrine Fitzpatrick**

**Leopoldine Core** was born and raised in Manhattan. She studied writing at Hunter College. Her work has appeared in *Open City*. **Corrine Fitzpatrick** is a Brooklyn-based poet, and former Program Coordinator of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. She is the author of two chapbooks: *On Melody Dispatch* and *Zamboanguña*, and her poetry appears in numerous print and online journals. She recently completed the MFA program at Bard College.

**1/24 MONDAY****Ben Mirov & Solmaz Sharif**

**Ben Mirov** grew up in Northern California. He is the author of *Ghost Machine* (Caketrain, 2010) and *I is to Vorticism* (New Michigan Press, 2010). He is poetry editor of *LIT Magazine*. He

lives in Brooklyn. **Solmaz Sharif** was born in Istanbul to Iranian parents. She holds a BA in Sociology and Women of Color Writers from U.C. Berkeley and an MFA in poetry from New York University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *jubilat*, *Diagram*, *Witness*, and PBS's *Tehran Bureau*. Between 2002–2006, Sharif studied and taught with June Jordan's Poetry for the People.

**1/26 WEDNESDAY****Lars Gustafsson & Donna Stonecipher**

**Lars Gustafsson** is one of Scandinavia's best-known authors. Born in Västerås, Sweden, in 1936, he published his first novel *Vägvisa: ett mysterierespel på prosa* (*Rest on the Way: A Mystery Play in Prose*), at the age of twenty-one. His work has won many awards, including the Prix Européen de l'Essai Charles Veillon (1983), the Swedish Academy's Bellman Prize (1990), and the Swedish Pilot Prize (1996). His most recent book in English is *A Time in Xanadu* (Cooper Canyon Press). **Donna Stonecipher** is the author of three books of poetry: *The Reservoir* (2002), *Souvenir de Constantinople* (2007), and *The Cosmopolitan* (2008), which won the 2007 National Poetry Series, selected by John Yau, and was published by Coffee House Press.

**1/28 FRIDAY****Fall Workshop Reading**

See poetryproject.org for details.

**1/31 MONDAY****Situation Report: the 95 Cent Skool. A Talk by Joshua Clover**

This talk will be a double-sided assessment of the 95 Cent Skool, an almost-free "seminar in social poetics" convened by Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover in summer 2010, with 20+ participants from three countries. One side will be the internal actuality of the school: what happened, what problems presented themselves, what seemed like provisionally happy developments. The other side concerns the external responses to the skool's very existence and hypothesis, some of them hostile. The "situation report" does not concern the skool itself so much as the situation of contemporary anglophone poetry in which both the skool and the hostility to it appear, and what partial conclusions might be drawn from all of this. **Joshua Clover** is a poet and political organizer. He mostly teaches for a living. This year he is a Fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, studying poetics and political economy.

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

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

## BOOK REVIEWS

### CHAPBOOK ROUNDUP

REVIEWS BY EDDIE HOPELY

#### 01. *Live a Little Better*

Daniel Nohejl  
(The Physiocrats, 2009)

#### 02. *Try a Little Time Travel*

Natalie Lyalin  
(Ugly Duckling Presse, EEPS 27, 2010)

#### 03. *Petrarch*

Tim Atkins  
(Crater [listed as CRTR] VI, August 2010)

In *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan draws a distinction between the message and content of a medium. For McLuhan, the “message” of a medium or technology is the “the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs . . . the scale or form of human association or action,” while “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (24). Illustrating the latter definition with the nesting model “speech-writing-print-telegraph,” where each new vessel requires some qualitative transformation of the preceding, McLuhan seems to identify “an actual process of thought, which is itself non-verbal” as the beginning of the historico-communicative chain and an interface between its two ends, the point at which media’s messages of speed, scale, and form crash into a content-vector for an individual receiver/author.

Concern with shifting, periodically reinstated series of meaning-making provides, perhaps, a reason why Daniel Nohejl’s *Live a Little Better* can be a “publication of the *Institute for Human Phenology*,” while still so fascinatingly investing objects, people, and words with the capacity for persistent and present self-definition. Nohejl gets at the question of naming through the question of possibly living “a little better where better is defined as a qualitative-quantitative improvement in how one lives one’s life or how we live our lives compared to before,” thus beginning to unravel *remediation*’s double-meaning (remedy or correction; mediated media (communication)).

Circling the issues this motif generates, we can follow *Live a Little Better* through its own shifts and reinventions as it covers a surprising amount of ground in the pamphlet’s twenty

pages. Nohejl is delightfully plastic in approach, holding hands with philosophy, logic, history, labor, semantics, and poetry to write knotty and colloquial prose paragraphs seeking some analysis of “individual instances everyone insists when insisting” (6). Each chapter both progresses forward with the overall investigation and introduces new sources that Nohejl glosses, pokes at, and leaps away from. Full of sudden twists and unexpected switching between frames of language and identity, the text seems to be arguing towards rather than for any specific conclusion. The organic quality of the progression, one can only realize later, is based on transitions both subtle and contextually sensible, such that clarity emerges amid the haze of accumulating circles of definition. The book’s title comes from Lefrak City’s slogan, and Nohejl starts by positing some interpretations of this suggestion (injunction?) for a city that has “been standing for almost fifty years, too long for it to be naive about living as its slogan suggests” (4). Using apples as a simple way to think through a philosophy of “*live-a-little-better-ism*” before moving onto problems of speech and language, Nohejl enacts the periodic events that phenology implies in a style that runs throughout the work:

“after years upon troubling years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores, after years upon troubling years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores and wondering where their trees are, were, went, after years upon troubling years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores and wondering if these apples are actual apples from actual trees, after . . .” (7)

If Nohejl advises reorienting our thought from static labels to processes as a means for (a little) betterment, Natalie Lyalin has some different advice, and a different method for engaging the Janus-faced structure of writing. The design of *Try a Little Time Travel*, an entry in UDP’s Eastern European Poets Series, includes replacing left/right page numbers of a spread with “[PAST” and “FUTURE],” leaving us set in the present with Lyalin’s magical realism. As the title suggests, however, the poems consistently speak to motives for forward or backward motion: Studded with nostalgia for persons and animals who have floated, flown, galloped, and walked away, the narrator of these poems can use the labor (farming, looking, mothering, making, chopping) of herself and others to lock in the now, while situating these often surrealistically described actions as a platform for memory and desire.

Roses spurt from our organs and it  
Is a registered kind of pain. We do not  
Use scales here. Only float in water

Hoping the really giant fish ignore our  
Heat. The burble of wheels is astonishing,  
[ . . . ]  
In the beginning we missed things, but not now.  
Now we are gaping open and cutting bark  
From some of the more sinister trees.

