BOOG CITY

A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FROM A GROUP OF ARTISTS AND WRITERS BASED IN AND AROUND NEW YORK CITY'S EAST VILLAGE

ISSUE 114 FREE

THIRD MAN BOOKS

Trembling Pillow PRESS

d.a. levy-palooza 4: celebrating three renegade presses

We check in with Third Man Books, Trembling Pillow Press, and White Pine Press before the first Sunday in May event.

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The Exhilaration of Upheaval: Poets Who Write On the Visual Arts in the 21st Century

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What Poetry Can Be: Letting Poets Answer

REVIEW BY HOLLY RICE

What Is Poetry? (Just Kidding, I Know You Know)
Anselm Berrigan, ed.,
Wave Books

What Is Poetry? (Just Kidding, I Know You Know) is didactic, inspirational, and at times a comforting read, though these descriptions seem too clinical and reductive to truly get to the heart of what Anselm Berrigan has achieved with this collection. Through interviews originally published in The Poetry Project Newsletter, Berrigan has curated a celebration of the Project's fiftieth anniversary that serves as a tapestry of history and culture of New York poetry and its many off-shoots. In their own words, poets from a variety of generations and schools of thought discuss language, community, politics, and the art that is inspired. What Is Poetry? is a collection that eradicates the barriers between poets and readers and offers poets the opportunity to demystify their experience as part of the poetry community and the art itself.

Poetry is political; it serves both as response and activism to the ever-changing climates of society. In an interview by Daniel Kane, Kenneth Koch speaks about writing as his objection to the Vietnam war after being inspired by Allen Ginsberg's political poetry, "And I didn't like what was happening to my students, what was happening to anybody, so I started to write my poem 'The Pleasures of Peace' as a direct result of being inspired by that Ginsberg reading ... Well, my poetry rejected everything about the war, everything that was about suffering." There are many moments like this in this collection. The reader is reminded that poetry, although steeped in aesthetics, language, and beauty, forces culture to record the grief that is often tied up in government, society, and power. These interviews are a comfort to contemporary poets that they are not alone in their political struggles, and that engaging in activism is as simple as attending a reading or as writing it down. As readers in a Trump world, Koch's inspiration and subject matter is all too familiar, but What Is Poetry? shows that the critique of culture has always been, and perhaps always will be, close to the heart of poetry.

These interviews are a comfort to contemporary poets that they are not alone in their political struggles, and that engaging in activism is as simple as attending a reading or as writing it down.

Part of what makes What Is Poetry? an enjoyable read is its inclusiveness and variety of artists. The New York poetry scene often evokes a few big names–Ginsberg, O'Hara, Williams–but Berrigan, like the Newsletter, has done a spectacular job of showcasing talent that is not just white and male. One of the most fascinating interviews in What Is Poetry? is a "snail mail" interview between Barbara Henning and Harryette Mullen. Mullen's brilliant approach to language is multi-faceted; the language she uses is always paired with intentional meaning, as when she says,

> Even a relentlessly language-centered quatrain like 'mutter patter simper blubber/ ... / mumbo-jumbo palaver gibber blunder" is intended to comment on the loss of indigenous languages of enslaved Africans, while its recurring sound patterns also suggest homophones of kinship terms mother father sister brother, thus setting up an analogy between loss of language and loss of kinship.

and

> In one quatrain, 'a strict sect's/ hystereotypist hypercorrects/ the next vexed hex/ erects its noppy text,' I allude to the discourse of the Christian Right and right-wing populists of the Republican party, while also recalling the speech of Dixiecrat George Wallace, who used to pronounce 'détente' as 'the taunt'.

She plays with language in the broad sense of words and diction, but also considers "southern dialect, black English, Spanish, and Spanglish" essential elements of language in her poetry. Writing and exploring poetry through the lens of many languages and dialects allows poets and readers to abolish the constraints of a sole language and meaning. Perspectives like Mullen's broadens what poetry accomplishes, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in its sound and cadence. The awareness of this delicate touch allows readers a heightened experience in reading Mullen's work, and blesses us with an intimate look at the intentions of a poet with words from her own mouth.

Anselm Berrigan

Perhaps the thing that What Is Poetry? does best is remind us of poetry's vast definition, which can be lost unless we hear directly from poets themselves in close proximity to one another. It is clear from this collection of interviews that poetry is simply what the poet decides it to be. Berrigan says in his introduction that "you won't find many people who speak on and for poetry, or anything else for that matter, in such high and ordinary terms. The ride is for anyone to take." What Is Poetry provides us access to the brilliance of The Poetry Project's writers and thinkers, and while these poets shine on their own, it is a true pleasure to see Berrigan's selection of poets speaking together on what makes poetry and community. He has curated a book that invites us, no matter our history, to submerge ourselves in an era and a community that is simultaneously mysterious and warmly welcoming.

Anselm Berrigan's books of poetry include Come In Alone (Wave), Primitive State (Edge), and Pregrets (Vagabond). A chapbook, Degrets, is forthcoming from Couch Press sometime soon. He is the poetry editor for The Brooklyn Rail, a former artistic director of The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church, and recently wrote five poems all titled "Jim Brodey".

Holly Rice is a creative writing M.F.A. candidate at The New School and the deputy editor of The Inquisitive Eater. She is the 2015 recipient of the Nova Scotia Talent Trust's RBC Emerging Artist Award and currently lives in Williamsburg.

3 Summers Gleaning Skimming Nilling

BY JEFF T. JOHNSON

3 Summers
Lisa Robertson
Coach House Books
Try it both ways plus others
For example first at random opening to any pages
Then orienting to titles hey these poems are long sweet
Then maybe also rereading but trying to find new pages
Until all have been read
Titles help with this
Then reading again in the typical manner
Front cover to back cover gee this looks familiar
But aren't we always gleaning and always also skimming
And aren't we also always nilling
Maybe and maybe also we are finishing or not finishing
The book too is always finishing
So does it matter in what order it is read
Though it does perhaps matter who reads the book
But it does not matter if someone says you have to read this
You will read it or not read it and you might read it nillingly
But this is not to suggest we should not write about books
That we should only read them or write them
And there are happily many or at least several writings on 3 Summers
Some of which are quite detailed
So you might want to read 3 Summers first not that anyone could spoil it
Or you might read it without reading it at all
And you might read it but remember nothing
Or remember only one title for example The Middle
Though perhaps you liked it quite a bit
And there was another called The Suit or with a suit
Or jacket no A Coat and it was for Stacy Doris who was a fine poet and teacher
And we imagine a good friend
Now there is anticipation of reading again
Desirous of the cover yellow pink and blue
And the feel of paper Coach House uses such nice paper
Probably because the Canadian arts are government funded
And people buy books in Canada
Which is not to say we in the US do not buy books
We buy a great deal but there is something about Canada
You can read it in their books like Lisa Robertson's 3 Summers
Which I hope you will read or read again I certainly will

So I write with the awareness that I don't need to reproduce what's already there, or what might appear elsewhere. I'm free to write something someone else might not write. And in that sense I really am writing alongside Lisa Robertson, who writes alongside others in a way no one else can.

Ralph Kolowe photo

I'm trying to write an approach to reading notes that attend a practice of poetic semi-absorption (or maybe semi-permeability). "I am writing alongside and toward," Andrea Quaid writes about her poetics of contemporary women's writing and the epic. This helps me think about the mode I am seeking, as does Lisa Robertson's notion of nilling, which I read as a drowsy tussle between readerly and writerly modes of textual encounter. There is a surrender to the spell of the text, and a meanwhile-resistance to its demands that can be acted out by skimming, gleaning, glazing over, staring at words, admiring the shape of a paragraph, reading backwards or out of sequence, reading beyond coherence and attention span, stopping mid-sentence, picking up something else, a book or banana or beer bottle. This is how nilling has blossomed in my mind and happily distracted my own reading practice. As an occasional writer of soft reviews, I imagine a resistance to the imperative of recommending and finding fault, of balancing praise and critique, but also a resistance or alternative to comprehensive consideration. After all, in many cases there are other reviews and essays out there that fine-comb the nuances of any given cultural object, and to the extent that they are available online, no write-up need stand alone (or shove others aside, for that matter).

I'm writing alongside a book, in this case Lisa Robertson's 3 Summers, but I'm also writing alongside other writings about Robertson's work, some of which I have or will read (you can read that read both ways). So I write with the awareness that I don't need to reproduce what's already there, or what might appear elsewhere. I'm free to write something someone else might not write. And in that sense I really am writing alongside Lisa Robertson, who writes alongside others in a way no one else can. Sometimes it seems like she can't or won't write the way she writes, that her nilling extends to her writing practice. 3 Summers takes me back before Cinema of the Present and R's Boat, recent volumes that don't captivate, astonish and delight me the way Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip, The Men, Debbie: An Epic, and Occasional Works and Seven Walks from the Office of Soft Architecture do. Maybe one day Cinema of the Present and R's Boat will captivate me, so I'll keep flirting with them in hopes that sparks will fly and maybe we'll set ourselves on fire. Or maybe have a real cool time together.

So, if you'll indulge me, I'll share a few observations as I reread 3 Summers. Imagine (if you really want to indulge me) that "I'm lying on the bed in the heat" of last summer or maybe it's just the steamy radiator blaze of winter heating up my mind of summer in anticipation of another broke-ass summer on the way, 3 Summers in hand, and "everything that isn't poetry bores me" too, but so does poetry, which is fine with me sometimes.

The first time I read Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip, I was astonished at the formal leaps between poems. It felt like reading several books at once, while firmly embraced by one book. 3 Summers is something like that, but also it's like a series of intertextual advances. Simple but suggestive titles ("The Seam," "Toxins," "On Form," "An Awning") echo language through the book, transform common language into non-discrete (and sometimes also delightfully indiscreet) utterance.

"The Middle" runs from pages 53-72 of a 120-page book, pretty much forming exactly the middle of the book. Does "On Form" mention this? Probably in its way ("you can see form take shape / at the coronal suture's first arcade / it's explaining it's appearing"). Better though is the way it thinks form as bodies, then cities through which our bodies, which are also cities, move, and meanwhile we have the book on our minds as we hold it with our bodies. So we can look at the words while we dream of bodies and cities in our bodies, getting off on all that form.

Between those two poems is "On Physical Real Being and What Happens Next" so let's leave off there. The form and subject matter are variable, braiding as is her wont textual strains, mashing historical materialism, libidinal economy and full-on desire, and including a dryly hilarious and delirious meditation on the life and doubtful suicide of Lucretius which intertexts with Marx, Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip, and David Markson's Reader's Block. "The I-speaker / on her silken rupture / spills into history." It is sensuous reading and it is sensuous, reading, a body read with a body as it is written with a body, all of us desirous of one another's attentions, awake as we are between bouts of sleep.

Jeff T. Johnson's (http://www.jefftjohnson.com/) writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in Fanzine, PEN America, Jacket2, Encyclopedia Vol. 3, and Tarpaulin Sky. He is the author of Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics (punctum books). He lives in Bedford–Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

Poet and essayist Lisa Robertson has held residencies at the California College of the Arts, Cambridge University; University of California, Berkeley; UC San Diego; and American University of Paris. Her books include 3 Summers, Cinema of the Present, Debbie: An Epic (nominated for the Governor General's Award in Canada), The Men, The Weather, R's Boat (poetry) and Occasional Works and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture(essays). Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip (Coach House) was named one of The New York Times 100 Notable Books of 2010, and was longlisted for the 2011 Warwick Prize for Writing. She currently lives in France.

Third Man Books is the Charm
An Interview with Press Editor Chet Weise

INTERVIEW BY JACKIE CLARK

Small Press editor Jackie Clark talks to Chet Weise, editor of Third Man Books. Third Man Books is a featured press at d.a.levy-palooza 4 this Sun. May 7 at Unnameable Books.

Located in Nashville, Tenn., Third Man Books is dedicated to publishing the best in poetry, fiction, SF/F, and nonfiction with the same diversity and aestheticism that have been the hallmarks of its partner company, Third Man Records. TMR & TMB: Where your turntable's not dead, and your page still turns.

Third Man Books is an offshoot of Third Man Records, Jack White's eponymous record label and storefront based in Nashville. Can you talk about your relationship to Third Man Records and where the idea for Third Man Books came from?

Third Man Books is located in the same building as the record label in Nashville. We share art and shipping departments, but are completely different companies. So, it's kind of like the religious concept of the trinity, except a duality. We're separate but somehow the same.

The first book published by Third Man Books is a pretty ambitious one: Language Lessons: Volume 1, which is a 321 page hardbound anthology of contemporary poetry that also includes several broadsides and has a musical component as well. Can you talk a little bit about how this book came to be? Can it be interpreted as a mission statement for Third Man Books? Were you hoping or wanting the eclectic anthology to set the tone for future Third Man Books?

Good god, what a first project. We came out swingin' for the fences, didn't we? Such a complicated anthology to put together: 300+ pages, a double LP, and 5 broadsides, and all encased in a custom, hand made box. I'm not sure if I could take on that kind of project now. It definitely came from the naivety and energy of being a newby. Language Lessons grew out of a reading series that I curated in Nashville called Poetry Sucks. After enough writers and musicians had performed, I decided an anthology was in order. Originally, I planned to do it like 95% punk rock, DIY projects that I've been a part of and charge it on my Visa card. Instead, Ben Swank from TMR approached me and said that Third Man wanted to expand Third Man Books (they had done two photo books) into a press. He wanted to try Language Lessons first. Funny thing is that when he approached me, it seemed almost like he expected no for an answer. I never could figure that out, except that Swank is a humble person. Of course I said YES. I had known Jack, Blackwell, and Swank from the days when our bands played together here and there on tour, loved what TMR was doing, and knew it would save my Visa card and closet space. Language Lessons succeeded and that lead to me going full time with TMB. For the record, I originally planned to call the anthology Poetry Sucks, but poet/friend CD Wright talked me out of it. Definitely a good decision. CD really helped me with that anthology in her understated, behind-the-scenes kind of way. I miss CD with everything I got. She was a guiding light, as in a lightning bolt. She parachuted out of plane once wearing my old rock n roll band The Immortal Lee County Killers' t-shirt. That's worth more than a million Pushcart nominations. It's pretty cool that TMB has become part of the language community in our small way. We've been admirers from the outskirts and now to be involved is exciting, empowering, and definitely humbling. What I'm trying to say is that having people like CD, editor Michael Wiegers, poet Adrian Matejka, and writer Jeff VanderMeer strolling through our hallways equates with Mick Jagger sitting in the tv room, Cherie Curie hosting Devil's Night, or Billy Gibbons walking through the building. I should include names here, too, like Janaka Stucky, Margo Price, Cat Flaps, The Kills, Kendra DeColo, and Sampson Starkweather. Because all these people have created amazing, beautiful things, and all these people have been involved on the ground – DIY style – making stuff happen in their garage first and then going from there. Having that kind of energy is more important now these days than ever.

