

On the Dark Side, Oh Yeah Phoebe Kreutz Makes 'em Laugh, Sorta

BY JUSTIN REMER

Phoebe Kreutz
Big Lousy Moon

Phoebe Kreutz is the Dorothy Parker of AntiFolk's Algonquin Round Table. Possessing a sharp wit and a knack for wordplay, she writes unpretentious songs full of humor tempered with melancholy. In fact, "tempered with" might not be the right description; the humor in Phoebe's songs comes from the melancholy.

"I knew how I wanted it when we said hello," Kreutz narrates in "Birdy in the Driveway," a song about a one-night stand while on tour. "I would watch you come, and you would watch me go."

But don't get the impression that this is dark, bitter stuff. If anything, the best descriptor for her work is whimsical. The second song on her new album, *Big Lousy Moon*, is called "Oh, Elizabeth I," and it's a big, silly pop song about the Virgin Queen (a moniker "which seems to me awfully personal," notes Kreutz). "All Summer Long" is a laid-back celebration of free time, featuring the catchy, adolescent-sounding chorus: "Every day is getting awesomer and awesomer and awesomer and awesomer ... All summer long."

The best material on this album, though, is the smiling-through-the-sadness stuff. "Song to Make You Cry" is a laundry list of sad things for a hurtful lover to think about: "that Smiths song that you never let me play," "your kitten that was hitten by that car." "Lesbian Cowgirl" plays like a chuckle-heavy same-sex redux of one of Marty Robbins's gunfighter ballads,

but it still ends mournfully with our heroine riding the range alone. There's also a welcome, slightly spiffier re-recording of "Bull Run Beer Run," which was originally on

Kreutz' EP *We Gotta Go*. "Bull Run Beer Run" seems like a darker sister to "All Summer Long," painting a moody picture of time wasted drinking and smoking in a graveyard south.

As great as this CD

true of the album's centerpiece, "The Ballad of Throat Culture," where the narrator dreams of starting a band and envisions all the *Behind the Music*-style exploits that will ensue. It's amusing on record, but it works best in person.

The only other complaint worth lodging is that the album is too darn short. Kreutz offsets her meatier songs with mere morsels lasting two



Eric Lippe photo

A lot of the pleasure of Kreutz's music is watching her perform live as she slips from character to character.

is, it feels like there is something missing.

minutes or less. The album could easily be twice as long. On the other hand, you could probably just listen to it twice.

Visit www.phoebekreutz.com for more information.

Justin Remer makes films, music, and reviews. Visit www.elasticnonoband.com to learn more.

She is such an able performer—frankly, such a skilled actor—that a lot of the pleasure of her music is watching her perform live as she slips from character to character. This is especially

The Man, The Myth. The Myth ...

Scott Alexander Just Wants to Be Your Friend

BY JONATHAN BERGER

Scott Alexander
Scott Alexander Makes Friends

Scott Alexander, an over-sized, dorky-looking bassoon player, seems to be an artist unlike any other. "Classifying my music has been a real problem for me," he says. He's something special, something different. How? He compares himself to "Jonathan Richman with ADHD, or Lou Reed if he had had rich parents." Was Lou Reed's family poor? And what about Scott Alexander's family? "It's not that my parents were rich or anything, in fact they were pretty cheap ..."

But parsimonious family finances don't begin to describe what's unique about Alexander's art. His songs are non-linear, non-rhythmic (he claims his material is "catchy for six seconds at a time") and very, very strange. These qualities serve as his greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses. Highs and lows are all available on the new *Scott Alexander Makes Friends*, a three-song suite that promises thematic unity in its title, though it doesn't really deliver. The three songs are of a piece only in that they are not really about anything in particular.

The first song, "Unfortunately Fat," is about how uncomfortable the great make Alexander. Like all of his material, it is accomplished, intellectually stimulating, difficult, and kind of confusing. The guitar work, reminiscent of Billy Bragg, is driving and potent until he starts mildly strumming, changing directions for a few measures, before going off to try something else. Of course, the new thing won't last long either. As some say, "if you don't like a Scott Alexander song, wait a minute."