(“Jesus Shows Inside His Flesh”)

A nearly constant flow of declarative statements about what is happening, where, and with whom, *Try a Little Time Travel* quite literally wears one down into a raw state of wonder at the capacity of a body to register this varied a spectrum of living and dreaming. The blending of a concrete, heavily populated universe with fantasy-oriented perceptions is accomplished through perfectly punchy, rarely fragmented sentences, wound tightly into a dense, plenary poetry. Despite a sometimes devastatingly bleak outlook, there is an enormous amount of deadpan humor threaded throughout these poems as well, and it is this unresolvable tension that keeps making me want to return to the volume: “The death canoe contrasts the quiet lakes. You are smothering me. / Literally, with a pillow.” Although her time-traveling advice is surprisingly cogent (“Go outdoors and reclaim your / Hiding places. The you of the past / Is still hiding there. Beware!”), Lyalin notes that “Photos are small reminders / Of how we cannot time travel.” One wonders if the mute, unconscious ground of the poem serves as a similar reminder, while underwriting the generative friction throughout.

Tim Atkins’ translations of fourteenth-century Italian scholar and poet Francisco Petrarca’s sonnets (in *Petrarch*) open an entirely different kind of functional space within the gap between media, and inject it with wit, contemporary vulgarity, and not a little libido. Crater’s edition is a thing of wonder itself, featuring bright orange, blue, purple and green inks, requiring a paper knife, and fronted by an image of Crazy Kat being hit by one of Ignatz Mouse’s bricks. The image is pitch-perfect for a book full of unrequited, confused, overbearing love, considering both Petrarch’s famous inspiration from afar (Laura), and Atkins’ own hilarious, charming love of Petrarch:

I am Francisco Petrarcha I am  
Having to wake up in order to remember  
who I am sleeping with

The author with bad hair or laurels  
Ah ! . . . Which is Tim Atkins

(Sonnet 344)

Tossing all night beside the slumbering wife  
Saying I love you to a sonnet is really the best  
thing to say because only it will listen.

(Sonnet 339)

## BOOK REVIEWS

As such, love here is for men, women, and poems. Atkins pulls the poetry of his friend and lover into messy interfaced languages of multiple historical moments (“I won the Eurovision poetry prize in 1341”), employing a criss-crossing gang of references as company (Bach, YouTube, Henry James, Futurism...). If there is a systemic translation methodology employed across the various, non-chronologically arranged sonnets, I have yet to discover it; the sharpness of the poems allows them to stand solidly outside of any framework, while taking place at high volume, with nerve, emotion, and wit all equally maximized. When something of a simpler yearning or sweetness breaks through, as in 339 quoted above, it can be a shock and a treat, fracturing the otherwise hyper voice of the poems. Commentary on the history of Petrarch, avant-garde predecessors, and other cultural figures are arranged throughout these poems as well, reinforcing the split-vision of a two-headed Atkins-Petrarch poet remediating the forms and figures of history as a means of finessing out an overload of feeling.

**Eddie Hopely's most recent chapbooks are *Cannot Contract* and *Hand Portraits in Steaks and Sprig*. He co-curated the *Poetry Project Friday Night reading series* in 2009–10.**

### *We Saw the Light*

Daniel Kane

(University of Iowa Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY ANNA MOSCHOVAKIS

Aside from conversation, the trope Daniel Kane relies upon most in his recuperative study of poetry and the New American Cinema, *We Saw the Light*, is rhyme. This is fitting in a book that deftly employs a two-pronged approach to reassessing an under-studied relationship: first, by recounting the narrative transcript of the relationship between the two genres (interviews, letters, recorded conversations, unearthed correspondences); and second, with that relationship's formal analysis, wherein similarities across mediums register as rhymes (that other sort of correspondence). The amiable way Kane leads us through the book's seven chapters belies the fact that this book is, above all, an argument against what Kane takes to be the dominant discourse surrounding poetry's relationship to film. Here—to adapt the well-known credo of one of its subjects, Robert Creeley—the form of Kane's study is nothing but an extension of its argument: His book enacts the thing it calls for, a gentle but firm prying open of

essentialist assumptions, rigid categorizations, and perceived incompatibilities.

Take the chapters on Frank O'Hara, in which the Hollywood-entranced poet is shown to be (contra the general critical consensus) a friend of “difficult” experimental film, even something of an activist. In a reading of the Alfred Leslie/O'Hara collaboration *The Last Clean Shirt*, Kane argues that not only was the poorly received film—which features a mixed-race couple driving uneventfully through the streets of Manhattan in 1964—well ahead of its time aesthetically, it was also politically progressive. Far from pitting politics against joy, “O'Hara's poetics,” Kane suggests, “connected the development of a political awareness to joy, much as Emma Goldman famously insisted on her right to dance as she staged revolution.”

Close readings form the bulk of the book, with highlights including the discussion of Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* and Robert Duncan's “The Torso” in *Passages*, the chapter on Brakhage and Creeley, and the discussion of Warhol's *Screen Tests*. Other chapters rely more on interviews, anecdotes and contextualization, such as the heartbreaking and hilarious account of the making of the Robert Frank film (featuring Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky), *Me and My Brother*. Everything feeds Kane's premise, which reduces, broadly, to: If we can just set aside decades of entrenched assumptions and take a wider view of things, surprising and revealing relationships become apparent between the visionary zeal of Brakhage, the New Romanticism of the Beats; the spiritualism of Ginsberg; the pop culture of Warhol and O'Hara; the emancipatory political drive of Anger; so that we can finally talk about Warhol's spiritualism and O'Hara's activism and Ginsberg's Warholian consumerism, etc. Kane acknowledges the aesthetic and political turns that prompted a movement “from an intense, even mystical subjectivity to a gloriously powerful diffuseness and play,” but rejects the singular importance of that trajectory. (He recounts a conversation with Marjorie Welsh in which, in response to her suggestion that his interest in the mysticism of Anger and Duncan was “unfashionable,” he replied, “I'm interested in stories that aren't being told anymore...What about sincere belief in God? Elves? Magic? Can't we appreciate that [too]?”) He aims to “help us reassess how radically disjunctive forms have been used for effects antithetical to what we loosely call postmodernism.”

A chapter called “The Conversations Between Andy Warhol, Gerard Malanga, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery, and Frank O'Hara” uses Ginsberg's

interest in the “Zen-like aspect” of Warhol's work (wherein “ordinary objects” become “totemic”) to challenge the notion that Warhol's “surface-oriented” work was necessarily anathema to Ginsberg's spiritualism. Elsewhere, Gerard Malanga becomes a double agent of contagion, via film, between the Beats and the New York School. The final close reading, of the Rudy Burkhardt/John Ashbery film *Ostensibly*, enacts the generative nature of collaboration by tracing, almost shot-for-shot and line-for-line, the close connection between poem and film, while locating the central refrain of both in Ashbery's observation that there are “so many separate ways of doing.” Throughout, Kane's selections from the numerous letters, interviews, and emails at his disposal provide great pleasure, as in the letter from Frank to Ginsberg, written during a rough patch, which ends: “We should not be afraid. Where we will differ will be at the Epilogue as I do not have the same Ideals or dreams as you have. We will make the movie and stay friends.”