Kiini Ibura Salaam writes speculative fiction that is dark, wounding, but confrontational and healing. They're the kind of stories that when the reader finishes, that quiet living room where they're sitting in with the tv muted feels different, alive, peculiar, as if the whole environment and self is re-evaluating or re-evaluated.

Judging from Language Lessons: Volume 1, Third Man Books obviously has a love for poetry. You guys have also published poetry collections by Janaka Stucky, Sampson Starkweather, and Kendra DeColo, as well as a collected works by Frank Stanford, a "legendary badass from Arkansas," according to NPR. Even though I am a poet myself I don't ask this question facetiously: Why poetry? What is it about these poetry books that caught the eye of Third Man Books? How do these collections (or do these collections) connect or dialogue with the current culture writ large?

All of here at TMR are fans of poetry. Poetry is music. Music is poetry. I mean that without an ounce of irony. I mean it literally. I have two people forever carved into my arm: John Lee Hooker and William Blake. One is about rhythm, the other about melody. Feel free to try and choose who's who!

Chet Weise

A little bit more expected than poetry, Third Man Books has also published some music-related texts, including Life is a Rip Off by John Olson (of the band Wolf Eyes), which is a collection of 12 months of daily record reviews ranging from death metal to gospel and Total Chaos: The Story of the Stooges / As Told by Iggy Pop by Jeff Gold. It seems like a natural extension of a record label to publish books about music. How did these collections come to you?

We began with poetry because we love it. We also began with poetry because, frankly, I'm a poet and am familiar with parts of the scene from reading, publishing, and attending stuff on my own accord. So, I was a fan of Starkweather, DeColo, Stanford, Wright before TMB began. We also started with poetry to distance ourselves from rock books. When we began almost three years ago, we wanted to publish everything that appealed to us. Starting with poetry definitely sent a signal that we would not be a rock book only press. I receive manuscripts for rock books daily. The first sentence always reads, "Since Third Man is a record label, we feel our book about such and such music person/band would be a great fit..." There is no shortage of those submissions. With that said, we waited almost two years before we did a rock book. No way are we going to say no to The Stooges (author Jeff Gold approached us) or John Olson of Wolf Eyes (Swank's idea to approach him).

Another anthology of poetry that Third Man Books has published is Acknowledge: An Anthology of Selected Poems from The Contributor. For those who don't know The Contributor is a street paper launch in Nashville in 2007 that is sold by people experiencing homelessness and poverty. The Contributor has always featured a poetry section that publishes the writing of their street vendors. This book is a selection of those poems. Third Man Books has pledged that all the proceeds from the anthology would be donated to The Contributor. Even more than charitable, which it is, it feels even more like a community building effort, or rather a way to lift up and acknowledge (as the title suggests) other aspects and organizations in your local community. Can you tell me about the process of putting this anthology together?

Like any other anthology, we looked through years of submissions to The Contributor and picked the poems that we felt had some lightning and fit together. It's a great book. One I feel proud about. There are different voices and style in there then one sees in a lot of poetry. Also, the reading we had for it were incredible. The poets took the stage and delivered their words with an honesty and vigor that shook everyone in the room. The fact the book was for a great cause is a bonus. First and foremost, it's a great book. I had been picking up The Contributor and reading the poetry section for years. When TMR manager Bonnie Bowden and co-worker Joshua Gillis came up with the idea of doing an anthology, my first thought was, good god, why didn't I think of that, it's been right there in front of me. TMR/TMB works like that in many ways. It's a mass of ideas and people moving through space looking for solidity. Acknowledge is a great, great book.

Can you talk about how Third Man Books and Third Man Records became involved with The Defenders of the Water School at Standing Rock, which was created in tandem with the No Dakota Pipeline movement? How important is it to you that Third Man Books participate in acts of social justice? Was it something that you consciously thought of when you were starting the press or was it more something that evolved over time?

Interesting question that fits with the previous. A person named April Rain contacted me out of the blue. She explained that Mní Wi hóni Nakí iži Owáyawa, the Defenders of the Water School, existed and lived separately from the camp in a fundraising respect. That they were looking for help to raise awareness and funds. And of course we wanted to help. Our Icky Trump shirts (someone from Trump's following used one of Jack's songs without permission, so Jack decided to answer) had done well with our crowd, so my first thought was that we could design and sell a t-shirt for them. It worked. The other idea we had to raise awareness was to post art, writing, and pictures of the school via https://thirdmanbooks.com/. We absolutely wanted to help put those words and images out there. I'm honored and flattered that they thought of us and that TMR/TMB had an opportunity to be on the right side of history. Of course, the effort went to shit when Trump took office. But like all struggles that spark so much energy, there's much good that will come from Standing Rock. We'll be hearing about those good things for years; those good things will be sprouting, flowering, thorning, coloring, protecting, preserving, beautifying for years and in places we'll never suspect. For instance, one of the immediate results in the real possibility that the Defenders of the Water School will become a permanent brick and mortar– teaching both traditional school subjects AND traditional Native American subjects. Mní Wi hóni, Water is Life.

Your latest publication is a collection of short stories entitled When the World Wounds by Kiini Ibura Salaam. How did this manuscript of stories come to you? Was it always Third Man Books ambition to also publish fiction at some point or did this manuscript persuade you?

I alluded to this earlier, but we do want to publish any and all language that we find beautiful and important. Kiini Ibura Salaam writes speculative fiction that is dark, wounding, but confrontational and healing. They're the kind of stories that when the reader finishes, that quiet living room where they're sitting in with the tv muted feels different, alive, peculiar, as if the whole environment and self is re-evaluating or re-evaluated. I love stories like that, poetry like that, songs like that. SF/F/Speculative Fiction/Magical Realism/Surreal Poetry/Mississippi Hill Country Blues/Wolf Eyes experimental music, it all does this. I've found at times that when I use these kinds of references and/or descriptions that I open myself up to being called a hipster. Or that TMB is "hipsterfying" literature. Maybe so, but when someone watches Kiini Ibura Salaam's video for The Taming with Wolf Eyes as the soundtrack, something happens. There's a synthesis between something ancient and something now. And it's deep. Real deep. As in someone probably has to make an ironic joke after watching it to achieve levity again. I like that. It's transformative, and yes, it's HIP AS FUCK.

At lastly, what sort of publication can we expect in the future from Third Man Books? Any projects you are working on now that you'd like to share?
We'll be publishing two children's books within a year.

Jackie Clark is the author of Aphoria (Brooklyn Arts Press), and most recently Sympathetic Nervous System (Bloof Books). She is the editor of Song of the Week for Coldfront Magazine and can be found online at https://nohelpforthat.com/.

Chet Weise's poetry and fiction has appeared or been anthologized in publications such as Copper Nickel, Bayou, Poems & Plays, and the Rough Trade 40th Anniversary Journal. A musician too, Weise performed and recorded with groups The Quadrajets and Immortal Lee County Killers. He was banned from Canada for 2008. Weise currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and is the editor for Third Man Books.

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editor/publisher
David A. Kirschenbaum
editor@boogcity.com
art editor
Jeffrey Cyphers Wright
art@boogcity.com
film editor Joel Schlemowitz
film@boogcity.com
libraries editor
Lynne DeSilva-Johnson
libraries@boogcity.com
music editor
R. Brookes McKenzie
music@boogcity.com
poetry editor Buck Downs
poetry@boogcity.com
printed matter editor
Jaclyn Lovell
printedmatter@boogcity.com
small press editor
Jackie Clark
smallpress@boogcity.com
counsel Ian S. Wilder
counsel@boogcity.com

BOOG CITY
3062 Brower Ave.
Oceanside, N.Y. 11572
212-842-BOOG (2664) • @boogcity
http://www.boogcity.com

Boog City presents

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celebrating three renegade presses

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Sun. May 7, 2017, 12:00 p.m., $5 suggested

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New Orleans

White Pine Press
http://www.whitepine.org/
Buffalo, N.Y.

in the backyard at

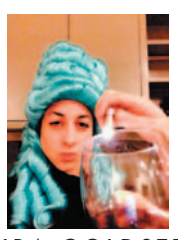
Unnameable Books

600 Vanderbilt Ave., Prospect Heights, Brooklyn

THIRD MAN BOOKS

Trembling Pillow PRESS

ANA BOŽIČEVIĆ (MUSIC)



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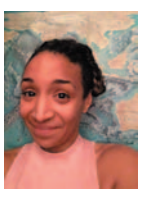

MYA SPALTER

TRACEY MCTAGUE

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES

SAMPSON STARKWEATHER

KRISTIN SANDERS

BELLE SKINNER (MUSIC)

PAIGE TAGGART

2, 3 to Grand Army Plaza, C to Clinton-Washington aves, Q to 7th Ave.
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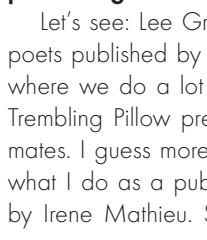
The Power of the Poet New Orleans, Trembling Pillow Press, and Megan Burns



INTERVIEW BY JACKIE CLARK

Small Press editor Jackie Clark talks to Megan Burns, editor of Trembling Pillow Press. Trembling Pillow is a featured press in the d.a.levy-palooza event this Sun. May 7 at Unnameable Books.

Boog City: Trembling Pillow Press was founded in 2006. I wonder about what life was like for you in 2006, what your life as a writer was like. Where did the impetus to start a small press come from?

Megan Burns: In 2006, New Orleans was still completely decimated by post-Katrina devastation. Trembling Pillow had actually been around publishing broadsides and chapbooks prior to 2006, but in 2006, the press started to venture into publishing perfect bound poetry collections. Bill Lavender from Lavender Ink had a manuscript called I of the Storm, and we used that manuscript to begin publishing books. I think there was a feeling that New Orleanians needed to tell their own story as a lot of work started coming out from writers who were not from here and whose lives were not directly impacted by Katrina, but who felt they could use the event as a way to create some art about suffering.

Trembling Pillow is also such a unique name for a press. I think it's a combination of both the present participle of "trembling" coupled with the inanimate object of "pillow." Can you tell us where the name came from?

Nope. My former partner with the press named it that, and once I took over as the sole publisher, I just kept the name for continuity.

I'd imagine that running a small press in 2006 is very different than running a press in 2017. 2006 is like a lifetime ago in terms of the proliferation of smartphones and social-media. What changes have you experienced in the small press universe in your time as an editor? How much has Trembling Pillow had to change or adapt to outside influences like online publishing and social media?

The biggest change the press has been through has been the movement from it being a partnership run press to when I started running it alone. I think in 2007 or so, I had HR Hegnauer, who I knew from Naropa, build the press' website. I manage all the social media for the press' FB, Twitter and Instagram accounts. I think the press has slipped into social media as easily as we all have. It's just a way of life now. Submittable is a game changer in online submission tracking and ease of communicating between various readers and editors. I should probably do more marketing, but mostly I'm a single mom with three kids who works full time as well, so there's only so much online work one can do promotional-wise.

How much does New Orleans, Trembling Pillow's hometown, influence the landscape of the press? Your website states that you are "committed to devoting a portion of our energies and attention to New Orleans writers and New Orleans texts every year as we continue to foster and nurture our local community in coordination with local poetry series and presses." Can you talk a little about some specific New Orleans writers that Trembling Pillow has given a home? Can you also maybe talk about how Trembling Pillow interacts with the city in other ways that aren't just publishing books?

Let's see: Lee Grue, John Sinclair, Michael Ford, Gina Ferrara, Bill Lavender, Brett Evans, and Kristin Sanders are all New Orleans poets published by the press, although some have since moved on to other homes. I run a reading series in the city called Blood Jet where we do a lot of book launches for the press. I also co-direct the New Orleans Poetry Festival where we feature a reading of Trembling Pillow press poets both local and national. That's a nice event because authors from all over can meet their sibling press mates. I guess more accurately you could say that I interact with the city in various capacities in relation to the writing community and what I do as a publisher is also woven into that fabric. For instance, last night at Blood Jet I read from our latest collection orogeny by Irene Mathieu. So, the poetry is getting out there via the press or via me standing in front of a room introducing it to listeners.

I think there was a feeling that New Orleanians needed to tell their own story as a lot of work started coming out from writers who were not from here and whose lives were not directly impacted by Katrina, but who felt they could use the event as a way to create some art about suffering.

Your website also states that most of the books you've published have been solicited. But Trembling Pillow also accepts submission year around for a modest reading fee. I wonder if there is a book in particular that stands out to you that you got through having a year round open reading period, a book that stands out to you as being cosmically meant for Trembling Pillow that you likely would never have known about if you weren't open to submissions.

The only collaborative book we've published FILL: A Collection by Kate Schapira and Erika Howsare came through as a submission. Also, Lisa Donovan's first collection Red of Split Water: a burial rite was a submission. I read it, and actually contacted her saying we didn't do color images in books, but I still wanted it. Then when I started laying it out– it's just such a stunning text that I made the decision to make it full color. It's our only full color text. I recently accepted Lauren Ireland's Feelings through a submission. I just read in all in one sitting and was blown away.

In addition to having open submissions year round, you also have the Bob Kaufman Book Prize. Is it a yearly contest? How do you determine who you will ask to judge the contest? Why is the contest named after Beat poet Bob Kaufman? Is the namesake solely because he was a New Orleans born poet or is the connection a little deeper than that?

The Bob Kaufman prize was a way to generate funds for the press and it has consistently brought in strong manuscripts from poets who might not have been with the press except for the book prize. It was an annual book prize that included a judge I selected who I thought would just bring fresh eyes to the press. A significant portion of the submission money goes to the judge who reads every manuscript, so it was also a way to provide money for poets who basically are doing the job of being a poet. I liked that aspect of the contest. I actually did not do a 2017 Book Prize because I have been thinking about the best way to continue the press in the future and if book prizes are still the way to go.

Megan Burns

Any predictions about what next 10 years might have in store for Trembling Pillow Press? What do you think the future holds for small presses?

The future is pretty bleak for printing because the reality is that people don't buy books, and if people aren't buying books then it's hard to make money to make them. Everyone wants to be published, but hardly anyone buys the books. I think the book still holds a place of prestige in the poetry world as though the book provides some legitimacy, but that construct is flimsy as well. It just makes more environmental sense to not print when digital access is readily available. There's of course an art and beauty to printing an object but this press' goal has always been to get the poetry out into the world. Every year I publish first books for poets, and I want that to propel them into making more poems, reading in more places and to sharing their work. It's a poor business model, but I want to keep the world safe for poetry, and our rituals in poetry of the object of the book and the power of the poet reading from this evidence of work they have manifested still matters...so I keep making them.

