

Occupy at One



Stacking Up: Betsy Fagin on Occupy and The People's Library

BY CHRISTOPHE CASAMASSIMA

In the last 40 years or so we have witnessed the slow disappearance of the public square as a locus of the free transmission, exchange, and deliberation of ideas. But when librarians got together to organize and catalogue a few thousand books donated to the Occupy movement, the public square received a crucial resurgence of vitality. In no time the collection grew to over 5,500 titles, and the People's Library became a common space for information, education, debate—even relaxation and fun. That is, until the City of New York stepped in.

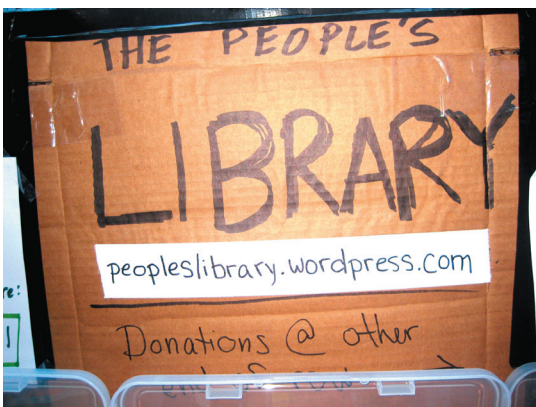
In the wee hours of Nov. 15, 2011, the New York Police Department raided Zuccotti Park, the stronghold of the burgeoning Occupy movement, only 45 minutes after protesters were warned to evacuate. In its aftermath, police and sanitation workers razed a majority of the books belonging to the library. Six months later, on May 24, however, Occupy Wall Street and several librarians filed a Federal lawsuit against Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, and Sanitation Commissioner John Doherty, among other city

officials and employees. The charges included the unconstitutional and unlawful seizure, damage, and destruction of the Occupy Wall Street People's Library, and a request for a total of \$48,000 in compensatory and punitive damages.

Amid the clamor surrounding culpability—most interestingly is the finger pointing between the mayor's office and the park's owner, Brookfield Properties—it is obvious among Occupiers that the value of the library cannot be determined

by cash money. Although some of the books themselves can be replaced, what's at stake here is actually universal human rights—specifically, the right to freedom of speech, the right to reasonable search and seizure, and the right of due process, all of which have been denied.

After a summer vacation on Governor's Island, the growing People's Library has moved to the Paul Robeson Freedom School in Williamsburg. While the school might be an appropriate venue, the future of the library rests on securing a safe and permanent location for the catalogue. I recently spoke with Betsy Fagin, a librarian at the People's Library, about her role in the movement, the function of the library, and its future.



What at first attracted you to the library sciences? To activism? Is there a logical connection between the two?

I've always gravitated toward libraries. I worked as an assistant in many libraries before it dawned on me that I should pursue a career in it. Activism is difficult for me to separate out from regular life. In my thinking it is as integral as any other aspect of life and not more suited to one profession or another. We are all responsible for creating the world we want to live in together, in whatever capacities we find ourselves.

What, as an artist, as an activist, as a community member, attracts you to the potential for the library to be that locus of revolutionary thinking and action? Why not the cafés, the universities, the

local Mom and Pop businesses?

Quick answer: money! Cafés, universities, local businesses are all businesses—you have to pay to play in those spaces. Libraries are still (at the moment) free and open to the public. We are losing public space at an alarming rate—the commons has all but disappeared. As we've seen with Occupy, politicians and moneyed business interests have the ability (power) to keep people out of public space when they choose—they pay to change the rules. Libraries are, among other things, storehouses of all of human knowledge and experience. If we can't be free to play among our most daring visions and brilliant ideas where can we go? What's left for us?

Libraries have been, traditionally, not

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Never-ending Participation: Activism and Occupy Wall Street

BY BRENDA IJIMA

So long as you have food in your mouth, you have solved all questions for the time being.

—Franz Kafka

The following was delivered at the panel discussion "Never-Ending Participation: Activism and Occupy Wall Street" that took place in August at the 6th annual Welcome to Boog City poetry and music festival.

Good afternoon everyone! I want to touch upon numerous points today; those announced in our Boog City festival program, the critical points that Tyrone Williams and Thom Donovan's papers will navigate us through, as well as a few additional concerns that seem crucial. For example, I'd like to open a discussion that focuses on our sociability, space, and activism to get to the core question—what exactly do we want to change? How are we actively envisioning a different organizational system for humans that has less to do with utopian musings (so as to avoid utopia's

What exactly do we want to change? How are we actively envisioning a different organizational system for humans that has less to do with utopian musings (so as to avoid utopia's critical failure to find its referent in an actual existing reality).

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OCCUPY AT ONE

Can You Remain a Poet and Be an Activist?