While gender- and genre-blurring works are in the spotlight, the gender imbalance among this study's subjects is glaring: a glance at the index reveals inches-long lists of references for Ashbery, Brakhage, Creeley, Duncan, Ginsberg, and O'Hara, while Maya Deren nets about 13 mentions, Yvonne Jacquette six, “women filmmakers and poets” five, Abigail Child one. Kane addresses the problem in his introduction, and the fact that he gives collaborators Lisa Jarnot and Jennifer Reeves—the last word is less an effort to correct the balance (he could have written a different book) than an invitation for others to continue the conversation. In that interview with Jarnot and Reeves—a duo he seems to have picked in part because of their relationships to Brakhage and Duncan, but also for their comfort engaging the “unfashionable” ideas he favors—the women talk lucidly about similarities in their processes and attitudes toward their work. Kane is delighted. The rhymes are everywhere.

**Anna Moschovakis is teaching herself nonlinear video editing, with mixed results.**

### *Black Life*

Dorothea Lasky

(Wave Books, 2010)

REVIEW BY EMILY PETTIT

“Ever Read a Book Called AWE?” This is the title of a poem from Dorothea Lasky's second collection of poems, *Black Life*. *AWE* is the title of Lasky's first collection of poems (both out

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from Wave Books). If you haven't read *AWE* you should read *AWE*; read it right away! Both *Black Life* and *AWE* are powerful books full of moving and necessary poems. Necessary for they are transformative. Dorothea Lasky's poems want you to feel things. From the poem, "The Poetry that is going to matter after you are dead":

All poetry that matters today has feelings in it. You can refute or deny this with your lack of them. You can wrestle against feelings and make funny words for it. Take a look in the mirror.

You have feelings in the mirror. These feelings are not far away. Being alive is one thing. It is a feeling. Being in love is another. Grief is another. Weird is another. Gratitude another. In Dorothea Lasky's *Black Life* you will find yourself a mirror. A mirror you might never see, though you will surely feel it. "It is not so much moonless as the moon is seen nowhere / And always felt"—this from the poem "Poets, you are eager"—a flesh-eating poem that should flesh out your ideas about new writing. New writing is here and everywhere and it is very good. This poem shouts that. This poem bravely shouts that. For Dorothea Lasky's poems are brave.

O birds who suffer in the long September morn  
You sing to me because I am one of the people  
And I hear you because I am not one of anything

The above passage from the poem "I am a politician" asks you to look at the feeling of being alone. Alone is a feeling. A feeling that must be dealt with bravely if one wants to do things with it or to it or against or for it. Consider "A noiseless patient spider." Dorothea Lasky's bravery is a kindred spirit to the bravery inhabiting Walt Whitman's poems. I am thinking about this wild and willful and wandering and wishful "I." An "I" that comes to know itself as a means of discovery. I am thinking about the self-referential. I am thinking about repetition. Declaration. I am thinking about Negative Capability. And now I'm thinking about John Keats. I am thinking about the sublime. The horrific. I am thinking in this strange mirror that is *Black Life* that the reflections are ever-evolving.

These various reflections prismatic; they serve to complicate and enrich our understanding and feelings about a given subject. In "I am a politician", the feeling of being alone is looked at in relation to the feeling of power, while in "It's a lonely world," the feeling of being alone comes with regret, sorrow,

It's a lonely world  
Hi everybody  
It's Dorothea, Dorothea Lasky  
I have done something very wrong and

I am so very sorry about it

and courage. Yet another look at the feeling of being alone places it in an esteemed position. With the idea of being alone can come space. Space for imaginative work that leads to something special. From the poem "None of it matters":

I am all object  
Throw me around the sky  
And I will glisten, a red ball

There are many ways that the idea of being alone can be made special—it is a necessary motion towards maintaining the will to live and love things and do things and do nothing and then do more things. A motion towards evolving. Often this motion is made with images. And Dorothea Lasky's images are not just pictures; they are a complexity of visual information, intellectual viewpoint, and emotional shading. If being or feeling alone allows you to "glisten, a red ball", then good for being alone. When I am alone I will be all right. I do declare. I will repeat. Declaration, declaration, this is what Dorothea Lasky does. She declares, she declares. She repeats. She declares. This mirror might be alive! The repetition throughout *Black Life* like some sort of heart beating, like some sort of breathing. The following lines come from poems throughout the book:

(O let us hold the painting in our mouths) (O too this is so dramatic this shaking) (O animal, your heart is wise beyond your years) (O let it fly) (Oh that I once was) (Oh that I once did) (O what I did) (O how I would identify with the sickly nature of love) (Oh but Dottie, you say, you are so funny) (O the air that leaves the mouths of bugs that does transcend)

Words, phrases, images, syntactical structures and themes are repeated and repeated and with each repetition you are offered another look at what a feeling might look like. I am thinking about Fernando Pessoa when he says, "How to tell what it is like to feel this? / What's the soul of the existence of being?" Another reflection. Another chance to have another feeling about another feeling. Feeling spills from *Black Life* and reflections of this will light on you. From the poem "The Legend of Good John Henry": "I am not what I once was, but who would want to be".

After reading *Black Life* you should not be what you once were and you shouldn't want to be.

**Emily Pettit** is an editor for *Factory Hollow Press* and *notnostrums*. And assistant editor for *jubilat*.

### *Poems of the Black Object* Ronaldo V. Wilson (Futurepoem Books, 2009)

REVIEW BY BRAD FLIS

The depth-charge of Ronaldo V. Wilson's latest work, *Poems of the Black Object*, can already be felt in the spit-fire responses that have proliferated across the interwebs in the wake of the book's publication last year. I'm especially thinking of the remarkable replies that the publisher has gathered on its blog *Futurepost* (of which CAConrad's and Dawn Lundy Martin's are particularly killer), and the meteoric interview with the author that's up on the *Bookslut* website, each highlighting in specific ways the various facets of race, sexuality, memory, and violence that motorize the book.

The great variety of those responses also attests to the impossibility of cramming the books' poems into an easy summative onessie: Wilson dons many formal and generic hats—moving between chopped and screwed lyrics to more fluid, prosy dream recitations—while also gear-shifting through opposing moods and tones. Take, for example, the section of the book entitled "Chronophotographe" (a technology that helped transition between the still photo and the motion picture). It opens with the halting rhythms and elusive authoritarian command of "Helmet in the tundra, brylcreem and fixed—boxed hip bone and cock pumped, bow down to it", and yet stands in clear contrast to the effortless though piercing address to the reader in the memory-poem "Toilet," "You imagine his face sprinkled with your vitamin-rich urine. You want to unload on his beautiful black beard what you give to the urinal's mouth."