Megan Burns is the publisher at Trembling Pillow Press (http://www.tremblingpillowpress.com/). She also hosts the Blood Jet Poetry Reading Series in New Orleans and is the co-founder of the New Orleans Poetry Festival (http://nolapoetry.com/). She has been most recently published in Jacket Magazine, Callaloo, New Laurel Review, Trickhouse, and the Big Bridge New Orleans Anthology. Her poetry and prose reviews have been published in Tarpaulin Sky, Gently Read Lit, Big Bridge, and Rain Taxi. She has three books Memorial + Sight Lines, Sound and Basin and Commitment, published by Lavender Ink. She has two recent chapbooks: Dollbaby (Horse Less Press) and i always wanted to start over (Nous-Zot Press). Horse Less Press released her Twin Peaks chap, Sleepwalk With Me, last year. Her forthcoming fourth collection is titled Basic Programming.

Jackie Clark is the author of Aphoria (Brooklyn Arts Press), and most recently Sympathetic Nervous System (Bloof Books). She is the editor of Song of the Week for Coldfront Magazine and can be found online at https://nohelpforthat.com/.

Developed from a Need that Wasn't Filled at the Time
An Interview with White Pine Press

INTERVIEW BY JACKIE CLARK

Small Press editor Jackie Clark talks to Dennis Maloney, editor of White Pine Press. White Pine Press is a featured press of the d.a.levy-palooza event this May at Unnameable Books.

White Pine Press was started in 1973. That means 2017 is the press's 44th year. When White Pine Press began did you have any idea it would be around for so long? I wonder what life was like for you then.

In 1973, I had just graduated college after a semester of independent study in Kyoto, Japan. While I was there I met Cid Corman and Edith Shiffert, American poets living in there and I was a beginning poet and translator. I thought it would interesting to publish some of their work and since I was reading a lot of work in translation and beginning to translate myself that publishing translations would be a good idea. I wasn't sure how to get started and there were far fewer literary publisher's then. I wrote to some other publishers whose work I admired as a poet and they gave me some suggestions. I started with postcards and chapbooks as that was all I could afford to do. We did most of the work on an IBM Selectric typewriter.

According to your website, White Pine Press is committed to publishing literature from around the world. Can you talk a little about why it was so important that White Pine Press publish international writing? Did you feel there was a lack from international writing being published domestically when the press began, or was it a specialized interest of yours? Or both?

When I was a freshman in college I heard Robert Bly read. This was during the Vietnam War and he was popular for "Teeth Mother Naked at Last" and other antiwar poetry. I heard that poetry but also heard Antonio Machado and Pablo Neruda. Before that I had no interest in poetry. In looking back that was a major turning point in my life and Bly is the reason I became a poet, translator, and publisher. Once I started reading poetry and poetry in translation I realized how little poetry from other cultures was being published in the US. Bly's sixties' Press which published translations of major European and South American poets was an inspiration as was Unicorn Press which had an extensive list of translations from all over the world. Translation has been and remains a main concern of White Pine Press. Usually half our list each year is works of translation and we have now published work from over thirty languages. While the situation for translated literature has improved, with many more presses publishing works of translation given the current mindset of our government we need all that we can get.

White Pine Press publishes several different kinds of series. I was wondering if you could say a little bit about the history and impetus behind each one.

Each series developed from a need that we didn't see being filled at the time. The earliest is our Secret Weavers Series of work by Latin American Women. Marjorie Agosin, one of our authors, brought to my attention that most of the great male writers of Latin America had been published but not many of the women writers. So we set the task of introducing these writers with a series of anthologies and individual volumes.

I started with postcards and chapbooks as that was all I could afford to do. We did most of the work on an IBM Selectric typewriter.
—Dennis Maloney

Our Korean Voices Series is the result of a long term partnership with LTI Korea and other foundations in Korea to bring that work to the attention of the English Speaking audience. Both of these series have over twenty volumes in print. Other series are similar.

In the case of the Marie Alexander Series, the series was started by Robert Alexander at New Rivers Press and they published the first four volumes. When Bill Trusdale, the founder, passed away the press went into hiatus and we took over the series. While the series focuses on prose poetry it has been a home for manuscripts that don't fit into a particular category and have had difficulty finding home.

The White Pine Press Poetry Prize is in its 23rd year. Who have some of the judges been over the years? How do you decide who to ask to judge the contest from year to year?

We are proud of our poetry prize series, in that we have discovered a number of new voices. We have been very particular to have a wide range of judges over the two decades plus. We alternate between male and female judges and have paid attention to the cultural diversity of the judges. We have also utilized poets of established reputation but also have worked with mid-career poets who are judging a competition for the first time.

White Pine Press is located in Buffalo, NY. How has your location influenced the press? Are there ways that White Pine Press interacts with the community aside from just publishing? Do you have any relationship with the Poetics program at the University at Buffalo?

We are located in Buffalo, NY, largely as that is where I am from and live. We have never been connected with a college or university and have always been an independent voice. We have interacted with the literary community for decades via Just Buffalo Literary Center and other local community organizations to bring our writers to the community to read and give workshops. When Robert Creeley was head of the Poetics Program at the University of Buffalo he brought in many writers and made sure they did something in the community but since those days there has been little interaction between, as they say, town and gown.

While we have published a number of local authors our focus is much more national and global in nature.

I'm sure this will be a hard question to answer, but can you list a couple of White Pine Press books that have really stood out to you over the years, or dare I say your "favorites"? What is it about these books that makes them such a good fit for White Pine Press?

That question is of course like asking who is your favorite child or in my case, these days, grandchild. I will mention several books for me, which are particularly of interest, and ones that I put a lot of work into. When I read Robert Bly's New and Selected Poems released a couple of years ago I realized what wasn't in it of his work and decided to collect a lot of his toes that weren't included there. We published Like the New Moon I Will Live My Life, which collects over 150 poems that first appeared in chapbooks and other small books of his work. In the past year we have also published Luminous Spaces: Selected Poems and Journal of Olav Hauge, the Norwegian poet. I met him in 1990 when we visited Norway and stayed at his house. Years later his widow asked us to put together a new volume of his work in English. The volume has over 300 of his poems, including over 100 translate for the first time, and excerpts from his journals. Lastly I would point out Lessons: Selected Poems of Joel Oppenheimer, a poet who is associated with the West Village and wrote a column for many years for the Village Voice. He was a personal friend and we published several volumes of his work in the eighties. He passed away in the late eighties and all of his work was out of print. I am keen to reintroduce his work to a new audience of readers.

'When I was a freshman in college I heard Robert Bly read. This was during the Vietnam War and he was popular for "Teeth Mother Naked at Last" and other antiwar poetry. I heard that poetry but also heard Antonio Machado and Pablo Neruda. Before that I had no interest in poetry.'

What are you looking forward in 2017, either specifically in regard to White Pine Press or otherwise? The political climate in the US is so fraught, it's good to have things to look forward to!

As the book says, "it is the best of times and the worst of times." It is of course heartening to see so much good work needing to be published and to discover new voices. For example, I was invited to Holland two years ago for a poetry publisher's tour of Holland and Flanders to meet poets and Dutch publishers. One of the poets I discovered and decided to translate and publish, Ester Naomi Perquin, was just made Poet Laureate of Holland.

On the other hand our National Endowment for the Arts is under renewed attack by the current President. While the NEA has been subject to attack before, in its 50 year history, this is the first time a president has suggested its elimination. It is hard to imagine that this crucial support for the arts in this country would be eliminated. As a non-profit literary publisher we are always fighting hand to mouth to publish the work that we do. The support from the NEA allows us to leverage several other sources of funding to publish the work of the essential voices.

Jackie Clark is the author of Aphoria (Brooklyn Arts Press), and most recently Sympathetic Nervous System (Bloof Books). She is the editor of Song of the Week for Coldfront Magazine and can be found online at https://nohelpforthat.com/.

Dennis Maloney is a poet and translator. A number of volumes of his own poetry have been published including The Map Is Not the Territory: Poems & Translations and Just Enough. His book Listening to Tao Yuan Ming was recently published by Glass Lyre Press. A bilingual German/English, Empty Cup will appear in Germany in 2017. His works of translation include: The Stones of Chile by Pablo Neruda, The Landscape of Castile by Antonio Machado, Between the Floating Mist:Poems of Ryokan, and The Poet and the Sea by Juan Ramon Jimenez. He is also the editor and publisher of the widely respected White Pine Press in Buffalo, NY. and divides his time between Buffalo, N.Y. and Big Sur, Calif.

Kate Colby
Providence, R.I.

View

I'm the would-be sort

who throws up windows

to welcome morning,

but at 4:45 the crows

get going in gray light

weakening around

the shades. The chain-

link city rattles its chains.

Because the counter-

weights are broken, I

prop it open with a crowbar.

Pete Spence
Melbourne, Australia

Poem Starring a Hat, for Hamish Danks Brown

I can't be too casusal
rollerskating through
an evening that needs
drastic mending of a tear
that deflects so much strarlight

I've stolen Hamish's hat
as a temporary fix-it
although it looks a little overdone
for tonight I think it shines

tomorrow night after some
expert repair I'll deliver
Hamish his hat on rollerskates

Adam Tedesco
Albany, N.Y.

[FROM] Bone Matrix

Mosquitos speed on, fuckheads come
into new bodies, wormed through cardinals
sins slapping dicks in a field of breeze blown
rape leaves get born again in a beggars skull
Who's gotten higher than me
and not blown their own mind
Kurt Cobain's a weatherman waiting
for his medal in a Texas blizzard
I take the news and break light
rob the sky of every gold sound
now say how you see past
the shadow of hammers
I am the son of a waterbear
a tardigrade swimming
in the last drop of daddy's come
who never saw the light of day

Alexandra Mattraw
Oakland, Calif.

Chronic

Upstart the body
talking back to itself.

Thunder wet pinewood.
Rain needles clink tin.

I as hinge
washing recurrence :

Dirt clings ground
so smoke reaps sky.

Break I who upstarts
fear, sky or seer

electric through greens.
To know breath branches

outside. To know not
knowing : light foreshadows

cumulous, awning's hidden
amen a desire.

Even hair when I look
is not my own.

Here is honesty :
a pine doesn't reason.

a sapling bending
only bends.

Blair Ewing
Lutherville, Md.

A Brief Conversation with a few of my Forefathers

I stand here on this earth,
perched atop the shoulders of your victories
and your sins. I know the hollow, howling sound
of white men hating, there is no dearth
of others to be hated, but first
dark-naming songs and chants shall resound
before the others all get beaten down
and gassed and broken and jailed.
I read your diaries, your journals
so I know your souls: if you
gave any ground, it was because you failed.
and as for me, your worthless sword,
I know how you hate that I get the last word.

Poetry Bios

Kate Colby (http://queenmobs.com/2015/05/kate-colbys-i-mean/) is author of seven books of poetry, including I Mean (Ugly Duckling Presse) and The Arrangements, forthcoming from Four Way Books. **Blair Ewing** (http://www.oysterboyreview.org/issue/09/KaufmanD-Word.html) is a poet, editor, and activist living north of Baltimore. Poems have recently in Poetry Salzburg Review, Abbey, and Passager. **Alexandra Mattraw** (https://dulcetshop.myshopify.com/products/flood-psalm-alexandra-mattraw) is an Oakland poet whose full-length book of poems, small siren, is forthcoming from The Cultural Society in 2018. Her poems and criticism have also appeared in The Poetry Project, American Letters and Commentary, Fourteen Hills, and elsewhere. **Pete Spence** (http://www.redfoxpress.com/dada-spence.html) is a filmmaker and visual artist living in Melbourne, Australia. **Adam Tedesco** (https://albanypoets.com/2015/10/three-poems-adam-tedesco/) is a founding editor of REALITY BEACH, a journal of new poetics based in Albany and Manhattan. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Funhouse, Fanzine, Fence, and elsewhere.

Music Now, In Depth and In Brief

ALL REVIEWS BY R. BROOKES MCKENZIE

IN DEPTH:

Rooster, Baby on The J (EP)

https://mimii.bandcamp.com/album/rooster-baby-on-the-j

A sunny, nuanced look at relationships and living in the city. The production (by Dan Ricker) is excellent throughout, with a sparkling shimmer to the guitars and subtle percussive touches that really make it stand out among the crop of DIY releases. I particularly love the non-musical elements like the sound of the subway on "Baby on the J" - in any other hands this would be almost unbearably cheesy, but the fact that the harmonics of the train sounds (the "ding" of doors closing in the beginning, the brakes screeching at the bridge, the "whoosh" of the train arriving at the end) blend seamlessly with the chords makes it really cool. Mimi's voice is strong as always, ranging from a high pitched squeak to a low growl as needed to emphasize her lyrics and bring out her emotions.

"Joni Don't Go" is slightly country-tinged ode to her muse, filled with lyrical references to Mitchell's songs "and I was dancing with the ladies of the canyon / and sleeping next to Blue". The arrangement keeps it interesting with touches of slide guitar, piano and constant rhythmic shifts.

On "Baby on the J" I like the way she shows how politics and even empathy can take a back seat to personal happiness, not because New Yorkers don't care but because sometimes you just can't: "the world is dying but I still got a home" "Hold on, what's the delay now / by God, it's already so late / somebody jumped on the tracks again / why couldn't suicide just wait! / Gotta keep some sanity, living in this madness / don't you see the beauty in all of this sadness / every time I cross the bridge, I think that I might die / I'm so happy in his arms / he makes me feel alive!" At points it sounds almost like the Mamas and the Papas with the subtle descants behind the hard-driving California rock.

But the real centerpiece of the record is the masterful 'Fucking' Bullshit.' I've heard her do this song numerous times live and I was afraid the recording wouldn't do it justice, but Mimi and co deliver in spades.

But the real centerpiece of the record is the masterful "Fucking' Bullshit". I've heard her do this song numerous times live and I was afraid the recording wouldn't do it justice, but Mimi and co deliver in spades. It's a slow burning denunciation of all the things in the world that are fucked up, from sexist men to corporations making cheap clothes ("a child made it and for you it's the right price") to health care ("i can't go to the doctor because I got no money / the state of this country shouldn't be so funny") to empty patriotism ("they say we're free but I feel like a slave") to gun control "guns guns guns, everybody needs one / without a gun it just wouldn't be any fun / I've got mine and you've got yours / everybody's got one so let's go to war") to capitalism ("Bobby is dead, Dylan's high on religion / you've got a voice but you're choking on no opinion / everywhere I turn is hunger and greed / the West success-obsessed, possessed by a distortion of need") to the music industry ("music isn't music anymore it's just a kick in the ass out the door when you don't look like a whore / fill another need for a record company / sign on the dotted line, be a part of the machine") all over a rollicking, hard-driving tune that ebbs and flows but builds to a powerful climax on the last verse. This is really strong writing, singing, playing and production. Recommended if you like: country rock with strong opinions. Rosanne Cash, Joni Mitchell, and Patti Smith.