The second track, "Fucking Technology," adds his bassoon to the mix while the lyrics approach Alexander's difficulties with the 21st century. "With anything but books I rarely toyed; degrees mean nothing to recruiters if you don't play with computers" is one of the occasional rhymes strewn throughout this number, a strategy rarely applied elsewhere on the disc.

"I happen to hold a degree in ethnomusicology, meaning I've seriously studied music from a cultural context at an

acclaimed university," says Alexander. He graduated UCLA magna cum laude, and it shows. His musical sense is far more intellectual than visceral.

There are vigorous moments in the art, though, as in the final song on the EP, "What Other People Think." The instrumental refrain again hints at a young Bragg, and again artfully escapes such comparisons by changing tempos, seeming to signify the ADHD he includes as part of his self-description. His transitions seem to represent a thoughtful change of mind. It's an interesting strategy, though very distracting.

But the music on the disc is only part of the story. At shows and on CD, Alexander begs his listeners to go to his website and his associated myspace page. Therein, the greater meta-story of *Scott Alexander Makes Friends* comes out.

The title alone tells you most of what you need to know—Scott Alexander is seeking friendship from the masses. Underneath that, of course, is the tale of a funny quirky kid with a desperate need for attention who will use whatever strategies he can to increase his popularity. The myspace-only monologue "I want to be your friend," explains what he's doing, what his aims are, and what means he'll use to attain them.

"While some of us may temporarily feel dissatisfaction with those we are friends with," Alexander explains online, "I find it far more common to feel dissatisfied with those we are not friends with ... My personal determination to realize music as a career stems largely from my desire for more relationships."

Among his strategies for personal success: an earnest offer to interact on a personal level. He emails his audience and requests the same. After a show, he goes around the room thanking the crowd for coming out, after having distributed his fresh-baked cookies to any and all comers. They're vegan cookies, but so what? They're delicious!

The recipe for his cookies is on his website, as well as many other vegan recipes. There's also a witty public service announcement, and requests for further dialogue. He set up an



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internet hotline where people can discuss any topic, but it seems to be down now.

That sounds like a reasonable microcosm of his friend-making vision. Alexander's music is non-traditional, and, as such, not entirely approachable. His other pursuits, however, and his apparent earnestness just may bring you in.

For more info please visit www.scottalexandermusic.com and www.myspace.com/scottalexander.

Jonathan Berger is the music editor of Boog City.

K. Lorraine Graham
Carlsbad, Calif.
from Dear [Blank] I Believe in Other Worlds

Pacified near world-weary life moments of babies or computers and women without babies. But I wanted to write a beautiful poem. Seeking reference we get in the tub with Baroness Elsa and a propeller cap it's better if I'm naked she says and we are. A rounded spine and bloody nose discovered in special collections, small helicopters, feather dusters to tickle the law. Release that good idea. Remember you are here because you love what's subsumed in bureaucracy, in courtyards raining inside, flip flopping through at night, in wool. That day we greeted soldiers younger than ourselves and we were full of it's the simple truth—

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David

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Math Class

Facial Geometry

By Maureen Seaton, Neil de la Flor,
and Kristine Snodgrass
NeO Pepper Press

By Sandra Simonds

In some sense I was raised by poetry
philistines. Collaboration in poetry, I was
taught, was something to be shunned, much
less read. But last year Kristine Snodgrass
asked me to perform a part in her chapbook
Facial Geometry for an academic conference
in Tallahassee, Fla. Yes, perform a part. One of
the authors, Maureen Seaton, was unable to
perform, so I got my chance under the bright
lights of the conference classroom. During our

rehearsal something remarkable happened: a
symphony of voices emerged from the pages of
the book. The following is from "Opera Bouffe":

Venus, my oriflamme! My sweet shield,
such is a cannon. Place a mirror
to it and
we will all remain constant in the depth of
the light, the tunnel. Pull something
from me. Pull me a tin or an overturned
bowl. We had water you see? It is
gone. It
walked down to the shore to be with her
sister blood. We swish and swish. We
sway to the light.