But it would be misleading to simmer the book's content down to the crude roux of stylistic dexterity (of which the book gives ample evidence), and that's not what's exciting about the book anyway. The title helps orient us, in part, to the book as meditation on blackness and on bodies. At one point, the poet writes something of a mission statement: "To identify with the fractured self, the process of the it forced apart by language, again, is where the self explodes out of the text." And while books of poetry which endeavor to correlate the fractured and multiple "self" with aesthetic practice are a dime a dozen, Wilson's emphasis on violent dislocations "out of the text" gives us something far more advantageous than word play and solipsism: "Does this narrative begin in a black hole? Does it create another diasporic space? Is this space black? Is it a black?"



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Wilson's hammering out the particular, categorical, fixed noun, "a black" from the diffusive and general adjectival form in "a black hole" is nothing short of astonishing—and in effect answers the original question as the fog of abstract visuals suddenly breaks to suggest a human being. How is that possible? But blackness in those lines defines not only an object/subject as it exists in space and (narrative-)time, but space itself. I'm left considering how race (blackness) extends beyond the bodies to which it is meant to adhere, where the language of recognition is not taken for granted, but undermined, made to seem distant and invasive, or to bleed beyond its boundaries.

For this reason, I'm intrigued by the insectual and the creaturely that stalk the pages, given that the animalistic, throughout the history of racial discourse, has been used to dehumanize. But Wilson's human-nonhuman encounters are evocative and complex. The common fly, aphids, worms are all understated though recurring objects throughout the book, lending a sense of rot, parasitism, and decomposition to the material bodies on display here, as though to remind us that what is permanent about identity is not our bodies, despite the body being the object of identification. Sometimes the speaker serves as host, "Something crawled / up me and died", and "the bed / bugs feed / on a hollow leg". Other times the speaker exacts violence upon these other life forms, as in the poem that details the ambiguously intended torturing of a leaf-bug. The book's cover images, details of a nineteenth-century illustration of a stingray, similarly frame the poems with this same inhuman sentience, a study of the life that defines our humanness in distinction. The stingray's memorable appearance in the poem "Dream in Fair" is as striking as it is humorous:

Left Eye Lopes is angular in the dream; alive,  
she is in a silver crop-top.

She's a junkie who shows up under the bridge  
and asks, "Are you \_\_\_?"

I can't remember the name, only that I'm looking  
down into Woodard's face.

Another young black woman pulls out a gun  
that shoots out a dart

full of tranq that flies through the air at her chest.

Steve Irwin was killed by a stingray barb to the  
heart today.

He was 44. On the internet, it was black, and he  
was under the sea.

The brilliance of this sequence is that you end up performing, as a reader, the same failures of recognition as the dreamer above. Does the shooter stick her own chest with the dart? And what was black, exactly, on the internet? And am I meant to read *Left Eye* and the Crocodile Hunter as contrasting racial types here, lodged in the framing devices of pop-cultural media narratives? But how do I relate this to the figure of Wilson's mother, who appears as actress Alfre Woodard above? And is the dream a critical apparatus here or merely an escape hatch with which to direct desires of misrecognition? In the face of this ambiguity, Wilson gives us the neologism "WRECKEDCOGNITION" as a form of "recognizing failure, the failed, the exhausted." If "race is all made up" as the speaker glibly states in the epistolary section, "Vergelioian Space", then it requires something like "wreckedcognition" to see it as a failed or exhausted project of our own making. In this, possibly, we might identify something like a utopic desire of the black object at stake in the book. Not a defamiliarization, but a disorienting ("no north star") of the way we relate our bodies. And despite the book's brimming with loss and violence ("your block will get knocked"), a call for a new sensibility rooted in density and difference: "Feel. Unconscious. Un-Make. Sense, and line it as you wish—repel, rebel."

**Brad Flis lives in Detroit.**

*Duties of an English Foreign Secretary*  
Macgregor Card  
(Fence Books, 2009)

*To Light Out*  
Karen Weiser  
(Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010)

REVIEW BY RODNEY KOENEKE

Karen Weiser and Macgregor Card describe their books as "companion volumes," sharing words and lines drawn from nearly a decade's worth of weekly collaborations. It's an apt phrase for two collections that investigate the varieties of human connection so intensely; it also invites a reading of each book in the light of the other that may be unique in contemporary poetry.

I thought reviewing them in tandem would be like pushing the leaves of a table back together, or joining the split halves of a *symbolon*, the broken

message that completes itself when its bearers reunite. It's true that the cross-book echoes—"incrementalized doubt," "vatic underfauna," "the robin in the venison," and several others—let you in on the fun of a longstanding creative friendship. It's amusing and gratifying, the way filling in a crossword or snapping together two puzzle pieces can be, to spot the parallels and imagine the writing sessions as the lines passed back and forth. But the language in common also throws light on their points of departure. Reading them side-by-side, it's the divisions that struck me as much as the joins.

One of my favorite poems in Card's *Duties of an English Foreign Secretary* is "Contempt," a cento made up of famous last words. There's something inherently stagy about dying lines; the speaker and the listener (what good are last lines without an audience?) share an awareness of the "big finish" waiting in the wings that charges whatever's said with disproportionate drama. Funny, grand, absurd, or banal, any phrase in that context takes on the weight of an address to the footlights, and Card's cento, like the poems that follow, revels in cataloging its possible tones ("it was a mistake," "The gas is low," "Mozart! Mozart!," "Now comes the mystery," "Put out the light", etc.). The poem operates in a way that's characteristic of Card's approach throughout: dramatic, wittily self-aware, often enigmatic declarations that gain their emotional power by keeping the drama that provoked them just offstage.

Take, for instance, another favorite:

So full of longing, the day was mine warning  
to sleep hard and never, the earth pied by trees  
full of people, tradesmen, police and students  
friendly from ear to glare. She was a beautiful  
chauffeur who bent a horseshoe into wealth,  
hand against my heart, now I sing a foolish  
song, like a crossguard in a part of town, night  
came and summer stuck it in smoke, I mean,  
tonight I have work and I have memories, basically  
a ton.

A clear, even generic emotional axis runs through the poem—"longing," "heart," "song," "memories"—but the speaker seems equally drawn to the *mise-en-scène* of his own dramatic situation. He notes the "earth pied by trees", the summer night, the grinning extras, and the dress-up roles of chauffeur and cross-guard—an accident waiting to happen—while keeping the exact nature of the "longing" and "memories" just out of view. What work? Which part of town? The poem creates its effect by not letting us know; like with all the best ballads, the information's in the telling indirections.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Card's infectious affection for artifice and stagecraft colors much of the book's imaginative landscape. In other poems, we find "a ship of war / in a mariner's brochure," "showy mirrors," "a fog machine," "a wood of chairs," "a story puppet with a flaming sword," a "Macbeth horse-opera," "a theater of well-lit rain," and, for good measure, a poem using lines from Mozart's librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte. But lest you think it's all wardrobe and lighting (lights and lamps, along with smoke, clouds, and fog, are recurring images), notice how often the voices that speak from these handsome sets proceed by negations. The narys, nos, nothings, nots, nevers, don'ts, cannots, cant's, and no could's supply a good part of the poems' home vocabulary. They come out especially vividly in the antic repetitions Card borrows from the neglected Victorian Spasmodic, Sydney Dobbell:

"In perpetuity, no no no no no no no  
No, my boy, no no no no no no no no no no..."