Ray Brown, Live at Whelan's: DEADLY CRAIC

https://raybrown.bandcamp.com/album/live-at-whelans-deadly-craic

Recorded live at Whelan's club in Dublin, Ireland, last fall, Deadly Craic is going to go down in history as one of the great live Antifolk records of all time. It reminds me of Live at Carnegie Hall (1973) by Bill Withers - there's a smooth, soulful, relaxed feeling to it, with great players at the top of their game and fantastic arrangements showcasing the masterful songwriting of Ray Brown. The slide guitar by Chris Barry and bass playing by Myles Manley are particularly stellar, as are the various contributions (vocals, keyboards, percussion) by Cal Folger Day, who also arranged the tunes. Cal's backing vocals in particular are like a master class in subtlety, providing the perfect amount of emphasis to Ray's cool delivery, like underlining in pencil instead of using a bright neon highlighter.

Recorded live at Whelan's club in Dublin, Ireland, last fall, Deadly Craic is going to go down in history as one of the great live Antifolk records of all time.

"Goodbye Catweazle" starts off the record with a funky rhythm guitar by Ray and swooping slide over it. The sparse bassline fits in perfectly and the maracas complete the sound. Then you listen to the lyrics and realize this is a brilliant song. It tells the story of a night Ray tried to make a move on someone but "Bernard King cock-blocked me / and I took off down the stairs". As usual for a Ray Brown song, it is hilarious and moving by turns: "Oh I wrote this song / huffing butyl nitrate / Yeah, look it up" contrasts with "there's a longing deep inside of you / there's a lonely man right here in plain view / there's an empty bed at [Ray's real address]". My favorite has to be "Goodbye, farewell, so long, fuck you, suck my dick / you delusional orangutang" which is one of the funniest slow burns I've ever heard, in the casual way it builds up from friendly and polite to actively hostile.

"Vicious Queens" is another stand out track, with multiple low-key harmonies and a nice organ drone in the background. It's laid back with a soulful groove and like many of Ray's songs, tells a shaggy-dog tale in an engaging, amusing manner about how he wanted to hang out with his friends so he "headed over to Sidewalk in Exile" which was held at A Gathering of the Tribes about six or so years ago. The song drops Catweazle-era antifolk names left and right like Blueberry Season and "BK" (presumably Bernard King again). "Late at night when you're sipping tea / if the subject ever turns to me / please don't be vicious / please don't be vicious / please don't be vicious... you vicious queens".

"Garage Apartment" features shimmering guitar riffs over a sparse bass line and gentle maracas/shakers. The ending of this song perfectly encapsulates the two sides of Ray Brown's personality as displayed in his songwriting: the rough side ("there's an old computer / that I watch brutal porn on") with the sweet/sad/longing side ("while sending love letters / out to the world"), and when Cal and the deep-voiced dudes (either David Blaney (drums) or Myles, who per the credits, also sang backup) sing "out... to... the... world" in syncopation with Ray's' "love letters", it's stunningly beautiful.

"Vote Allan For Prom King" has a classy bossanova swing with a shimmery liquid lead guitar and the low haze of the organ hanging like weed smoke over drums like fingersnaps in a speakeasy. Ray sounds so chill and relaxed throughout the record, perfectly in control of his sound, and his low-key vocals fit perfectly over the smooth as silk backing. The band is also very tight, and the whole thing swings like the 1960s and turns on a dime. The way these lyrics are delivered is just stellar: "They raided *el barrio*, they raided the bar / Maced everybody, oh they got me in my car / Religion and politics, money and drugs / Mayor and buddha, the police and their guns."

Overall I found this album a highly enjoyable experience. I do wish it wasn't only available as one giant file of the whole concert on Bandcamp, but I chopped it up into songs and cut out some excess crowd banter on my computer. If you're computer-savvy it's pretty easy, and it's worth the effort. Recommended if you like: Steely Dan, seventies' Paul Simon, antifolk in-jokes

IN BRIEF:

A Deer A Horse, Backswimmer (EP)

https://adeerahorse.bandcamp.com/album/backswimmer-ep

Dark, sludgy, heavy, powerful. Rebecca Satellite's voice reminds me of Grace Slick fronting Black Sabbath - her commanding presence is what drives this strong second EP. The band is also very tight and can turn on a dime. Reminds me also of slint's spiderland, with high harmonics ringing out over a bed of grungy low tones. The production is excellent, with the vocals mixed just right to stand out over the background but still fit into a compelling whole. The lyrics are interesting but obscure. They don't really tell a story, per se, but they are extremely quotable. "When she's good she's good but when she's bad it's whoa" and "I've outsourced / the bad thoughts / they're overseas doing well / I checked out / direct route / this only leads to hell, it only leads to hell" from "Bad Thoughts, "I drink heavily responsibly / I sink in the statue sea / I know you're a dead man / I thought it was deadpan" from "Statue Sea" are some samples. Overall this EP has featured heavily on my recent playlists and I look forward to ADAH's full length album if one ever comes. They also recently played SXSW and then toured the East Coast. Here's to good things for this excellent group that has been putting in their dues for quite a while now. Recommended if you like: slint, Jefferson Airplane, Heart, heavy muscular metal-tinged rock with a strong female lead.

Pinc Louds, Pinc Louds (EP)

https://pinclouds.bandcamp.com/album/pinc-louds-ep

First things first: Pinc Louds are a fantastic live band. The frontman (Federico Ausbury of Flying Dodo Society) who wears women's caftans and a black pageboy wig and goes by the name of Claudi, speaks in a high-pitched voice like a manic chipmunk and her energy is positively infectious, the bass player wears a bizarre two dimensional teddy bear head, and the whole thing feels like an underground Berlin cabaret circa 1920. I have always had a good time at their shows and their devoted following loves to dance. That said, I found this EP slightly disappointing. While Claudi's vocals are as exquisitely supple as ever, sliding up and down the scale from a sweet high tone to a low growl at the drop of a hat, and the band swings along like a house on fire, but the lyrics are hard to decipher, due to both the way she sings and the way the album is produced. When I looked them up they are actually pretty good, but I wish I didn't have to research it. Pinc Louds is so tight as a band, and the music and the singing are really excellent, but with a little less of an obscurantist-meets-cutesy approach they could be truly spectacular. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy wackiness as much as the next TMBG and Weird Al fan, but there comes a point when it crosses a line from being fun to being mildly annoying. Recommended if you like: sixties doo-wop, wackiness

20 Minute Loop, Songs Praising the Mutant Race (LP)

https://20minuteloop.bandcamp.com/album/songs-praising-the-mutant-race

20 Minute Loop is the first band I ever bought music from on Bandcamp. They've actually been around since 1996, but I only discovered them in 2008. They are from San Francisco and by the time I discovered them had quit touring and releasing new material. But recently they came back with a collection of remastered selections from prior albums ("Swan Songs Are Long"). This latest album consists of "unplugged" versions of songs from prior albums, along with one new song ("Giftgas") and an underwhelming, anemic cover ("Never My Love"). Their signature sound of male and female vocals (by songwriters Greg Giles and Kelly Atkins, respectively) intertwined over complex, rhythmically and harmonically challenging backgrounds is unchanged. And the new song proves they've still got it, being a chilling tale of the Holocaust ("giftgas" is a literal translation of the German word for the toxic gas used in the concentration camps) delivered with their usual stunning aplomb and stately elegance, while the lyrics are sad and frightening in turns. But overall this record is for completists only. I hope they will be able to record a whole album of new material instead of just rehashing their old catalog. Recommended if you like: PJ Harvey, The Pixies

Mourning the Morbid
A Eulogy from the Morbid Anatomy Museum's Film Programmer in Residence

April 26, 2014 was the occasion of the first event held of the Morbid Anatomy Museum; a book release party for the Morbid Anatomy Anthology, celebrated with an exquisitely gruesome cake in the form of the open-chested Anatomical Venus. It is something of a bittersweet anniversary this time, with the Museum having abruptly shut its doors at the end of last year, to the distress of the Museum's many devotees.

The Morbid Anatomy Museum, a black citadel – its name emblazoned in stark white above the upper story windows, in lettering resembling that of a Victorian calling card – seemed to have been conjured out of nowhere, among its environs of auto body repair shops and light industry in Gowanus, Brooklyn. Its presence seemed as inexplicable as the monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey, as if it landed there from some other dimension, or perhaps had not come from above but had arrived via exhumation, a subterranean crypt that had risen from below much as natural disasters in the form of floods or mudslides have caused caskets to rise up from their underground graves. To walk along the dusty gray street and look up to see the ominous black building seemed an encounter uncanny as the vision of Salome in Gustave Moreau's painting, The Apparition, pointing toward the radiant, disembodied head of John the Baptist, floating above, crimson blood dripping from his severed neck. The Museum's presence also suggested the 1960s B-movie where the dank, creepy, old boarded-up mansion located incongruously in the midst of some pastel-colored California suburb attracts the attention a group of eager fresh-faced teenagers: "I didn't know they'd opened a wax museum here." "Are you scared? Let's go have a look!"

Whenever possible the works I programed there were shown on 16mm film rather than in digital form, in keeping with the Museum's affinity for the tactile object – almost all of the objects in the Library were there to be touched and handled – and the rarified experience of an encounter with analog media.

Entering the Museum was to discover a haven for the curious and unusual, its gruesome preoccupations with the death never those of tacky horror-house chills, but an intellectual and aesthetically concerned mediation on the macabre. Workshops on Victorian hair memorial art would be offered on weekends. Exhibits upstairs with surveys of antique taxidermy and the contents of a 19th Century German Panopticon were accompanied by carefully composed museum guides. Lectures on funerary practices in the non-Western world, the plague in the time of Boccaccio, the lurid nightlife in Nazi-occupied Paris, the underground economy of forbidden jazz and rock music records cut onto discarded x-rays in the Soviet Union, frescoes of a mischief-making devil tempting a saintly nun serving as guidance in convent in Rome, were presented in the basement lecture hall, with penetrating question and answer sessions from the Morbid Anatomy's attendees. The Museum's magic was its ability to serve as place of convergence for those nonconforming individuals seeking out the esoteric knowledge and experiences it offered in abundance. The parties brought out this energy of idiosyncratic solidarity, especially the Krampus-themed holiday party with its demonic-costumed attendees vying for a contest prize. A revelry of a particular type: the dispelling of the solitude of the individual whose tastes seemed too weird for the everyday world, the Museum acting as a portal into an alternate looking-glass world where the connoisseurs of the strange and uncanny were no longer confined to a quirky subculture. A gothic Narnia contained within the imposing black wardrobe on the corner of 3rd Avenue and 7th Street in Gowanus, Brooklyn.

It had begun long before as Joanna Ebenstein's Morbid Anatomy blog, then taking root at the Observatory in Gowanus, Brooklyn, before opening as the Museum. It spawned an anthology of essays and a book on the Anatomical Venus in addition to its own uncanny physical presence.

After two and a half years haunting the corner of Third Avenue and Seventh Street in Gowanus the Morbid Anatomy Museum closed in December of last year. For a period of about a year and a half I had been the Museum's Resident Film Programmer and Arcane Media Specialist, arranging screenings there more or less once a month. As a sort of prelude to this, I had participated with Bradley Eros and Lary Seven in a presentation by Arcane Project, using magic lantern slides and other analog media in a layered, multiple projection spectacle held down in the Museum's basement lecture hall. Whenever possible the works I programed there were shown on 16mm film rather than in digital form, in keeping with the Museum's affinity for the tactile object–almost all of the objects in the Library were there to be touched and handled–and the rarified experience of an encounter with analog media.

The programs ranged from works of dark, gothic atmosphere in the richly shadowed world of black-and-white cinema in the pre-Code era: Svengali (1931), White Zombie (1932), and Rasputin and the Empress (1932), to those of contemporary filmmakers Alice Cohen, Katherine Bauer, MM Serra, and Madeline Schwartzman, whose works each found distinct ways of touching upon themes related to the Museum: Cohen's cutout animation with its eye for shuffling together an array of vintage images in uncanny juxtaposition; Bauer's mystic ceremonies of glitter, incense and animal bones lensed through Melies-style cine-magic; and Serra's collection of vintage peep show movies from the old and seedy Times Square of yesteryear as the basis of a hand-processed photochemical cinematic specters. Schwartzman's pagan trilogy of films imbued the screen with scenes of mythic hijinks, including the legend of Orpheus transplanted to a physics lecture at Columbia University, love potions gone ary, and the wrong deity responding to the mystic calls from a brotherhood of occult worshipers in "Dial P for Pagan."

A dual format presentation "Atomic Doomsday Battle of the DJs: 78 record vs 16mm film!!" paired together the atomic bomb-themed record collection of Ethan Crenson with local film archivist and collector "Movie Mike" Olshan's 1950s Civil Defence films filled with useful tips on surviving an atomic blast and what to expect in the confines of an urban fallout shelter. Mike Olshan's extensive 16mm film collection, from the timelessly classic to the oddly curious, proved to be a great asset for many cinematic happenings at the Museum, including the grim, gothic trappings of The Most Dangerous Game (1932) and the brazen B-movie bombast of The Phantom Creeps (1939).

Silent films with live music attracted large audiences and rather ludicrous numbers of RSVPs on Facebook. MV Carbon performed with The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1919) in an astonishing melding of sound and image, resurrecting the shocking and unsettling qualities of the film through her sonic interpretation, Underworld Oscillator Corporation rendered an elaborately developed score for Phantom of the Opera (1925) which included theremin and foley sound effects. Murnau's Faust (1926) was shown with music by Reel Orchestrette accentuating the grim poignancy of this beautiful and diabolical work of silent cinema.

A lot of mileage (through the projector!) was gotten out of my film print of Haxan (1922), known in English as Witchcraft Through the Ages. Perhaps the very fact that I had a personal 16mm copy of Haxan an indication of the good fit between programmer and venue? When Joanna asked if I was interested in doing screenings there did she realize she was asking an enthusiast with cinematic affinities so well-attuned to Museum's macabre mandate? Not every film collector happens to have a print of Haxan.

Haxan is not merely an astonishing film as a relic of the early years of cinema, it is a film that would be an astonishing production in any era: a Rabelaisian miasma of depraved diabolism and inquisitional excess. The silent print was shown together with a soundtrack assembled from 78 records–something I had done during the previous Halloween season at Spectacle Theater in Williamsburg, Brooklyn–DJ'd on the spot and never exactly the same from one screening to the next. But the consistent element in this phonographic accompaniment was a stack of polka music paired together with any appearances of the Devil and the scenes of the Black Mass. Perhaps the very perverseness of this combination is what made it fit so well. The scenes of witches consorting with the Lord of Darkness are a delirious phantasmagorie, with everyone having a rollicking good time and the jolly polka tunes fitting right in.