Such was a billowy stream—arms and legs
of cannon fodder floating and the way
armor peels away like a hospital gown—in
the name of spears and lately
hazmats
we love yummy war. We do! We lick it!

One must consider the gap between these
two "stanzas." I suspect that they were written
by two of the three different authors. To the
poem's credit the transition between the voices
is not seamless. If it were, the poem would lose
momentum. Indeed it is the sometimes slight shift
in voice that infuses these poems with mad and
vibrant energy.

The book is also of its time, by which I
mean it tackles the political landscape of the
modern world—war, gender inequality,
marriage, and motherhood. All are given an
avant-garde spin. For example, as in this
passage from the eponymous "Facial
Geometry":

I sat upright in the boat of freedom. All
around me congress held sessions of
menthol and linearity. I was deposed of my
inhibitory rights and swelled into
ports of call. A crowd deployed and
there he was: dressed up in desert
clothes and

**Collaboration in poetry, I
was always taught, was
something to be shunned,
much less read.**

grinning digital and "Iraqi". On the back:
Me as the Enemy. Love, Matt.

There's another source of face interference.
That's Timbuktu. Here, in this
Timbuk kind of place, faces are engraved
into treasure trunks and on the sides of
royal sitting chairs. Here, where the
ancients display their sex appeal, we
challenge them with our sex (face) appeal.

Ultimately, this is a brilliant little book that
concerns the self among many selves within
history. The subject matter springs from the
collaborative form and could not have been
written in any other way.

Visit www.tashogi.com/neopp.htm for
further information.

Sandra Simonds is the author of four
chapbooks and the editor of *Wildlife*, an
experimental poetry magazine.

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QUEENS: If You Can Make it Out of There, You Can Make it Anywhere

BY CHRISTINA STRONG

I know why it's hard to leave Queens; the public transportation makes it difficult to get out once you arrive. This is true. If you are traveling in Queens on the weekends, the express train is running local and some of the lines are shut down. If you are going home from work during the weekday, it's a pain to leave your home and go back to Manhattan or Brooklyn for the same reason. I know this is true because I lived in Long Island City, and I rarely left once I got there. Why was it so hard? Because if I wanted to go out I was usually heading down to the East Village or the LES, and this required getting on at least two trains. I once knew someone in San Francisco who prided himself on jumping on and off buses to make a connection to his destination. Buses are the way to get around in SF, but that doesn't mean I want to ride on six of them to get from the Lower Haight to Chinatown/North Beach.

I'm the other sort of commuter. If there are more than two connections then I don't wanna go. I do not run for buses or trains. If I miss a train, fine. I'm usually going to work anyway, which is the last place I want to be. Why rush? Last I checked employers don't cut off employees' hands, especially in my line of work—graphic design—because, you know, we press buttons all day. I just might hit the delete button with my stub of an arm instead of "apple-v," and I wouldn't want to have your book or website deleted with a stroke of a key, now would I?



Citibank Tower, Long Island City

My feeling is that Brooklyn feels like Brooklyn, and Queens feels a bit too much like Long Island, which to me, is the suburbs. It's the land of strip malls, sugary coffee drinks from Dunkin' Donuts, culs-de-sac, and backyards. Queens also feels like the show *All in the Family*—which I had to endure on TV and in real life—and the Kitty Genovese murder, which happened well before my time, but still typifies old New York: a young woman screamed while being stabbed and no one helped. The story of her murder is a little more nuanced than one sentence, but I do remember New York City having a bad reputation in the 1970s, and with good reason. I remember my father buying the *Daily News* with the headline, "Ford to City: Drop Dead," and his yelling, "See, New York is a horrible place!"

"A horrible place" is not a term I would use to describe Queens. After all, what's famous about this borough? No, it's not Shea Stadium or The World's Fair artifacts. It's that The Ramones are from Forest Hills. I saw them at the now-defunct Agora Ballroom in West Hartford, Conn. in 1986. I don't remember the show too much, but I do remember the riot outside. It says something about American culture when a band can incite a riot.