These moments in the poems evoke nonsense songs or children's ditties, but they also remind me of the repetitive stammers you might use to ward off dread or mental anguish, feelings that often spend time in the green room of these poems, waiting to come on right after the poetic break. For a book that's richly concerned with hospitality, *Duties* touches more often than I expected on the murkier side of friendship: "a friend is only a machine / delivering consent—"; "I am ashamed and a burden to my friends"; "A true friend cowers in my charity," etc. I admire the way Card balances directness and intensity with suggestion and mystery, and blends the comic with the "little sad music of this poem / You may not enter to rest." "But I need you / to feel my pretense" could be the book's motto; by the end, it hits like a manifesto.

If Card's speakers look up to the gallery, the voices in Weiser's poems sound distances inward and outward, "like a piano, open, at a regional fair / playing its own ethereal pulse." Poised between Swedenborg and Spicer, a daughter and a mother, *To Light Out* deploys static and sleep as metaphors for the receptive states that establish "the thoroughfare between us." Weiser's especially deft at using syntax as an instrument for tracking the intricate mental and physical data her poems explore. Early on, we meet with "totipotent," Teresa Brennan's word for the stem cell's capacity to develop into any of the body's other cells. Weiser's phrasal units work in a parallel way, growing across and down the page into ever-longer sentences that send filaments out into politics, pregnancy, science, economy, and nineteenth-century history,

"bric-a-brac hanging from every word / where the red tape should be."

The science and Swedenborg make this sound like a "project," but the writing's too quick to get bogged down like that. "I want to be sense teller / in a fast bliss service / a locomotive like a paddle boat" one voice declares, and the propulsive momentum of lines like that allows the poems to surprise "a cosmos in its clematis drawing room" or "DNA spiraling into its own pulse" without getting fixed, Schroedinger's cat-style, into "These originary moments / already a museum of burnt machines / when slowed down to speech or consideration...."

Images of speed and movement, through space and through time, connect with the book's insistent openness to transmissions of all kinds: radios or angels, the big bang's ambient hum to the mystical static of the sonogram. The poems treat the body with unpretentious wonder as a species of receiver, and language as a signal-to-noise ratio where "the crackling of another" carries the best part of the message.

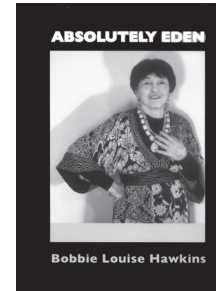
What links these two books is finally more than just common lines, but a commitment to being present for one another, and the chorus of others around them, across any distance. "It's small," writes Weiser, "the moment of opening between us / and I will meet you without fail."

**Rodney Koeneke** is the author of *Musee Mechanique* (BlazeVOX, 2006) and *Rouge State* (Pavement Saw, 2003). He lives in Portland, Oregon.

*Green-Wood*  
Allison Cobb  
(Factory School, 2010)

REVIEW BY TRACEY MCTAGUE

*Green-Wood* [Cemetery]'s oaks rise up on Brooklyn's apex: a glacial moraine ridden with headstones, and in Allison Cobb's remarkable book *Green-Wood*, our vision has been shifted afar, beyond the beckoning book-end dates—to witness the overall vista of several-hundred-thousand marble surfaces reflecting the canopy of trees and light from an empire's setting sun. The finite sentiment on each gleaming marker engulfed with everything that surrounds it. Reflection is at the heart of *Green-Wood*, a glorious fury of information surrounding and expanding the poetry. Not an easy task—to shepherd this vast content, but an act of foraging that Cobb has etched magnificently into this monu-



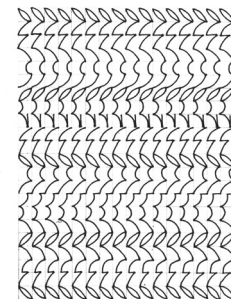
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mental work. The loose mind, a poet's best asset, and a fine net of observation helped create this intensely researched opus magnum. *Green-Wood* is a compendium of lists growing within a larger catalog. Each section begins with a small inventory of grave offerings discovered on each walk:

heart pillow wrapped in a plastic grocery bag  
smiling cop with one arm broken off  
Hello Kitty sticker that says smartfit  
knock-kneed mummy with green teeth  
Puerto Rican flag fuzzy dice  
wrestling dalmation puppies figurine  
MERRY CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN ribbon

Cobb ventured for years throughout this ever-changing Necropolis glade and on one walk, she notes how the Beech trees' smooth bark has invited generations of graffiti-carved signatures. She finds one beech dying and stands under its canopy.

The leaves of the purple beech look glossy, almost black, from a distance, but underneath they cast a cool green shadow. I circle the trunk of one and find a gash that splits the tree almost in half. Inside a pale fungus has grown in layers like lace. The trunk looks black and dead as if charred by a fire. The fungus, strangely beautiful, feels moist and airy in my fingers.

*hot and total ruin I sign my name here*

Impermanence and reverence signed in a fungus; a tree's immanent ruin, and rebirth. Through Cobb's journey we witness both a disrupted landscape, and the vibrant hope found in decay—much like Emerson's impulse to open the tomb of his dead young bride. A thread that runs through this book's complex fabric is one of environmental degradation and land ownership. The simultaneous story of a landscape's natural history and the history of patriarchal imperialism.

In England, promoters of enclosure argued against plantings as fence hedges like medlar, which produce an edible fruit. The fence itself might provide the commoners with a means of sustenance.

Quince  
Grape Holly  
Honeysuckle  
Pear  
Chokecherry  
Dogwood  
Bridal-wreath Spirea

*not flowers but bone, worn by stress and use*

As native tribes were relegated to squatters and the invader's bones needed a place to rest; Green-Wood was designed to make a more "perfect," sanitized version of the woodland. Ultimately, the mock copse became a refuge for the crushed spirits of postmodern urbanites starved for green.

New Yorkers at first refused to bury their dead in Green-Wood, which they considered wild land, unprotected. *They clung to the charnel-house and churchyard* wrote Cleveland. So the trustees erected an obelisk over an empty grave as a *sort of decoy*.

From the Dutch for "cage"—it referred to the practice of capturing water birds by surrounding a pond with nets.