The final screening assembled a collection of short films, the work of filmmakers whose work I wanted to show at the Museum while there was still time. It made it in just under the wire: with an appreciable feeling of poignancy this was to be the last event held in the space before their final off-site Krampus Party nearby at The Bell House.

Now this strange spectre of museum has itself become something of a daydreamed ghost haunting the memory of its devotees. Perhaps it is not shocking that it came and went with such ephemerality? A thing too exquisite for this humdrum world.

Joel Schlemowitz (http://www.joelschlemowitz.com) is a Park Slope, Brooklyn-based filmmaker who makes short cine-poems and experimental documentaries. His most recent project, 78rpm, is in the final stages of post-production. He has taught filmmaking at The New School for the past 19 years. Robyn Hasty photo.

The Exhilaration of Upheaval: Poets Who Write On the Visual Arts in the 21st Century


Geoffrey Gatza

The panel took place on Sun. Aug. 7, 2016 at Unnameable Books in Prospect Heights., Brooklyn as part of the 10th annual Welcome to Boog City Poetry, Music, Theater, and Film Festival. Much thanks to Geoffrey Gatza for bringing all of these great folks together.

Hurray and welcome to the *Boog City*'s 10th annual Welcome to Boog City festival; this is the panel session. My name is Geoffrey Gatza and I am very pleased to spend this afternoon with you.

Thank you to David Kirschenbaum our fine host and the driving force behind *Boog City*! Thank you for having us. I would also like to take a moment and thank Unnameable books; this is my second time here, and I am absolutely marveled by what a fine bookshop this is. And thank you all [audience] for joining in the *Boog City* festival and for your support for poetry and the literary arts.

Todays panel is on ekphrasis, which is, of course, from the Greek for the description of a work of art produced as a rhetorical exercise. In today's discussion specifically we will be speaking about poetry, as a graphic, often dramatic, verbal description of a visual work of art, either real or imagined.

We have titled it The Exhilaration Of Upheaval: Poets who write on the visual arts in the 21st Century

Today we will be having a discussion with five talented poets who write about the visual arts in their own work, practice, praxis, and output.

Let me introduce our panel: Michael Kelleher, Susan Lewis, Loren Kleinman, Anne Tardos, and Andre Spears

Susan Lewis is the editor of *Posit, a journal of the arts*. *Posit* features accomplished, sophisticated works of new poetry, prose and visual art. She is the author of nine titles, including *This Visit* (BlazeVOX), *How to be Another* (Cervena Barva), and *State of the Union* (Spuyten Duyvil).

Loren Kleinman is a faculty member at New York Writer's Workshop and a full-time freelance writer and social media strategist. Her interviews appeared in *IndieReader*, *USA Today*, and The Huffington Post. She's also published essays in *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Seventeen Magazine*. Her poetry collections include *Breakable Things* and the prose collection, *Stay With Me Awhile*. BlazeVOX recently published her memoir *The Woman with a Million Hearts*.

Michael Kelleher is the director of the Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes at Yale University. He is the author of several books of poetry including two forthcoming books, *Museum Hours* from BlazeVOX as well as *Visible Instruments*, soon to be out, I am assured, this decade from Chax.

Anne Tardos, is the author of nine books of poetry and several multimedia performance works. Among her recent books of poetry are *NINE* (BlazeVOX); *Both Poems* (Roof); *I Am You* (Salt). She is the editor of *Jackson Mac Low's The Complete Light Poems* (Chax). She is a fellow in poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

André Spears is an independent scholar-poet whose recent work has appeared in *House Organ*, *Cough*, and *Dispatches from the Poetry Wars*. He is a co-founder of the Gloucester Writers Center, and the curator of its Maud / Olson Library, which was inaugurated in June [2016].

I[, Geoffrey Gatza] am the editor and publisher of BlazeVOX. As well as being a poet and playwright, I also write for young readers. I live in Kenmore, N.Y.

Before we get into our talk, by way of an introduction, let me say, it's not the heat it is the humanity. By applying a poetic and often metaphorical language, poets want to amplify the astonishment of the spectator and the reader by creating compositions that generate tranquil upheaval through poetic images that leave traces of balance and imbalance on the edge of recognition and alienation. By investigating language on a meta-level, the poet tries to grasp language transformed into art. Language becomes an ornament; at that moment, ambiguities and indistinctnesses, which are inherent to the phenomenon, come to the surface.

Main Discourse

Susan Lewis

Geoffrey Gatza: A question directed to Susan Lewis

In my writings, all of my works represent the kind of fluid world that is enacted in the poem. To me, ekphrasis is compelling because it mixes the artificial with an unpredictable sense of the real. I relate it to what researchers of religion call a liminal state. This is a state of inception, a moment on the threshold, a moment of promised transformation for the participant.

I think that poetry is a highly charged liminal environment especially when it is coupled, doubly reflected, with the visual arts. In our reading minds, we feel both real and not real at the same time. Accomplished, sophisticated works of art, just like the works you advance in Posit as well as your own writing, can make us feel that we might live forever, to be in a liminal state where we can be alive but also not. These experiences may last for only a moment, but as receivers of art we seek them out in various forms. Susan, how do you relate your work to that of a liminal state of ekphrasis?

SL:

Geoffrey, your generous invitation to participate in this impressive panel has led me to examine how and why I incorporate the visual arts and their strategies into my poetic and editorial practice. And I've come to recognize that the answer to the first question is, in a number of ways, and to the second is, my belief in the empathetic regard of the other as the essential antidote to the trap of subjectivity.

A look at the history of 'modern' art reveals that people are more receptive to experimentation, challenge, and discomfort in visual art than in literature, especially literature that is disruptive, startling, non-narrative or non-representational.

—Susan Lewis

Now, with this beautiful invocation of the affinity between liminality and ekphrasis, I think you have struck upon an even more apt rubric than those I had been exploring (both notions of 'artistic intersectionality,' and of superposition, borrowed ever-so-loosely from quantum theory). I think there is a very real kinship between poetry and the ineffable, unstable beauty of liminal states: those transitional zones between dualities which are at once unstable and promising of new paradigms & syntheses. To my mind, that very balancing act of impossibles, and the elusive, magical energy generated by exploring and embracing that impossibility, lies at the heart of what makes poetry poetry.

Looking for a definition of "liminality," I find: the "quality of ambiguity or disorientation" which occurs during the transition from one status to another, in which "social hierarchies may be . . . temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain . . . and the dissolution of order . . . creates a fluid, malleable situation that enables new . . . customs to become established" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/liminality).

In fact, this generative and revolutionary fluidity resembles nothing so much as the notion that feminist ekphrastic practice can "heal the subject-object split" and move "away from a logic of 'either/or' and toward an embrace of 'both/and.'" (Monique Tschofen and Anne Keefe, as discussed in B.K. Fischer, "Shake Forth A Nest: Feminist Ekphrasis and the Example of Louise Bourgeois," Los Angeles Review of Books, August 9, 2014).

With this resonance in mind, I'd like to touch on liminality in the cross-genre curation I do at Posit (www.positjournal.com) as well as how the liminality of ekphrasis functions in my own arts-inflected poetic and collaborative practice.


Susan Lewis

As we all know, Balkanization in the world of poetry looms altogether too large (hopefully not just because the smaller the stakes, the harder folks seem to fight over their bit of territory). So, too, I think, between poetry and other literary forms. Witness how artificially and detrimentally poetry is divided from prose (no doubt because of the pressures of the market) – not only among writers but, even more importantly, among readers. Who here doesn't know any number of serious and sophisticated readers who refuse to read anything lineated? So too, I would argue, among the arts themselves. With Posit, I am interested in eroding those divisions, in part by creating an inclusive, stimulating, energetic space in which art and literature of a variety of styles cohabit.

A look at the history of 'modern' art reveals that people are more receptive to experimentation, challenge, and discomfort in visual art than in literature, especially literature that is disruptive, startling, non-narrative or non-representational. Which is not to say that we ever accept paradigm shifts easily, but that certain deviations and deviancies considered acceptable in the context of visual arts remain marginalized in poetry. Consider the success with which visual art has challenged and exploded notions of objective truth and its presumed stability. I'm thinking of the erosion of conventional representation by subjectivity, then fragmentation, and then out-and-out abandonment (via Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, etc.) Of course, each step on that ladder was greeted with resistance, but this evolution has nonetheless gone down the public throat quite a bit more smoothly than its poetic parallel (for example, the writings of Gertrude Stein or of the New York School). No doubt language elicits an especially stubborn expectation of comprehensibility, since we use it on a daily basis as a practical tool. It's not easy to ask people to look anew at the bucket they have always used to carry water and see how it troubles notions of geometry, inclusion versus exclusion, the Sisyphean ennui of existence, the power dynamics of manual labor, or the porosity of matter itself!

My hope is that Posit, by integrating visual art and literature, encourages a liminal state of openness and flexibility among our visitors – that the less literal approach viewers must adopt to engage with contemporary visual art will carry over to, and inflect, their approach to the challenging contemporary literature we publish. I'm looking to the mind-opening effect of art that uses no language on the reader confronted with poetry that seeks to repurpose language for something other than its ordinary usage. (For any who doubt the power of simple juxtaposition, consider the Kuleshov Effect, named for the early Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov, who edited together a short film in which a shot of the expressionless face of Tsarist matinee idol Ivan Mosjoukine was alternated with various other shots (a plate of soup, a girl in a coffin, a woman on a divan). The film was shown to an audience who believed that the expression on Mosjoukine's face was beautifully different each time he appeared, depending on whether he was "looking at" the plate of soup, the girl in the coffin, or the woman on the divan, showing an expression of hunger, grief or desire, respectively –proving his extraordinary acting talent–although the footage of Mosjoukine was actually the same shot each time.)

In addition, Posit is hoping to foster such receptivity on both sides of the artistic aisle – to open the minds of visual artists and their fans to contemporary literature as well -– and even to forge acquaintance between the communities, as one small step towards de-Balkanization. To this end we also publish collaborative projects both between and within the arts, (e.g. "The Ruler of Rusted Knees" by Joanna Fuhrman and Toni Simon in Posit 1; "Sweet Voiced Mutilated Papyrus" by Anne Waldman and Pamela Lawton in Posit 5; "Continuations" by Sheila E. Murphy and Douglas Barbour in Posit 2; "Decade Mode" by Thomas Cook and Tyler Flynn Dorholt in Posit 10, as well as artwork which incorporates text, such as that of Linda Griggs and Vito DeSalvo in Posit 2). For instance, in Posit 10, Cynthia Carlson's abstract geometric shapes, playfully exploding settled expectations of the simple, rectangular frame, precede Thomas Cook's & Tyler Flynn Dorholt's "from Decade Mode." That poetic work defies conventional expectations of narrative voice by interlineating two of them, as well as subverting 'normal' prose logic by constructing visually comforting prose paragraphs on principles of fragmentation and collage. "From Decade Mode" is followed in its turn by Mary DeVincentis' expressionistic renderings of archetypical notions of psychological interiority, managing to speak to the more emotionally direct aspects of Cook's & Dorholt's assemblage, while also highlighting its categorical ambiguity.

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With regard to my own poetic practice, the first question I hear you asking, Geoffrey, is whether and how the visual arts enhance my access to the kind of liminal states so fertile for poetry-making. Of course the answer to 'whether' is yes! One crucial 'job' of poetry is to challenge, stretch, and repurpose language to allow it to reach beyond its own limitations – to use language to transcend itself. If nature has always served as a fertile stimulus for such transcendence, so has art, which not only appeals to our aesthetic sensibilities but manages to share poetry's raisons d'être, with no need for its material, language. Like many poets, I look to this power of visual art aspirationally – perhaps even as a limit, as the term is used in calculus: a goal to approach, if not attain.

Not only does art induce a generative, liminal state by providing inspiration as well as a reality to "riff off and ransack," to borrow BK Fischer's excellent formulation (ibid., describing Camille Guthrie's ekphrastic work) – it can also be a source of strategies and structures which, simply by being applied to a different art form, give rise to liminality's fluid, destabilizing energy. Like so many 20th and 21st century poets, I find myself constantly borrowing, or you might say transposing techniques like abstraction and fragmentation, collage and surrealism – innovations so fully integrated into contemporary poetic practice as to warrant no further elaboration. But I would also like to mention my borrowings of visual artistic approaches to negative space, studies and series, and film technique.

After years of puzzling over Matisse's unique treatment of negative space, I have applied various aspects of his practice to my poetry. I'm thinking of the way he explodes the difference between subjects and their backgrounds by painting them the same color, as in, e.g., "The Red Studio," or the way he undermines the distinction between a figure and the space around it by preserving multiple outlines of its boundaries, be they leg-, arm-, or jaw-lines. This emphasis on the artificiality of such boundaries – and embrace of the liminality of 'reality' – has influenced not only my attention to notions of absence and lacunae conveyed by the white space around the stanzaic structures of my lineated poetry, in, for instance, This Visit (BlazeVOX [books], 2015) but of my prose poems as well. High-density language blocs floating in seas of empty space, they evoke, in my mind, the necessary humility of land compared to water on our planet, or of matter to empty space in every atom – and therefore in all "solid" objects in the universe, including ourselves.

If nature has always served as a fertile stimulus for such transcendence, so has art, which not only appeals to our aesthetic sensibilities but manages to share poetry's raisons d'être, with no need for its material, language.

—Susan Lewis

Similarly, my admiration for Monet's prolific studies of haystacks, cathedrals, water lilies, and more – evidence of a patient yet energetic stick-to-it-iveness with which I did not instinctively identify – led me to stretch beyond my comfort zone and attempt something analogous in my poetry. By now studies and series populate all of my recent books and chapbooks, including State of the Union (Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2014), with State of the Union I, II, and III, and She Tried I and II, This Visit, with My Life in Dogs, My Life in Sheets, My Life in Fresh Starts, My Life in Microbes, My Life in Branches, and My Life in Streets, as well as Dear Dear, Dear Tomorrow, Dear Subjectivity, Dear Openwork, Dear Beautiful Mind, Dear Random Object, and Dear Crutch). To offer just one example, twin poems from my newest book, Heisenberg's Salon (BlazeVOX [books], 2017)(unified by the liminality of reality as comprehended by quantum theory and imaginatively evoked by Schrodinger's Cat) begin: "After months if not years, she was ready for him to open his eyes" (After Months (I)), and "After months if not years, she was still not ready for him to open his eyes" (After Months (II)).