I remember listening to Reagan Youth, another band from Forest Hills. I never got to see them but after visiting Forest Hills a number of times I can see why bands like these would spring

forth. Forest Hills is the kind of place I visit and I tell myself it could have been worse, I could have grown up here. Here, next to the Boulevard of Death (Queens Boulevard). The nickname Boulevard of Death is a real one. Queens Boulevard extends as wide as 16 lanes and 73 pedestrians have been killed crossing it. My guess is many of the pedestrians killed were older people who can't, and shouldn't have to, run across up to 16 lanes to go to the pharmacy. It even warrants its own wiki page (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queens_Boulevard). The very familiar 1960s brick high-rises lend an air of another musical artist, not from Queens, but from Southern California, Frank Zappa. The developers who built these monstrosities are not singing, but buying into every song and lyric off of Zappa and the Mothers of Invention's album *We're Only In It For The Money*.

I want to mention why I've been to Forest Hills to begin with; to help a friend clean his recently deceased mother's apartment. This story is about friendship, NYC style. I have this belief that people in New York are friends with other people primarily because they want something from them. They want booty, contraband, a poetry reading gig, a book published, an art gallery opening, a job, or something. Now I admit to being cynical, jaded, negative, and pessimistic, and I understand that New Yorkers don't have a lot of time and so cut through the bullshit, right to the "Hey man, can you help me." On the other hand, this is someone I've been friends with for seven years so



Faux-retro diner, Elmhurst

we're beyond the "scratch my back" phase of our relationship. So when a friend calls and needs help, and wants me to meet him at nine o'clock on a Saturday in front of the Home Depot on West 23rd Street to get garbage bags and cleaning supplies and then go out to Forest Hills, what I am saying is that, despite my cynicism, negativity, jaded outlook, and pessimistic viewpoint of the entire planet, I am a loyal friend (who was also paid \$60 to help). I will note that I didn't ask for any payment but I'm certainly not going to refuse it.

After leaving Home Depot with my friend M and his friend A we convinced him that yes, we do need a taxi to take two mops, four gallons of Simply Green cleaning fluid, one 50-pound box of contractor garbage bags, three 2-liter Cokes, and a bag of zip ties to Forest Hills. Then the day turned into "Make Fun of Queens" and "Let's make M feel better" by all of us running off a series of crass, sick, scatological, rude (and very un p.c.) jokes all day long. It was a lot of "you had to be there" kind of jokes, ending with us eating at what once was called Pizzeria Uno at the end of the day because the sushi restaurant was closed. (We found a hair in our dessert, which got us \$25 knocked off our bill.)

We witnessed a woman wearing a see-through white t-shirt dress walking across Queens Boulevard. Maybe I'm missing something, but this see through T-shirt is something normally worn at the beach, over a bathing suit, not on a major thoroughfare.

After all, what's famous about this borough? No, it's not Shea Stadium or The World's Fair artifacts. It's that The Ramones are from Forest Hills. I saw them at the now-defunct Agora Ballroom in West Hartford, Conn. in 1986. I don't remember the show too much, but I do remember the riot outside. It says something about American culture when a band can incite a riot.

This particular woman was holding hands, walking with her boyfriend, and this prompted more crass comments; not from M, but from A and me, both women.

This tells me that women are much harsher and more judgmental of other women and that I've got a sick sense of humor that isn't repeatable in a family newspaper. The former is debatable, while the latter stems from many viewpoints, including a class-conscious perspective that I would be willing to have a healthy discussion about elsewhere.

While not being the hotspot that Manhattan has always been and Brooklyn has been turning into, Queens has redeeming qualities. Under the Long Island Railroad and one of the 7 train stops in Woodside one can lose their liver and



Echelon Condos, Long Island City

possibly get lost themselves at one of the five or so Irish pubs in the area. It lends itself to the Chet Baker song "Let's Get Lost," and if you can find your way around the disoriented numbered streets—someone please explain 23rd Road, 23rd Avenue, and 23rd Street to me—and get back on the train, I congratulate you.