Cobb's verse, which interrupts and amends the prose, comes from a verdantly steeped perception which reaches past the poetry of flat identity, feminism in quotes or linear all-caps poetry-politics. Cobb's observations are at once deeply funny and tragic. One such example is her mention of nineteenth-century "botany" books created for women (with the sexual reproduction of plants removed so that demure women would never know the rampant polyandry of the botanical world). She digs into the sediment and fertile darkness, understanding that this zig-zagging course cohabits both the past and present.

Cobb's frequent reference to R.W. Emerson's conflicted and inspired life parallels the flood of associations from Cobb's "mind on fire" at once bringing us within her train of thought and outward. We are peripherally shifted to the fata morgana-hazed horizon and to our endemic American dream. Happily ever after, exit stage right into the pollution sunset...the end. But the story is never that simple. Cobb's poetry captures the unexpected symmetry of pesticide, infertility, chemotherapy, and survival in the margins. This book could only have come from the mind of a poet who manifests more than just poetry in her life. An environmental warrior as her chosen profession, Cobb's dedication is fully realized mindfulness and awareness; her poetry understands the vast tragedy unfolding without ever relinquishing the fight. (In Tibetan, this magical quality of existence, or natural wisdom, is called *drala*. *Dra* means "enemy" or "opponent" and *la* means "above." So *drala* literally means "above the enemy," "beyond the enemy.")

Cobb spent six years walking under the gothic entrance to Green-Wood (whose human hand's baroque craft has been outshined for years now

by the intricately woven nests of wild Monk Parrots in the stone lattice). Cobb has entered into a world inhabited by the ghosts of a nineteenth-century empire. Past the markers of individual time-place holders, born-died, mother-daughter, into the undisturbed flow from the mind and oneness. *Green-Wood's* poetry exists in both the primordial teeming forest and currently manicured tomb. We linger where landscape designers planned a pre-Eve Eden and Cobb's poetry invades the beastie nests of the past, which still pulse with life of cormorant phantoms and overlapping shadows she's mapped out into the future.

*Every fact is a new  
word, a god  
of mercurial mind*

**Tracey McTague** serves as the editor-consigliere for *Lungful!* magazine, while her book exploring dog evolution is forthcoming from Overlook Press.

## AERODROME ORION & *Starry Messenger* Susan Gevirtz (Kelsey Street Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY STEPHEN MOTIKA

In the realm of the skies, whether the heavens or the nearest parts of Earth's atmosphere, the historic precedents are great and the terms of description vast. The realm might seem impossible to capture in book form, so it's all the rarer to find Susan Gevirtz's new volume comprised of two long poems, "AERODROME ORION" and "*Starry Messenger*," wrestling with the upper reaches. Her text sprawls across large pages and weaves through a variety of registers and lexicons, from that of science, technology, and economy to the near dream states of fairytale, myth, song, and art. These poems explore, nimbly and with subtle brevity, the unfathomable air above.

Towards the end of the first poem, Gevirtz writes, "Names in our nomenclature / for new species of exhaustion," a comment on the vastness of the vocabulary included here, from ancient Greek words to the latest acronyms. Gevirtz inserts a wide range of found language in her text, sampling Simonides and Galileo, Sor Juana and Sri Aurobindo, and snippets of air-traffic-control transcripts and comments from an airplane pilot and *Salon.com* travel columnist. Her sophisticated poetics and curiosity propel her project far from the realms of facts and figures into a

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space of linguistic density, creating a carefully calibrated lyric journey through a world that is, by its necessity, beyond our grasp.

Gevirtz uses language to open our viewfinder, stating: "Lend me your taxonomy and I will grant visibility," creating vistas and voyages with new sets of terms. The trips, across the sky, often resemble the sea voyages of ancient times:

so they drove  
over the flat sea  
wheels spinning  
momentum without charter

drove on  
herding contrails

plane clouds  
breed clouds

In this case, it's not the sea that harbors unwanted human activity, but the global jet stream(s) carrying on "without charter," an attempt to bring control ("herding") where no control is possible. Through our great talents with combustion, we create new clouds.

Even in the face of this difficulty, Gevirtz's sky is never devoid of the presence of the earthbound stargazer: there is always room for the words of Galileo—the title "*Starry Messenger*" refers to his 1610 book of the same title—or the lyric poetry of Simonides, "for the dogstar, wheeling up the sky / brings back summer, the time all things." It's from these men of wonder that our desire to name and claim originates. One of the strengths of Gevirtz's new book is her ability to collapse the walls between different cultures and identities; the skies, here, unite our diffuse experiences, understanding, and desires.

Our contemporary condition is well represented. Take the evidence seen on the air traffic controller's screen:

"that is the fastest sky to ever burn—strung up by umbilicus of connected dots: one dot is the pilot's voice, another the pilot's eyes, another air traffic controller's voice, the fourth leg is the air traffic controller's eyes. All of these, far more than the jet engine shoving air out of its path at such high speed that the plane creates its own slipstream into which it proceeds forward, keep the plane up. And the sky is kept up by the same means. There is no other time in history that the sky has been kept up over earth in the fashion."

In this, from one of the book's few prose sections, Gevirtz replaces her fragmented sequences with the lexicon of various human labors (enact-

ed through vision and voice) and the technological abilities that have created new byways. These byways insist that our activity has created a new aerial plain where our reality is constructed, upheld, and managed by the work of our civilization. The burning seems inevitable, the sky will fall and the world will, what, end?

One cannot help think of the American empire crumbling as it purchases and burns vast amounts of fuel in its attempt to maintain its dominance of the world's skies. And one cannot help think of Gevirtz's own return ("How I loop the loop") to her own Americanness. Here, the "Fog to the west" most certainly references meteorological conditions in San Francisco, where Gevirtz has lived and worked for the last three decades. With this in mind, one is not surprised to find reference to two American forebearers, Barbara Guest and Charles Olson. Although Guest appears here on a video screen, how perfect; it's her most expansive and annotatively discursive work, such as *Rocks on a Platter: Notes on Literature*, that resonates in these pages.

Gevirtz tucks Olson into her poem: "Amass Olson." Olson was a mass, and although he might suggest anything but ether, his scope and approach to composition are in evidence here. In *AERODROME ORION & Starry Messenger*, Gevirtz has achieved her own maximal appreciation of the language of the skies with something subtle and wholly original. Her Orion, both plane and constellation, patrols the sky above and book below, evidence of an impossible scale writ just so.

**Stephen Motika** is program director at *Poets House*, publisher of *Nightboat Books*, and a 2010–2011 *Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace resident*.

### *Ventrakl* Christian Hawkey (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010)

REVIEW BY DAVID AUERBACH

Georg Trakl was an Austrian poet who killed himself at 27. Born in 1887, he trained as a pharmacist and became a medical officer in the war. His ghastly experiences on the front lines while treating wounded soldiers caused a psychotic break in his already unstable personality, which led to his suicide not long after in 1914. Trakl's experimentation with forms and his feverish imagery mark him as a modernist and expressionist, but the absence of psychology

and his Dionysian mysticism mark him as a late Romantic, closer to Hölderlin than Rilke. His obsessive use of color, blue and purple especially, is a marker of a poetic language whose meanings can only be grasped obliquely. This aloofness, this immersion in nineteenth-century poetics, challenges anyone to invade his mind.