One more borrowing I would like to mention comes from film technique, and provides the organizing principle of another manuscript in progress. Zoom is a collection of prose poems which metaphorically 'zoom' in from long shot (as I see its analogy to third person narration) to medium shot (second person) to close up (first person), in order to explore point of view and its potency, the extent to which subjectivity defines and limits us. Once again I am using these categories, this time borrowed from the lexicon of film, at least in part in order to blur their boundaries and reveal their instability: to explore the liminal zones betwixt and between them. (And film is particularly expressive of liminality – for instance, in its potential to evoke and explore dream states (I'm thinking of everything by Bunuel, but also of Maya Deren's great "Meshes of the Afternoon"), or the liminal state between life and death (Richard Linklater's "Waking Life").

*

The final aspect of my poetic practice that engages the liminality of ekphrasis is collaboration, which, I would argue, is a bit like ekphrasis on stilts. Both modalities trouble the boundaries between artistic forms and their makers, and undermine the distinction between creator and consumer (with both ekphrastic poet and collaborator casting herself as both), as well as objective vs subjective (with both ekphrastic and collaborative artist mining her response to the embodied reality of another's creation).

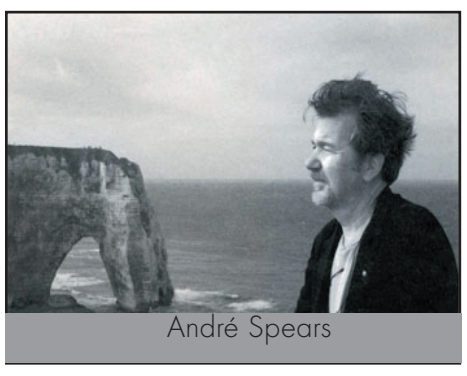
For this reason, the fluid, transformative energy of the liminal state has no better embodiment than the collaborative process, which demands surrender to a zone of receptivity towards the input of another voice and vision; of flexibility, to soften and mold one's own vision to combine with that of the other in a generative way. Not to mention, for the artist who 'goes first,' the giving over of one's work – i.e., of control – and its replacement with openness towards, and acceptance of, whatever the other artist shapes it into. Similarly, the artist who reacts to the work of the other must be minded to "accept and build," a guiding principle borrowed gratefully from improvisational theater.

Of special relevance here are my collaborations with artist Melissa Stern, for instance in her installation "The Talking Cure," in which a number of writers, myself included, responded to particular sculptures by writing 'their' monologues, which were then interpreted and recorded by actors whose performances are accessible via QR code to the sculptures' viewers. But these ideas are equally applicable to my collaborations with composers Jonathan Golove and Justin Weiss, and with other poets, especially Mary Kasimor. All of them require both artists to abandon notions of dominion over their art or medium, wading instead into a transitional zone between artists and art forms, with an eye to creating something belonging to neither creator and to no category: a hybrid, a chimaera, a between-thing not made, or makeable, by any one. In other words: the ultimate product of liminality.

WBC10 FEST ART PANEL

André Spears

From a Prepared Statement:



André Spears

When I was approached by email back in June by Geoffrey Gatza to join his panel on poetry and art ("The Exhilaration Of Upheaval"), I was thrown for a loop, not simply because I have never written on the relation of poetry to the visual arts, but more problematically because, at the moment of my reply, my feeling as a scholar-poet was that I didn't really have much interest in the topic.

Geoffrey wrote back:

"I thought you would be a great panelist after recalling our talks on art and seeing your Android poems, they have a very visual feel to them that is, to my eye related to many arts movements... By manipulating the viewer to create confusion, your poetry plays with the idea of the mortality of language confronted with the power of a transitory appearance, which is, by being restricted in time, much more intense than mainstream poetics."

That sounded great & I figured he must understand something about my work that I didn't, or at least that was the hope.

Later, I was confronted with a simple truth to which I had been inexplicably blind: of the eight short "books" I have managed to get out into the world over the past thirty some years (nine, if I include the collaborative "matchbook" Para Walter Benjamin), five have been artist's books produced in collaboration with artists; two of the others have cover photographs taken by my photographer wife, Anne Ros n, and my first, self-published book (1983) presents on its cover, as a sort of visual cue, a prominent glyph: the capitalized letters "X" and "O" (spelling the proper name "Xo"). Indeed, it occurred to me that virtually all of my work, up to and including the work in progress Shrinkrap, which Geoffrey alludes to as the "Android poems," can be said to represent a deep and pervasive engagement with the field of visual art. This would also include the two-columned, face-to-face text of my ongoing "epic without organs" (excerpts from which recently appeared under the title "Ship of State"), and even the recent collaborative installation of the "Ralph Maud Collection of Charles Olson's Books" as both a replica library and conceptual art piece in the seaside town of Gloucester[, Mass.]. So the question now facing me, in my reluctance to accept Geoffrey's invitation, why was I blind to this truth about my own work? Why didn't I recognize myself as a writer for whom visual art seems key?

Speaking as one writer among others whose work has not gained acceptance into what Geoffrey calls the "mainstream," at a time when everything seems increasingly "mainstream," I think my initial puzzled reaction to Geoffrey's invitation had to do w/ my assumption that it was simply the reality of rejection and marginalization that led me to work with artists. I found a venue for my work where I could.

I dismissed the importance of my engagement with visual art because, looking back, I remembered it as nothing more than the only way I could get my work out into the public sphere, "published."

My friendship with the French artist Richard Meier of Voix Editions, who I had known for a long time, first set me on my path. Since the mid-1970s, when he adopted the artist's book as his chosen medium, he has produced hundreds of limited-edition artist's books. During a visit to New York, he offered to publish my Letters from Mu: Part I, which was the first installment from a work in progress. I knew from experience that no US publisher would touch it: not only was I unknown, but my work was unusual and perceived as transgressive, since it was essentially premised on returning poetry back to its origins in mythological story telling. As a result of that conversation with Richard Meier, I collaborated in 1999 with a friend, the Swiss abstract artist Gilgian Gelzer, in Paris. In response to my work he produced a series of some 55 drawings that were subsequently interspersed between the pages of the book's twelve chapters. After that, in short order, through a network of associates in France, I collaborated on two small artist's books and a series of woodblock prints with the French artist Scanreigh.

A visual element began to insinuate itself into my own texts at the same time that I continued to collaborate with artists on the making of artist's books. —André Spears

The point is: I did not necessarily see these initial collaborations with artists as representing any particular interest in the visual arts. But when I consider the trajectory of my writing since then–the way in which it continues to gravitate, however distantly, toward the field of visual art–I begin to ask myself whether I'm not bringing into my work a vision that is determined in large part by that field.

A visual element began to insinuate itself into my own texts at the same time that I continued to collaborate with artists on the making of artist's books: namely, w/ Anne Ros n–on the book Translation (2010), as well as on the aforementioned "matchbook" Para Walter Benjamin (2011)–and again with Gilgian Gelzer on En Terre Perdue (2013), my translation into French of Letters from Mu: Part I, for which he produced 22 new color drawings in the "Addendum."

The artist's book Translation presents highly torqued "translations"–homophonic translations, a "flash" translation, the translation of a forgery–from Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud. In her series of photographs accompanying the texts, Anne Ros n uses a variety of techniques–overlay, double exposure, composites, HDR, collage, imitation silkscreen–to play, like the texts themselves, with the idea that translation from one language to another can also function as an image for the translation of one art form (in this case, photography) into another, i.e. for a process in which the passage from one form to another both preserves and renews the art itself.

When I consider the aforementioned translation of Letters from Mu (Part I), I find that I have to question another assumption. I had thought that the reason I chose to translate my own work-in-progress into another language was simply for the purpose of re-gathering in my mind the threads of a fictional narrative begun decades ago, and that I was trying to advance my narrative (while literally translating one artist's book into another artist's book). I was stepping back in order to jump further, as in the French expression, Il faut reculer pour mieux sauter–but in so doing I was also renewing a process in which the engagement with visual art continued to function as some sort of power source. The translation from English into French renewed the translatability of my text into an abstract visual field.

In a nutshell, then, when I consider the visual element in my current work–the four vertical columns of text in "Shrinkrap," which are meant to suggest the flowing lines of code on the computer screens in The Matrix; or the two columns of texts in recent installments my "epic without organs," whose inner outline is supposed to evoke the banks of a river or the trace of a current on the ocean's surface–what I've come to see is that they represent an engagement with visual art that was not only there from the beginning, but that also determined the path I've followed.

To describe that path, and try to square it away with "the exhilaration of upheaval," I find it useful to fall back on Deleuze & Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus, which I happen to be re-reading at the moment. In their parlance, my first artist's book marked the opening of a line-of-flight, and set me on the path of becoming-imperceptible. Alone in the wilderness, I had been called to join a wolf pack, and leave my desire to be part of the herd back in the dust of its own de-territorialization. Of interest to me, in other words, is the way in which terms such as "line-of-flight," "becoming-imperceptible," "wolf pack," "herd," "de-territorialization"... like "becoming-animal," "plane of consistency," "haeceity," "smooth space," "faciality, "war-machine" or "nomad thought" all belong to a conceptual apparatus dedicated to the process of becoming in the field of immanence of a here-and-now. When I look to my own work, I think the inherent possibility of poetry becoming art, art becoming poetry–the process of the one's potential translation into the other–serves a kindred conceptual vision to the one that animates A Thousand Plateaus.

It should therefore not be surprising, in retrospect, that when Geoffrey in his email to me referred to our "talks on art," what we were in effect talking about was the work of Marcel Duchamp, the godfather of conceptual art, in whom Geoffrey and I share a marked common interest. No artist casts as long a shadow on the process by which art might become pure poetry, and poetry serve as threshold to the pure here-and-now within a visual field, as does Duchamp. So perhaps I could sum up by saying that the problem for me on the "plane of consistency," for which my work would articulate a solution, is how to shed light on that shadow. Certainly, I am not the only one.

A final note. Most recently, the process of becoming-imperceptible–say, within the larger global movement of "the minoritarian becoming-everything of everybody"–led me to the work of Cy Twombly. Subsequent to the release last April of a facsimile of Duchamp's Green Box, about which Geoffrey and I exchanged a few emails, I went with my artist son to visit the Duchamp room at the Philadelphia Museum, specifically to see Duchamp's two masterworks Le Grand Verre and Etant Donnés. What I did not expect to see, and didn't know about, was the addition to the museum, in a nearby room, of Twombly's extraordinary series of paintings inspired by the Trojan war, Fifty Days at Iliam. Indeed, the bottom line of what I have to say is: if you haven't been there, go. The passage from the Duchamp room to the room that contains Twombly's Fifty Days at Iliam is like a Mobius strip on which the end of art forever meets the beginning of poetry in a present moment that is ours.

Anne Tardos

From a Prepared Statement

Anne Tardos

Geoffrey Gatza's kind invitation to participate in this panel, included the following abstract: By applying a poetic and often metaphorical language, poets want to amplify the astonishment of the spectator and the reader by creating compositions that generate tranquil upheaval through poetic images that leave traces of balance and imbalance on the edge of recognition and alienation. By investigating language on a meta level, the poet tries to grasp language transformed into art. Language becomes an ornament; at that moment, ambiguity and indistinctness, which are inherent to the phenomenon, come to the surface.

This statement is composed of 80 words.

It is made up of three sentences.

The first word of each sentence is respectively "By," "By," and "Language."

Bye bye language.

The first sentence, the one beginning with the word "By" is 44 words long.

The second sentence, also beginning with "By," is 16 words.

The third, beginning with "Language," is composed of 20 words.

80 words, subdivided into 44, 16, and 20 are all even numbers.

The last word of each sentence is respectively "alienation," "art," and "surface."

I scrambled the words, sentence by sentence, keeping to the original word count. Given the vocabulary of the text, the meaning remains essentially unchanged.

First sentence:

By applying a poetic and often metaphorical language, poets want to amplify the astonishment of the spectator and the reader by creating compositions that generate tranquil upheaval through poetic images that leave traces of balance and imbalance on the edge of recognition and alienation.

My version:

By applying amplify
And by creating
Generate spectator reader
Poetic and often
Language poets want to
Metaphorical astonishment
And often the of the and the that
Tranquil upheaval
Through poetic images
Leave traces
Balance and imbalance
On the edge of
Recognition that
Alienation and

Second sentence:

By investigating language on a meta level, the poet tries to grasp language transformed into art.

My version:

Language tries the poet
Language investigating on a meta level
Transformed by grasp to into art.

Third sentence:

Language becomes an ornament; at that moment, ambiguity and indistinctiveness, which are inherent to the phenomenon, come to the surface.

My version:

Language phenomenon ornament moment
Inherent indistinctiveness becomes ambiguity and come to the surface
Which are at to the, to the.

The poem also knows best. The writer's job is merely to assist the poem to come forth by providing their brain, hands, and fingers. —Anne Tardos

These are transformations, a kind of translation of another text.
Addressing material from another world.
Another order of reality.
Another text, written by another writer–sometimes another me–at another time.

We naturally incorporate other worlds inside our own.
We collect items, quotations, and so on, as they gravitate into our hands by chance.

Elène Cixous says that the "Concept of an 'invaded authorship,' a writing influenced by others, points to the unconscious of a text."

Such invasions abound with potential interruption and displacement, transposition and disarticulation.

The writer becomes the sculptor, the architect of the text.
Writing is art-making.
The writer as image maker.

It is logical then that what we write finds its way into the writing of others. We can hear our own words coming out of another writer's mouth.
Somewhere, I wrote "we become each other."
Eddie Berrigan wrote somewhere "we become each other."
This is a form of friendship.
A communication on a different level.
The unconscious of a text.
There is a certain gentleness in not knowing what comes next, not anticipating it, not dreading it, not forcing anything.
A tenderness that comes from letting go of desire and preconception, ambitions and determination.
Letting the text happen by itself.
As if it was a gestating embryo requiring a certain environment and nourishment, without outside interference. It doesn't need to know, which it probably doesn't, how to move forward or how to develop. All this is contained in its nature.
The poem also knows best. The writer's job is merely to assist the poem to come forth by providing their brain, hands, and fingers.
Kit Robinson recently wrote:
The poem doesn't care who writes it / It is waiting in the wings
Let me finish by reading three of the Nines. These are poems where each stanza is composed of nine lines, and each line is of nine words long. I wrote 126 of them, and BlazeVOX Books published them more beautifully than I could have hoped, a few months ago, at the end of 2015.

FROZEN WORDS
NINE 58
Frozen handcuffs bound intoxicatingly bitter winter hinterland all alone.