If you feel like taking a pilgrimage to the jazz greats, then a visit to the Flushing Cemetery is in order, resting place of Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie. Andrew Goodman, a civil rights activist who was killed during "Freedom Summer," is buried in Mount Judah Cemetery.

If you're interested in live entertainment or at least a thought slash visual process, then visit PS1 or the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, or The Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria. Developers have already discovered Long Island City, but I implore you to hang out and explore and have yourself a genuine "New York Experience" before Queens is also depleted of its rich history, which is much more than a designated parking lot for Long Island commuters or rich developers cashing in on a Manhattan skyline view.

Christina Strong has recently discovered the blog www.lostnewyorkcity.blogspot.com and she can now read even more blogs and not upkeep her own. She can be found at www.xtina.org and www.openmouth.org.

Christina Strong photos

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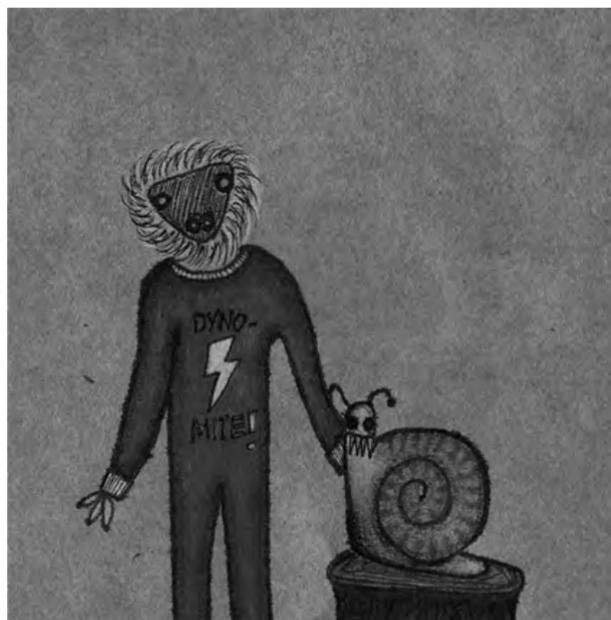
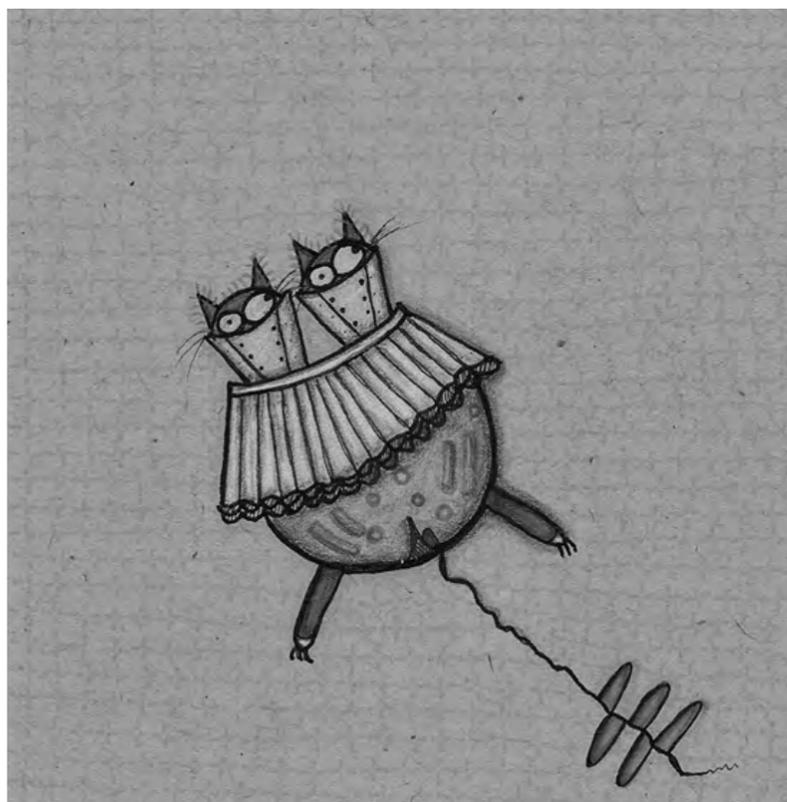
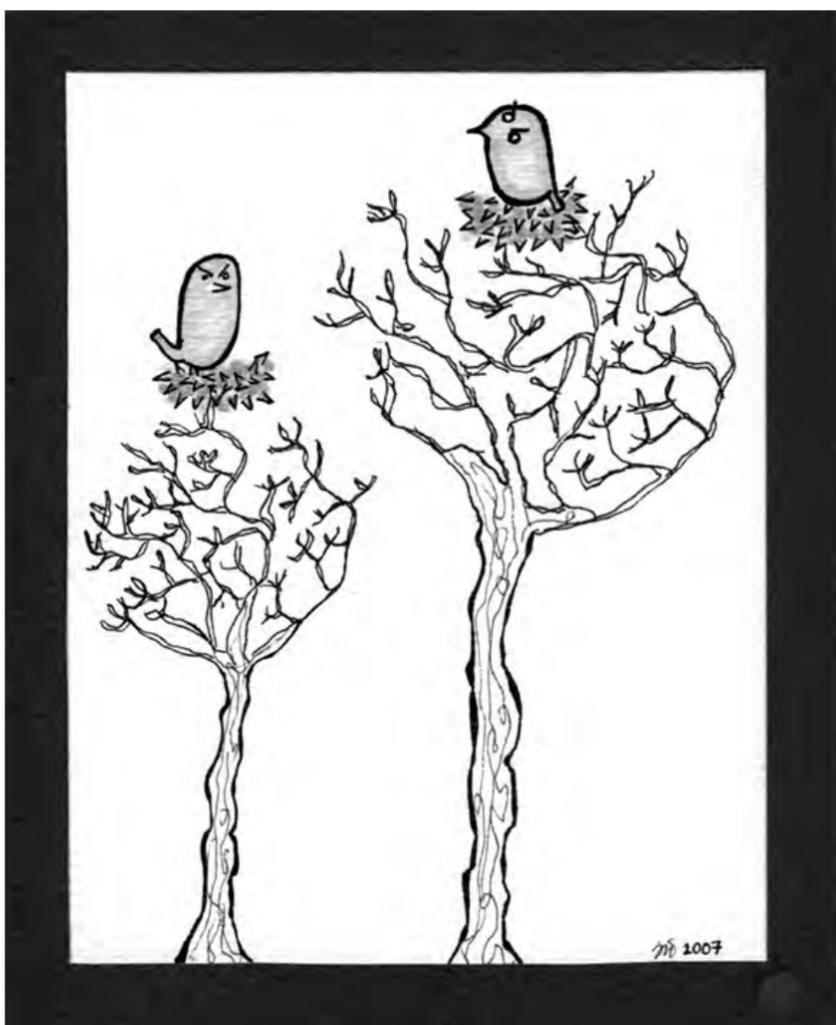
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Stephanie Wu