Christian Hawkey intends to do just this. *Ventrakl* is a "scrapbook" of "collaborations" with Trakl. Its investigations into Trakl—Hawkey's personal reflections, imagined interviews with Trakl, manipulated photographs, a biography of Trakl's sister, and formal and aleatoric manipulations and translations of Trakl's poems—confront Trakl's work from multiple angles, usually indirectly rather than head-on. Such a potpourri is bound to be messy, something Hawkey advertises by terming *Ventrakl* a scrapbook. Yet the humility of that term is contradicted by the deliberate presumption of also calling the work "a collaboration," underscoring Hawkey's own ambivalence about engaging with such an elusive figure. Ambivalence and messiness, rather than an elegant falsity, is what is called for.

Hawkey rightly plays up the difficulties rather than obscuring them. The title page of each section in *Ventrakl* is marked with an obelus, the division symbol. Two individuals—two dots—separated by a literal line of division. There are many such figurative lines in *Ventrakl*: English/German, present/past, prose/poetry, reader/writer. The book stakes its success on the extent to which the identification of these lines reveals more than merely the failure to cross them. As Hawkey says of Trakl's great war poem "Grodek": "the words erasing the line between two worlds."

Hawkey reveals some of his translation and transformation techniques in the introduction, but is cagey about how and where they have been applied. One of the clearest processes produces some of the most striking joins of past and present, a series of color poems ("Whitetrakl," "Yellowtrakl," etc.) that translate and assemble Trakl's lines containing that color. The color is made to seem arbitrary, and yet the result is a bas-relief map of the color's tenor in Trakl's mind, presented in time-lapse.

*black angel, who quietly slipped from a tree's heart,  
the black flight of birds always touches  
the black dew, dripping from your temples, all  
roads flow into black decay . . .*

Other poems are constructed via homophonic manipulation of the German texts, a technique memorably used by Louis and Celia Zukofsky in their translations of Catullus and David Melnick

## BOOK REVIEWS

in his reappropriation of the *Iliad*. In Hawkey's appropriation of "Nachtlied," "Erstaart vor Bläue, ihrer Heiligkeit" becomes "For the blue of error-stars, heaven's klieg light," loosely but effectively evoking the efflorescence of the original. Later in the same poem, "nächtlichen" becomes "night-lichen" and "Spiegel der Wahrheit [mirror of truth]" becomes "speech's warfare." It is some work to track down the originals, as Hawkey does not always give clear pointers to his sources, but a good many of his treatments become more evocative when viewed with the originals at hand. As I participated by delving through Trakl, I came to identify further with Hawkey's position.

Other words and phrases recur throughout the poems, again pointing to a hidden web of connections behind the veil of a different language. "Reasons Why Orphans Wear Stillness-Mittens" picks up on that final word, already used in earlier poems in the book, and gives an ordered list of those reasons. It is strongly affecting, drawing on Hawkey's ability to take these strange homophones and draw out their emotional juice. It is here he perhaps comes closest to achieving something of Trakl's own foreboding presence,

by way of creating distance from both Trakl and himself through the space between languages. The recurrent use of such words across poems reinforces the effect. A number of poems use the word "sternum," linking the heart and chest to the stars (the German *stern*), a link that is a fitting metaphor for the book itself.

There is an inherent element of risk, however. In Hawkey's idiolect, "Durch Wolken fährt ein goldner Karren" becomes "A duck fart woke the golden Karen," in a coarse excursion into sub-Silliman space that even apologizes for itself: "how completely your mirror-language / Has failed." It seems we must take the good with the bad, but it sits uneasily next to the talk of war and insanity elsewhere in the pages.

The prose excursions are more tentative, lacking the focused incandescence of the best poems in the book. The "interviews" with Trakl, in particular, strive for a self-consciously awkward engagement, but sometimes slide into a stilted preciousness. Yet there are still such gems as Hawkey's thoughts on gazing at Trakl's manically intense expression: "Your physician in the Krakow asylum reported that you often saw a man with

a drawn knife standing behind your back. Even though your head faces forward, your gaze seems directed there, behind you."


Taken as a whole, these problematic points still contribute to the book's acutely Midrashian quality. Appropriation becomes a motif, with Hawkey noting his lifts from Spicer, David Cameron, the Zukofskys, and others. Nothing prevented him from adopting more novel techniques, as K. Silem Mohammad has done, for example, in his treatments of Shakespeare. But Hawkey chooses to emphasize *Ventrakl's* lack of autonomy. The translations/deformations are littered with contemporary references both serious and trivial. The strangely po-faced introduction drops Bachelard, Heidegger, Agamben, Stein, and Benjamin in its first three pages, encasing the book in a theoretical carapace that stresses its dependency on contemporary poetic discourse. Trakl, in contrast, comes to seem increasingly universal in refusing to provide anything but the barest specifiers of time and place.

Weighed down by its declared lack of autonomy, the book appeals to Trakl as a source of unimpeachable authenticity, only to be overwhelmed

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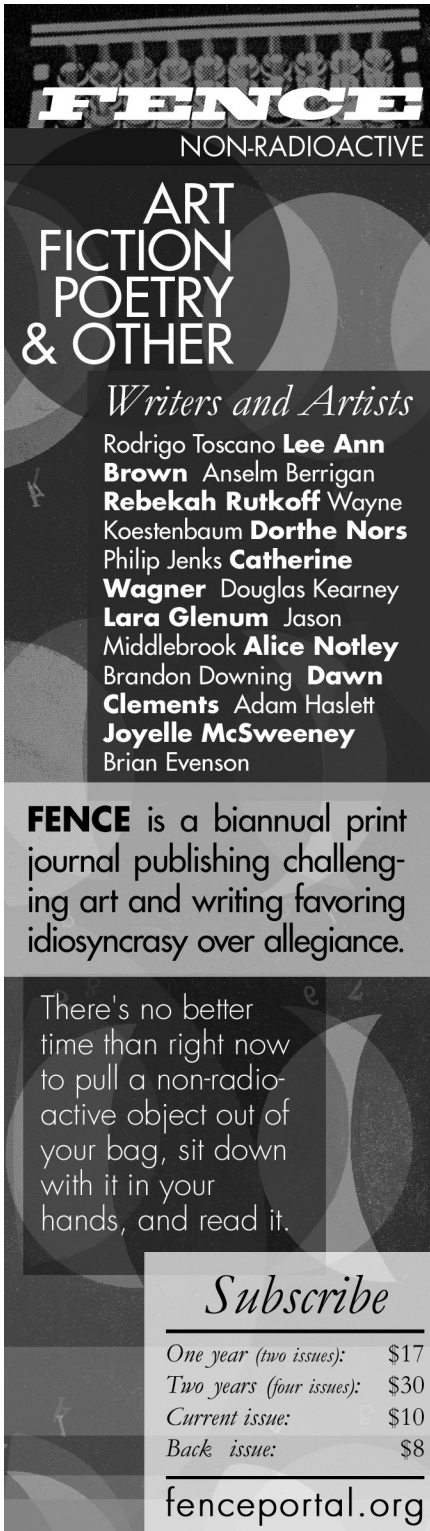
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by the concept of that authenticity and the inability to contain it across language, time, and place. It throws up beautiful but uncanny images, only to be unable to claim them as its own. (Here the word "collaboration" starts to seem more sinister.) When it now seems depressingly obligatory to cite Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" in any meditation on translation, as Hawkey indeed does, how can a writer and reader escape the theoretical baggage and speak of poetry and war? *Ventrakl* does not give an answer, but tenaciously refuses to admit success or surrender. It is an ouroboros looking to let go of its tail.