A full philosophical account of human life and language.
It may turn out that we need each other.
Mine is a mind that stays balanced and even.
Take it easy, first things first, easy does it.
And after all, who do I think I am.
I want to live with you, not your addiction.
The immense attraction to the material envelope of satisfaction.
Genderbending trivia simplification, and that was only three words.

WIKI MANDOLIN TCHEBABA
NINE 28
Wiki Mandolin stole this happiness from an indifferent universe.
Determinism is not the enemy but the relentless ego.
Folie à deux figurine, funny little dinky ink blob.
I'm only good when I'm good for nothing.
The gym makes me feel like I'm a member.
You say that the perfect act has no results.
"If I can understand it, anyone can understand it."
Those FedEx guys lost their cool completely that day.
Ziglio lusty mannequin gooey saliva shiva tzim-tzim tchebaba.

LACAN SAYS
NINE 64
Lacan says to "Eat your existence, mange ton dasein."
There's no field of sense that can be quilted.
(I don't really know what that's supposed to mean.)
We are here, that is, to protect each other.
Attaining a semblance of consistency within the archetypal neurosis.
(I don't know what that's supposed to mean, either.)
The seventh line wants to talk about suffering again.
The eighth line declines the invitation gently but firmly.
The ninth usually knows the way out of here.

Michael Kelleher

Michael Kelleher

Reads an extract, the title work, from his forthcoming book, Museum Hours

Museum Hours

January 2014

Dear Yuko Otomo,

I would like to write a book like your Study someday. I picture myself going daily to a museum and selecting a different picture to observe. I take notes, then return home to write poems. I do this every day until I have enough to fill a book. In the process I learn a lot about art.

Which is more or less what I've done while reading Study, except that in this case I substituted your book for a real museum. I read a few pages each day, Googled images of the art, took notes in the margins. I followed a fairly strict routine through the first section of the book, reading a cycle of poems in the morning and looking at images by the artists later in the day. At night, I reread the poems, using only my memory of the images as a guide.

The routine varied somewhat as I moved through the book. Even though many of the artists were familiar to me, I couldn't recall specific works. Others were totally unfamiliar. I decided to look first and read second or in some cases to switch back and forth between looking and reading. My eyes roamed from the image on my screen to the book on my desk and back.

One night I watched a movie about Ray Johnson after reading your poem about him. It was called, How to Draw a Bunny.

February 2014

It's been a month since I started this letter, but I haven't finished it because I keep returning to Study, as if to a memory palace, to immerse myself in your experience of art.

The low, mid-winter sun blasts through a large, south-facing window. I have to hold up my left hand to shield my eyes while I read your Robert Frank poems.

Trolley–New Orleans makes me think of the Tennessee Williams' play A Streetcar Named Desire. In an archive at the Beinecke Library, where I work, I once found an actual ticket to the actual streetcar named Desire from around the time the play was written. It's a much more interesting artifact than the autographed Playbill it fell out of.

I picture the fluttering curtains in View from Hotel Window – Butte Montana to be actually fluttering. In the photo I see that they are still.

*

My first memory of poetry (and painting) has to do with Seurat. Growing up I spent Saturday mornings in front of the television watching cartoons. Educational PSAs called Snippets sometimes aired between Bugs Bunny and Scooby-Doo. One of them featured Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte.

They filmed the painting from a distance so that you could see the whole picture before they zoomed in to reveal that it had been painted using thousands of individual dots. They used the word Pointillism, and made a point of repeating it. The Snippet ended with a short mnemonic poem intoned by a woman with a British accent:

Seurat
Knew a lot
About dots

***

You mention the date of a Bruce Nauman Exhibition you attended: 4.4.1995. On that date, I was in Quito, Ecuador doing a year of volunteer teaching. A number of significant events occurred in America while I was there that felt more remote to me than they did to my friends back in the states. The Republican takeover of congress. The O.J. Simpson trial. The Oklahoma City bombing.

On the table in the midst of
a violent incident
flowers in a vase
remain flowers

I watch a video clip of Nauman's A Violent Incident. I hear the man say, "You fucking cunt! Don't you ever–" She throws water in his face. She knees him in the balls. The flowers on the table are yellow. Possibly they are tulips or unopened roses. It's hard to tell because the grainy image in the video is of a television on which the video of A Violent Incident is playing.

***

Max Beckmann's blacks
like cracks

in the sky you
fall into.

***

How is it that I have now composed an entire book of ekphrastic poetry, most of it based on tiny digital reproductions, yet this one painting, which I examined again and again in the flesh, eludes me? —Michael Kelleher

I try to figure out which Untitled painting by Cy Twombly you are writing about, then realize it doesn't matter.

A massive snowstorm falls outside my window.

***

The verisimilitude of the eyes in Lippo Lippi's paintings establishes contact across the centuries. I feel like they can see me nearly as clearly as I see them. I wonder if it is Lippi himself staring back at me.

***

I am aware of myself sitting at my desk reading. The room's only light enters through a sliding glass door. Despite the gray winter sky, it feels crisp and bright because the ground is covered in snow. I feel compelled to get closer to it. I stand up, holding Study in my hand, and walk towards the light. I lean against the glass as I read the rest of the poem I had been reading, Tracing Time With 2BS and 3BS.

August 2014

Recently, I saw a movie called Museum Hours, by Jem Cohen. It reminded me of everything I loved about your book. The film centers on a brief friendship that develops between two solitary people, one a middle-aged Canadian woman, the other a (late) middle-aged Austrian man.

We don't know much about the woman, except that her cousin, who she appears to have met only once, lies in a coma in a Vienna hospital. The woman's phone number was the only one the doctors found in her cousin's possession, so they called her. We see her from behind, standing at a window while talking with someone on the phone. A sibling perhaps. She tells the person on the phone that she must go to Vienna and asks to borrow money. We don't know what the woman does for a living or who this relative is or why she bothers to travel to Vienna to observe the passing of someone she's hardly known.

However, we do learn a bit about the man, mostly through his first-person narration. He works as a security guard at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. He tells us that as a young man he worked security in the music industry and had a lot of fun. We also learn that he is not a passive observer. He pays close attention to both the art he protects and the people who come to look at it. His observations sound like journal entries read aloud.

The woman, who knows no one in Vienna, comes often to the museum, presumably because she has no money and the museum doesn't charge admission. The guard observes her fumbling with a map of the city. He approaches and asks if he can help. She doesn't know how to get to the hospital where her cousin is dying. He gives her directions and offers to show her around town, even to translate over the phone with the doctor. In one of many asides he tells us that he makes this latter offer in order to verify that she isn't running a scam.

The friendship that grows between them forms the emotional core of the film. We accompany them as they visit the hidden corners of Vienna. We listen in on their conversations as they sit in a cafe. We watch as they dance in a bar. Sometimes they sit together at the bedside of her cousin. The woman likes to sing to her cousin and has a lovely voice. I read that the actress who plays the woman is, in real life, a singer.

If their relationship forms the emotional center of the film, the Kunsthistorisches Museum forms the aesthetic and intellectual one. We learn from the guard that the museum houses one of the most impressive collections of Bruegel in the world as well as some choice Rembrandts and Arcimboldos. The director uses works of art to deepen our understanding of the story and its characters. In several scenes the camera cuts back and forth between paintings and carefully composed shots that echo what we see in the paintings without attempting to recreate them.

The guard tells us about the different ways the patrons respond to naked human bodies depicted in art, how the context of the gallery allows them to enjoy erotic feelings without shame. He wryly comments that a lot of the art in the museum is actually pornographic. As he says this, the camera moves from one nude to another, then shifts its view to the various patrons observing these nudes. They are men and women, young and old, skinny and fat.

The camera lingers for enough time on each face that when it returns to the first, we recognize the slender young woman with elongated Renaissance features and dark, straight hair. The camera moves slowly down her naked body, then cuts away. One by one the same patrons we've seen observing these nudes, men and women, old and young, skinny and fat, appear without their clothes. The camera asks us to look at their bodies as they look at the bodies in the paintings. It asks us to feel erotic without shame.

In another scene a docent gives a tour of the Breughel room to a small group of English-speaking tourists. It lasts almost ten minutes and raises many questions, for instance about the universality and timelessness of art, the tension between the laymen's presumed understanding of representational art and his feelings of helplessness, bewilderment, even rage in the face of modern and contemporary art, and also about the ways in which money and class permeate the creation and appreciation of art through the ages.

(In another clever aside, the guard shares with us his memory of a college student who worked with him for a summer, droning on about 'late capitalism.' The guard is impressed with his knowledge, but wonders also if his class consciousness isn't keeping him from understanding some larger truths about art.)

The film spends so much time inside the museum that after a while I could feel the height of the ceilings and I could hear the sound of shoes stepping over the floors and I could see the colors on the walls and the details around the doors and I could imagine standing in the Bruegel room for hours. It began to feel like a place I had visited many times, or a memory of that place.

There is not much else to say about the two main characters. The cousin dies and the friendship comes to its natural end because the woman must return home.

***

November 2014

(Ars Memoria)

I daydream about making a miniature theater for my daughter. I use an empty shoebox that is at this moment sitting on the floor of the garage as a kind of proscenium. I tear up an old t-shirt to make curtains. I paint a set on the inside and use my daughter's Lego figures for actors. I write a play based on her current favorite book. It's called Emily's Balloon. She loves balloons and it so happens her name is Emily. We named her after the poet. The story goes like this:

A little girl's mother buys her a yellow balloon from a street vendor. She lets go. The balloon flies away. She's sad. Her mother buys Emily another balloon and ties it to her finger. They walk home. She lets it go again inside the house and it rises to the ceiling. Her mother ties a small spoon to the end of the string so that the balloon floats just off the ground without flying away. Emily carries the balloon out to the garden. She crowns herself with a garland of flowers. A gust of wind carries the balloon up to a tree, well out of reach. Emily cries. She tells her mother all the things she would have done with the balloon if she still had it. They would have eaten dinner together, brushed their teeth together, gone to bed together. Her mother promises to get it down tomorrow. Emily can't sleep. She looks out her window and sees the yellow balloon still stuck in the limb of the tree. It looks like the moon.

The End.

WBC10 FEST ART PANEL

January 2015

I have been writing this letter for over a year. It keeps getting longer, so that it feels like I might never complete it. Hard to imagine ever sending it to you. Perhaps I will someday. It seems so archaic, this idea of writing and sending a letter, what with the easy communication enabled in digital space. But then, who would ever take a year to write an email or a tweet or a Facebook post? A letter is the only form that allows for slow composition (decomposition?).

The last thing I wanted to tell you was that I did try to do what I imagined at the beginning of this missive. It was in summer. Several days a week, during my lunch break, I went to the art gallery and strolled around looking for subjects for my poems. The painting I came back to again and again was Le Café de Nuit, by Vincent Van Gogh. You are probably familiar with it. I'll try to describe it anyway.

As the title suggests, the setting is a cafe at night. The dominant colors are yellow, red, and green, all of them layered on thickly, violently, as if Van Gogh wanted to make you feel nauseous looking at them. At the center is a billiards table on which one red ball and two white balls sit idle beside a single cue laid across its length. Behind the table stands a man in white, the proprietor of the cafe (I read). He's posing, as if for a photo. The white he wears is not really white, it's more of a luminous yellow-green.

All the tabletops and a bar in the background, a door in a backroom seen through a doorway, even a reflection in a mirror are all painted using variations on this color. These contrast starkly with the blood-red walls. Light from four large gas chandeliers struggles against the oppressive darkness of the room. Van Gogh visualizes this struggle with waves of radiating yellow paint that quiver on the verge of extinction. Bottles and glasses litter the tabletops. Five seated patrons, three of whom appear to be sleeping and two in the back, a man and a woman, who may be engaged in a tryst, are the only other people in the frame. A gigantic brown clock reads 12:10.

I returned to this painting on several occasions, paying attention each time to a different aspect. In my notebook I wrote about the colors, the texture, the composition, the biographical backstory, and anything else I could think of, all with the intention of turning my notes into a poem. The poem never materialized.

On the way to see the Van Gogh one afternoon, I passed a Paul Klee painting called Joyful Mountain Landscape. The next morning I wrote a poem in one sitting called Joyful Mountain Landscape. Why did this painting lend itself so easily and instantaneously to the writing of a poem while the Van Gogh, which I had looked at and studied so intently, resisted my efforts to translate it into poetry? How is it that I have now composed an entire book of ekphrastic poetry, most of it based on tiny digital reproductions, yet this one painting, which I examined again and again in the flesh, eludes me?

***

(Ars Memoria)

My first memory of poetry (and painting) has to do with Seurat. Growing up I spent Saturday mornings in front of the television watching cartoons.

—Michael Kelleher

A recording of Louise Bourgeois singing C'est la murmure d l'eau qui chante and other French children's rhymes. A vacuum cleaner whirring outside my office door. I recall one of her Couples sculptures at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo. If I mark that spot in my mind, it is easy for me to mentally map the whole museum. I can wander in one direction down a long hall featuring impressionist and post-impressionist paintings (including a work by Seurat) or I can go in another direction through rooms full of pop and op and abstract expressionist art. As I do this I realize that the museum is a kind of memory palace. I could place things on the walls and use them to recall a speech I'd like to give or a list of randomly ordered playing cards. Or I could just wander my own museum, which is built inside of yours.

Evolution of the Living Archive
Communion, Resistance, and Social Bibliomania at Wendy's Subway an interview with Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves

INTERVIEW BY LYNNE DESILVA-JOHNSON

Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves, an artist, writer, and postcolonial ethnobotanist is also a board member of the ambitious, forward thinking Wendy's Subway, a non-profit library and writing space located in Bushwick, Brooklyn. This "open, versatile space where cultural production flourishes through reading, research, and collaborative practice, and is manifested in performance, publication, and education" is a hotbed of activity, including workshops, screenings, talks and lectures, and a range of other public programs.

Their non-circulating library holds a collection of books and documents with a special focus on poetry, art, theory, and philosophy, as well as the Laurin Raiken Archive, an extensive resource for the study of art history and criticism.

Today, we're talking in particular about the critical role spaces like Wendy's Subway play in resistance and resilience – both in crisis situations as well as in the long haul.

'Human beings are going to share information. We just are ... Constantly improving how and what we share is going to determine how our species fares in the long run.' —AGNG

Boog City: Adjua, thank you for being willing to chat with me today! Let's start by talking a little more about you, and your role in the Wendy's Subway universe. The common notion of a "Board Member" probably evokes visions of formal meetings around long tables, but I imagine this situation might work a little differently. How long have you been involved in WS? Were you active in creating the space?