Chelsea



About the Artist My name is Stephanie Wu and I've been bouncing between Manhattan and Brooklyn since moving to NYC almost four years ago. I live and work in Manhattan with my baby bird (my fiancé). The cat with the large white ruff you see in some of the images is based on our beloved kitty, Gretchen, who passed away last March. I struggle every day to find time away from my day job to imagine/create, and I am filled with persistent daydreams of space piranhas, low-riding shrimp, disagreeable mollusks, depressed black widow spiders, and lots of birds and hatchlings. To say hello, e-mail at ruffled.bird@gmail.com. My website, www.ruffled-bird.com, is under construction (being built by Cecilia Wu) to coincide with the launch of my first minicomic, *The Fall*, at SPX this October!

COMICS

THE NEW LIFE

©2001 BY GARY SULLIVAN



WHILE ATTENDING THE MLA, STUDENT EVAN SHAWN IS BITTEN BY A RADIOACTIVE RESUME...

HE IS HEAD NOW SWOLLEN BEYOND CREDIBLE PROPORTIONS, EVAN DELUDES HIMSELF INTO BELIEVING THAT HIS IDEOLOGY IS THE ONLY WAY...



*'NUFF SAID! — EDS.

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...TO BE CONTINUED?!

These comics originally appeared in Rain Taxi Review of Books and have been collected and published as the third issue of Elsewhere (Elsewhere #3: "The New Life"). Order online at www.garysullivan.blogspot.com, or check your local Manhattan comic book store.

THE NEW LIFE

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THOUGHTS PASS OVERHEAD LIKE RECONNAISSANCE PLANES,

AS WE STEP GINGERLY OVER THEIR SHADOWS. WITH NOT ONE LETTER OF CIVILIZATION'S ALPHABET



WE ARE LIKE LOVERS AND THE LAND — OUR BELOVED.

AS LONG AS THE EARTH TURNS AROUND AND AROUND INSIDE US, THE WAR WILL NEVER END...



THE NEW LIFE

The Author Gary Sullivan © 1998



A Vision in a Dream!

August 5, 1998. After reading poetry all night, Beatrice & I fell into a fitful sleep. A large, talking Caterpillar entered my dream, with charts & diagrams he said would "explain everything"



"POETRY, LIKE DNA, IS PASSED ALONG FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT..."

"THE IMAGISTS BEGAT THE OBJECTIVISTS WHO BEGAT BLACK MOUNTAIN WHO BEGAT THE BEATS WHO BEGAT THE NEW YORK SCHOOL WHO BEGAT THE L=A=N=GUAGE MOVEMENT..."



I awoke the next morning filled with anxiety...

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on the verge

urban frontiers
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travel writing reports
open newness

Humboldts of the urban
beat, metro

threads ravel into
top list takers.

"Sunday morning, early dawning"
the alternative economy
musical bottles
cans, carts in the alley
to the park.

Where things were once made
when the struggle for the working day
was graspable, at hand, demands
collective and

now no nostalgia forms
for what you've never known

"shiny shiny boots
of leather" adorn a utopia
"I am tired I am weary"
worried to kiss the boot.

Individual hours annihilate
live work.

Kristin Palm

San Francisco

from City of Conscience

*

alluvial earth

geodiferous limestone

lias limestone

salt

quicksand

yellow clay

*

How we use the land:

turn detritus into art

low-income housing

farming

dumping

free parking

bonfires & barbecues

hold and wait for the boom

*

Things I loved:

the river

the library

Dally in the Alley

empty buildings

knowing people everywhere (& liking them)

Ford-Wyoming Drive-in

old socialists

sitting under I-94 overpass

biking on Belle Isle

feeling invincible

*

Things that scared me:

wild dogs

Constance getting punched on the bus

expensive homes on shitty streets

mice

Workers World Party

Parker Foods

gunshots (on New Year's Eve they sound like fireworks)

Dave getting carjacked

empty buildings

*

The 'real' space of our city contains:

(a) an ice rink

(b) a department store

(c) a glittering office tower

(d) "a startling paucity of vision"

About the Poets

Jeff Derksen is the author of *Transnational Muscle Cars* and he recently edited "Poetry and the Long Neoliberal Moment" for *West Coast Line* magazine. **K. Lorraine Graham** (cover) is the author of three chapbooks, *Terminal Humming*, *See it Everywhere*, and *Large Waves to Large Obstacles*, and the recently released chapdisk *Moving Walkways*. She has just completed the extended manuscript of *Terminal Humming*. **Kristin Palm's** full-length work, *The Straits*, from which her work is excerpted, is forthcoming from Palm Press in Los Angeles. She lived in Detroit for many years and now lives in the Mission district of San Francisco.

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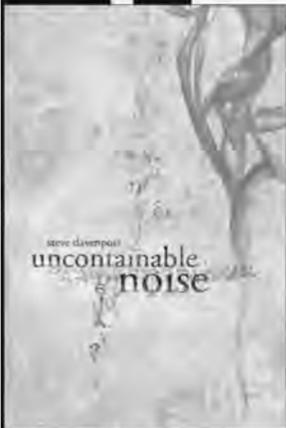
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