*David Auerbach* writes at [www.waggish.org](http://www.waggish.org) and elsewhere.

*The New Make Believe*  
Denise Newman  
(The Post-Apollo Press, 2010)

REVIEW BY BRIAN UNGER

*The New Make Believe* is the culmination of a poet's close attention to craft, prosody, language and life. Denise Newman brings to the table an uncanny (and maternal) ability to knit intense subjectivity and remarkable powers of observation to concrete narratives of everyday life, both profound and routine.

A rank-and-file buddhist, Newman is secure in her selfhood, comfortable in Adorno's "unre-

strained individuation." No need to invent readers here. The content is shared and social, the stuff of life's daily tasks and meditations refracted through a sharp intellect and a knowing eye.

*The New Make Believe* is really a singular serial poem, a long poem comprised of sixteen individual lyrics parsed out into four distinct sections. The sections are "Red Pearl," "I Went Out New," "The Silences," and "The Divine Naming." Each section is linked thematically to the previous and is introduced by a terse memorial verse koan loosely modeled on Pascal's *Memorial*. Pascal was a brilliant Christian philosopher and scientist who used his remarkable intellect and logician's skills in the *Pensées* to press the moral imperative that one should at least act like one believes in God, even if you're really not sure, or even if you flat out don't believe one iota of Christian theology. Newman uses this presumptively obscure theological basis to mount her journey, and this poem is very much a spiritual and philosophical journey not unlike Homer's *Odyssey*, H.D.'s *Trilogy* or Williams' *Paterson*.

The implicit linking of Pascal's work with her understanding of modern American buddhism is a fascinating and provocative gesture on Newman's part. And you can take this poet at her thematic word. *The New Make Believe* is a dance with death that starts off with a jarring prefatory commentary from Kierkegaard, followed by a memorial tombstone inscription. It's all about temporality, finitude, flux. Here's Kierkegaard's germinal mood-setter:



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BOOK REVIEWS

All I have is my life, which I promptly stake every time a difficulty appears. Then it is easy to dance, for the thought of death is a good dancing partner, my dancing partner. Every human being is too heavy for me, and therefore I plead: Let no one invite me, for I do not dance.

And this is the memorial verse that kicks-off section one, "The Red Pearl":

what must go goes what stops stops with—  
 water way lake poverty—held clear  
 water sparkle air pump daily  
 from bottom daily naked oblations to master  
 accident—be my means facing stop  
 water eyes woods to sheer words can't adhere  
 water goes goes with stops stops with go—

What must go is life, like water. What stops is death, the "master accident." Newman notices that life is one perceptual, phenomenological, psychological and social accident after another; unpredictable, uncontrollable, beyond human agency. Accepting this vulnerability is accepting a god, a force greater than us, a sort of classical greek god one can actually work with, instead of sheer human avoidance, pretending you know what you're doing, the distinctively human pretense that you know what is happening, or going to happen, at any given moment. Newman asks, what is my vehicle for this trip? What is the meaning of it? And how is life meaningful, not merely empty or absurd, if there is no God? As a Zen teacher recently pointed out, one doesn't really transcend anything in this life, that's a cop-out, a betrayal.

in the vigorous bloomtime  
 bring it on, struggle to be  
 peaceful in one's rod, rule, nonstop go—  
 that is, time, and how the older ones lean on it

The second section is called "I Went Out New," as in the heuristic practice of accident. From the start of the first poem, entitled "The First Rip":

then I went out new in my accident to see  
 if humankind looked new  
 and it did  
 looking up at people moving freely above the station  
 each living thing influential in its ability to move freely  
 along more or less the same lines  
 not that I was new but I was shiny and well tuned  
 with a new buoyancy limb, that is, my accident,  
 which hasn't happened but I know it  
 on instinct as I once was my animal,  
 animate, breath in that way . . .

In the penultimate section, "The Silences," Newman uses a funny conversational jag about the false consciousness of "a total managed reality" in our dance with death. She introduces a character named BLANCO (blank, void, death). She wants to dance with him, but shit that he is, he refuses. The final poem in the series is "The Divine Naming." The poet's vehicle is, ultimately, language, the naming of things, fears, emotions, loves and hates, plus all sorts of weird images seen with the eyes and the heart-body; felt, heard, seen out in the "real" world, with its common ordinary speech:

when we call it "song" or "life" or "light" or  
 "accident"  
 when we call it "mystery" or "misty" or "palace"  
 "overabounding"  
 we're actually saying "in a manner of speaking" or  
 "count me in"  
 in other words,  
 to say is to divine. . . .

Who is saying all this? Who's there actually?

wobble said  
 water said  
 dark said  
 and all things said in this vein

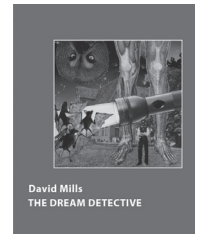
i'm of time  
 awe of wave  
 if of life

and all things said in this vein.

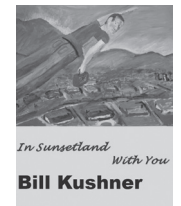
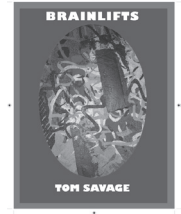
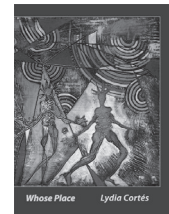
Newman has moved beyond the uncertain structure and prosody of her first two poetry collections *Human Forest* (Apogee, 2000) and *Wild Goods* (Apogee, 2008), and landed in a solid and admirable clarity. It is at base, I think, an existential and phenomenological clarity, comfortable with her selfhood in the complexly gendered San Francisco cityscape.

**Brian Unger** is a doctoral student in American Literature at the CUNY Graduate Center and editor of *Zen Monster*.

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