Adjua: Hi, Lynne! Delighted to be able to contribute to this line of inquiry. Formality is a funny thing for me – I have such performative affection for capital B *business* gestures and find I am constantly incorporating them into my art practice. Like, I made a notary seal that bears both my full name and that of the conceptual umbrella corporation comprising the entirety of my creative output, flanking the year of my birth. And I use this seal (in addition to my handwritten signature) almost every time I sign a piece of artwork. The roots of this are probably a childhood and close friendship growing up alongside my father who is simultaneously a prolific creator and a committed businessman. Which is to say, being a board member and (indeed) sitting around a long table to do the most formal aspects of that work, feels excellent and as our organization grows it means the simultaneous growth of my experience of what the administration of this sort of business truly is and what it feels like rather than what it previously looked and seemed like from more of a remove. That may be true for all of us on the Board to some extent. And honestly that long table is also where we also do our creative work and so much of our thinking together is located there, in actuality and also symbolically. So that long formal table also feels very much like heart and home.

Regardless, I always seek modes where opposing elements work together to be something new. While that's not what initially drew me to Wendy's Subway, that is why I stuck around and why I'm glad to be as deeply involved as I am. Wendy's started at the end of 2013, and a little less than a year later I joined because of percolating friendships that were emerging out of my long tenure as a bookseller at McNally Jackson Books. I wasn't active in creating the space, and was initially simply drawn to what was for me a new way to kick it with people. Like, in a library. That we were building together. In a warehouse loft. It was just the dreamiest intellectual prospect – The Social Life and The Life of the Mind finding common ground. A hypersocial bibliomaniac only child's dream come true.

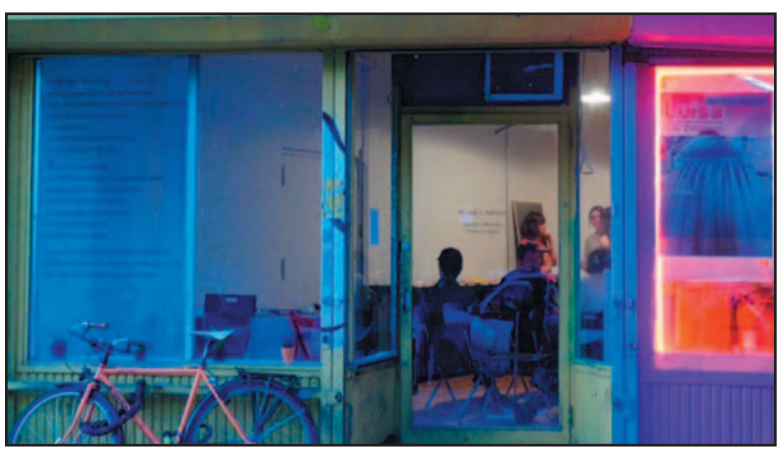
Have you been involved in Library or Archival work before?

Not like this. Books were prominent in my mom's household though, so growing up alongside her there was a sort of pervasive inevitability about walls filled with shelves filled with books. For a long time trips to various New York Public Library branches were a regular part of our routine together. Whenever I move into a new apartment, the space doesn't feel right until my bookshelves are reinstalled – home is where your books are. Oh, ha! and sometime between the ages of seven and 12 I began a card catalog system for my little kid bedroom bookshelves. But, only Mom and I lived in that apartment together. So I think for a little while I was encouraging her to check out YA and picture books from my library so that I could do the process admin of that loaning!

Then, throughout my youth I would always be meticulously date-coding (and often time-stamping) the notes and papers and journals I was generating. Quite literally to ease the workflow for future documentarians of my life. And in my twenties I developed a datecode format that improved upon any I'd encountered at that point. I still use it and love it, though I acknowledge it does have one systemic flaw. Also I recently dated someone who once referred to the ever-evolving collection of books, papers, and office supplies in my tote as a Living Archive instead of just saying "Adjua, why is your bag so heavy". Oh, and in undergrad I briefly worked in the Art History Department's slide library. But overall not so much professional involvement in library work as just an affinity and passion for cataloging and records that is present throughout my life on a seemingly cellular level.

What excites you about the work that Wendy's Subway is doing, in particular? What programs and initiatives are coming up that you feel really demonstrate the mission of the organization?

The primary thing I love about Wendy's Subway is that we are committed to creating and maintaining space for folks to think together. That's so simple but it's so potent. That looks like working alongside one another in our Bushwick location and it's the primary function of the pop-up Reading Rooms we've been curating and installing around the country in the past two years or so, most recently in Downtown Brooklyn at BAM for their NextWave Festival and currently on the Upper West Side at the Bard Graduate Center. In early April, we're screening a short film called 'Cave Small Cave Big' at our Bushwick location, and hosting a screenwriting workshop for children the day after. I love that folks come to us to host work like this. I love it. The film's director is artist Joële Walinga who's collaborating with these very young writers (ages five to seven) to create short films out of the scripts they've written. That kind of intergenerational collaboration is so gorgeous.



As you may know, the proposed budget for 2018 eliminates (among other things) the Institute of Museum and Library Services. While most US residents aren't familiar with this organization, it's the source from which LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) funds are distributed to every state in the nation according to a population based formula.

NEA, NEH, Museum and Library funding are often spun as being somehow in service of 'elite' or privileged populations, an all-too-familiar trope related to rampant anti-intellectual narrative.

In an insightful, critical piece for The Washington Post, Philip Kennicott warned that these cuts are "carefully calculated attacks on communities, especially those that promote independent thinking and expression." He speaks directly, in fact, to George Will's opinion piece in which we see exactly the type of thinking promoted by those who wish to dismantle, defund, and undercut the value of these organizations.

What is your response to the threats to funding, either of your organization or others in the arts / literature communities? Perhaps one of the most important things that we can do for each other is to amplify the work that is in FACT happening in these spaces, clarifying the services provided and, critically, the populations served by these services. Can you talk to me about the range of services Wendy's Subway offers and about the people that use your space? Tell those who might not know about your membership model, and how this works (or how you would like it to work) as opposed to how the space serves the general public.

Human beings are going to share information. We just are. We do not need the State to do that. Sharing information seems to be what got us to this complex and multivalent – albeit precarious – point in our species' evolution. Constantly improving how and what we share is going to determine how our species fares in the long run. And it really does not seem like any part of this particular State has any sort of eye at all to the Long Run. So be it.

This country is built on such dense network of lies that I sometimes find it hard to exert the effort to track the minutiae of its policy violence. I'm working on that, but news of these recent and impending cuts is so abhorrent that it just makes me want and need to turn my back on the whole mishegas and just continue to model community run intellectual zones.

Wendy's Subway currently offers public access to our non-circulating library five days a week, space (at the long table and surrounding couches) to think and write and consider ideas together in peace and quiet, literary events throughout the month, like readings and workshops, and the opportunity to curate them as well as attend. Members have an opportunity to be involved in all aspects of programming and organizing at the space (or something like that, to make clear the distinction between members and non members). Our members range from those who use it everyday as an other home/office and get really involved at all levels, to those who drop in occasionally but remain crucial to the extended family of the space. I'd love to see more of that happening at larger and smaller scales over the years as We the ever-curious People leave this bumbling self-hating cannibalistic State in our dust. I'd love to learn more about how and where these spaces of intellectual freedom already exist and persist and resist. I'm under no illusion that organizations like Wendy's Subway are alone in this effort. This is what humans do. We share information. We love to. If the State wants to continue to work against this natural tendency, that is the State's prerogative. It makes me so angry to see the disregard for public intellectual health. But it does not surprise me at all. If I was the current United States of America, I would also be doing everything in my power to try to keep the people uninformed so that my violence, narcissism, and fragility could be maintained. Most definitely. There are no surprises here. At all.

Do you feel that libraries and archives - especially those within independent, hybrid spaces like WS—have a critical role to play in resistance? Tell me how you would define this, both generally and specifically in these times / facing the current administration.

The more we can teach ourselves and one another from the margins, the easier it will be to eschew and deconstruct the status quo-serving centers. I wish I knew more public librarians, because I only have an abstract sense of what their work is like. Its glories and frustrations. Hearing myself respond to your questions, Lynne, I'm realizing I want to know so much more about what the Life of the Mind currently looks like in the public sector. There's nuance that I don't know about yet. I want to know. I want to know where their wildernesses are.

I want, always, to know more about the Life of the Mind in the public sector ... let's plan a MOOC!

How is WS already actively working towards resistance—even if you would use the word to describe programming that isn't specifically "activist" in nature? Have you added to or altered your programming at all in response to the current administration?

I was scheduled to staff the space on November 9th, and arrived there mid morning (after stopping by my best friend's house for the bleakest breakfast of my entire life) and found myself writing a note for our Instagram feed and eventually also our window that read

"Wendy's Subway is open for organization and communion. Bring your tears, your heavy silence, your fiercest texts, and your gentlest, your anger, your tender hearts – and most of all – your resilient human spirit out into the world today. People are in danger – we are responsible for righting this wrong."

And throughout the day the space functioned like that for me. My dad doesn't live far away, and he stopped by. So did a friend who lives in the neighborhood. And then in the evening the rest of the board arrived and we sat and talked together and sketched strategies for personal, and institutional wellness. We read to one another, we critiqued the readings, we shared academic insights, and critiqued those too. Soon after that we screened Adam Curtis's HyperNormalisation (2016) and facilitated a discussion of it directly afterward. We began to make arrangements to screen a film by Adam and Zack Khalil that takes as a starting point that for First Nations folk, the Endtimes came ages ago when the USA was just a baby monster, not the adolescent terror we know today and specifically looks at Ojibwe modes of reckoning with centuries old, relentless, genocidal destruction. And on Thanksgiving Day, staffed the space and posted on social media that I'd be there providing an alternative to the holiday, fasting and learning about the folks who lived here before Europeans invaded. That was good. A few folks stopped by. And then there was the programming lull of the Winter season, and now here we are re-emerging in Spring with programming and selves informed by those excruciating days but also looking and feeling a lot more like ourselves again I think. And continuing to program with hybridity in mind because that is crucial regardless of the nightmare occupying the Oval Office.

Through our residency program, recently hosting Ola [Ronke, of the Free Black Women's Library, https://thefreeblackwomanslibrary.tumblr.com] and Makhzin [publication in residence, http://www.makhzin.org] and upcoming, KAF [collective, http://www.kafcollective.com], we're really trying to think through what an ethics of hospitality can look like – from inviting another organization to occupy our space, and then extend an invitation to other writers, artists, etc... to run workshops, lead discussions, and select titles that have been important to them to be added to our collection. It feels important to be having workshops on translating Iraqi poets (Mona Kareem), or using vernacular language as resistance (Marwa Helal) in the context of the residency with Makzhin, which is a bilingual English Arabic journal, or workshops on imagining borderless community or panel discussions on radical pedagogy (both of which are forthcoming in April and May with KAF).

I also think that our ongoing collaborations with libraries in Mexico City–building those alliances and friendships is crucial work to be doing right now.

It seems like Wendy's Subway is focused primarily on (much needed) local/on the ground work (already a struggle to fund and maintain, I know well!). Just out of curiosity, though, has the team spoken about how and if you'd ever want to move into providing any non-local, virtual/digital resources or programming? How are you archiving and documenting the events you are having? I often find that even archival / library spaces have not actually made the leap into keeping an active archive of their own activities / events. Do you take video or audio?

As we've grown and become accustomed to the pace and practice of running this space, we've begun to consider adding an archiving layer to our efforts. To my knowledge that's a newer consideration. You're so right, though, the irony of that!

We are working towards digitizing our library catalog and turning that database into a research/writing tool for readers to continue to extend the thinking and writing work we do with those books in the space. And we also have a partial (though growing) archive of events that have taken place at Wendy's (with recordings of talks and readings). In our residency program, we're thinking specifically about how to archive and document ongoing month- or two-month long activities and conversations by developing publications out of each residents' stay.

Less a question about WS and more about these spaces in general: do you feel that libraries are used and appreciated in the US as much as they could be? Do the people in your life actively use libraries/archives? Do you feel that there is any cultural disconnect between our patterns of behavior and library/archive usage? I walk into a library and feel immediately at home, simultaneously relieved and excited. What about you?

There's something funny that happens with me between entering a library and the moment of opening a book. In the past few years I've noticed something about myself, and it's that I love books, but hate reading. And the more I look into that internal conflict I can tell it's about how my internal experience of agency and freedom and resource clash with external demands around mastery. Looking back, I wish I could re-teach myself how to read. Wish I could undo what my elite education taught me about a relationship to books. There's so much there. So much about the crisis of finding time to read, so much about lack of exposure to author's whose life experience better paralleled my own. I can't speak to how libraries function for people in general, but growing up there were books everywhere and yet so little time or energy to read them. That's a painful part of this for me, and I'm doing my best to reflect on it and let in new gestures. Like reading aloud with friends, and generally opening up my experience of books and moving past their being objects to be consumed in isolation and perfectly to their functioning more as conversational talismans and touchstones, whether in whole or part.

Could folks be using / relying on Wendy's Subway more heavily to support resistance movements and other community efforts towards change? How?

There's a lot of information within these walls about histories of resistance. Particularly in the Middle East and in Europe (and you could add in Latin America, Mexico Specifically–but also we have a good collection of feminist periodicals and journals from the seventies, and of radical poetry and experimental writing). But aside from researching old models, we've hosted activists that needed space to meet in the past. And that's an important thing we'd like to continue doing as much as we're able.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Our doors are wide open!

Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves (New York City, 1980) is an artist chiefly concerned with postcolonial ethnobotany working in the mediums of scholarship, diorama, corporeal wisdom, archival gesture and language. Greaves has been published in About Place Journal, The Recluse, and The Poetry Project Newsletter.

She lives and works in New York City where she is young mother of The Florxal Review—a global journal of postcolonial ethnobotany foregrounding black femme plant life – and where she is completing work on The Bulletin of Wilderness and Academy: an introductory conclusion to unschoolMFA forthcoming from Organic Electric Industries.

Galleries of her documentary photography and Afrofuturist dioramas are viewable on Instagram via @TerraBot and @SuperModelStudioPractice respectively.

Lynne DeSilva-Johnson is a queer interdisciplinary creator, curator, educator, and facilitator working in performance, exhibition, and publication in conversation with new media. She is a Visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute and the founder and managing editor of The Operating System, as well as libraries editor at Boog City. Lynne is the author of GROUND, blood atlas, and Overview Effect, co-author of A GUN SHOW with Adam Sliwinsk/So Percussion, and co-editor of the anthologies RESIST MUCH, OBEY LITTLE: Inaugural Poems for the Resistance, and In Corpore Sano: Creative Practice and the Challenged Body. Recent or forthcoming publication credits include Drunken Boat, Brooklyn Poets Anthology, Gorgon Poetics, Vintage Magazine, Wave Composition, PostMortem/MadGleam, and a Panthalassa Pamphlet from Tea & Tattered Pages Press. She performs often, resists always, and lives in Bed Stuy, Brooklyn.