BY THOM DONOVAN

The following was delivered at the panel discussion "Never-Ending Participation: Activism and Occupy Wall Street" that took place in August at the 6th annual Welcome to Boog City poetry and music festival.

I have been asked to talk about the relationship between poetry and the occupations that are ongoing in North America and throughout the world. I come at this request with some trepidation, for, among other reasons, how I have not actively participated in Occupy Wall Street at the level of actions or affinity groups since late this fall. Despite this lack of contact with the actions and general assemblies—what we may consider the heart of the occupations, its radical kernel—I have had contact with the occupations mainly through various friends throughout poetry and art communities. So my experience of the movement is mediated by these relationships, and the sense that aesthetics can and must play a central role in any viable social movement. In a somewhat haphazard way I would like to focus on a few different aspects of the occupations that have interested me with regard to poetry and art.

It has been said before, but the People's Microphone (or Human Microphone if you prefer) provides a qualitatively different way of participating in a traditional poetry reading. Closer to Slam poetry, though not nearly as codified generically, it provides the unique experience of speaking aloud a poem intermittently while one listens—I would add, often for the first time. This is an experience that interests me, that is intrinsically interesting, since it produces a relationship in which one undergoes the poem somatically, thus empathically. The poem lives (on) in your vocal chords and lips. It provides an instant communal bond, even when one disagrees with the content, perhaps even more so when one disagrees.

My experience of Poetry Assembly at Zuccotti Park was exhilarating. Not because I

found the poetry "groundbreaking" (innovation was rarely a measure of success), but because of the democratizing of the format, and because of the continuous feedback between the reading and the street where anyone could wander in to recite a poem, or, more likely, rap. If formatting determines not just content, but how we gather, than exploring new modalities for participation is absolutely essential for change. Poets have complained ceaselessly about the fourth wall of the poetry reading as



a genre. Certainly the People's Mic offers one solution to this problem.

Something my experience of Occupy Poetry (an affinity group devoted to intervening in public space via poetry) reinforced this past fall, was a sense that the "real" poetry of the Occupy movement lies in the procedures it has developed via the general assembly and of the strategic actions it has performed in the name of social and economic justice. This is a poetry of past civil rights movements, which is to say of laying one's body before the conscience of the world and the nation (King), of going to jail, of evading authorities, of strategy and inner resource.

On the other hand, Occupy Poetry underscored a disjunction between the way poets tend to behave within community (which is often organic and informal, if not anarchistic, when it is not reliant on hierarchies and institutions) and the procedures of the general assembly, which determine who speaks when, how decisions are made collectively, and more. Given the impasses faced by Occupy Poetry procedurally, my previous, and now still present, sense that poets should do something

of economic resources and the pervasiveness of a control society have forced our hand. The amazing thing about so many participants in the occupations is that, given their responsibilities in jobs, and to families/community, they have been able to participate at all. This winter and spring made it very clear to me that I could not participate in the Occupy movement the way I would most like to and continue to perform various kind of culture work for my community, including editing two books, writing criticism, and curating readings.

Activism by poets and artists abounds in our time within and without aesthetic communities. And the poems, to my mind, are often more substantial for this involvement.

other than poetry was also reinforced; which is to say, that poets should "give up" poetry if only to seek their poetics in another form of socially engaged activity. Take the case of Courbet, who became an administrator, or George Oppen, a union organizer. Activism by poets and artists abounds in our time within and without aesthetic communities. And the poems, to my mind, are often more substantial for this involvement.

But, but, but, part of the reason we're "occupying everything" (to use the motto of the UC student movement which preceded the current occupations) is because a consolidation

This kind of work, I believe, undergirds any viable social movement we have. In fact, I would go so far to say that no social movement can exist without these cultural labors being ongoing. This would seem to contradict my previous statement, that poets must do something else, that they must accept hiatuses if not seek them out. But I think there needs to be both. One must maintain the work they are doing in the face of a perceived crisis; they must also know when to adapt what they're doing to this crisis.

So in a feature I edited for the Poetry Foundation's *Harriet* weblog, David Buuck says that the work he is doing now has

Occupation Everywhere: Poetry and Politics

BY TYRONE WILLIAMS

The following was delivered at the panel discussion "Never-Ending Participation: Activism and Occupy Wall Street" that took place in August at the 6th annual Welcome to Boog City poetry and music festival.

Occupation everywhere—this might well describe the insurgency of outsider, experimental, innovative, spoken word, and other poetics against the perceived hegemony of a so-called mainstream dedicated to the traditions of the narrative and the lyric. But in reclaiming or co-opting the term mainstream, in his book of the same title, *Mainstream*, Michael Magee reminds us that all those poetic practices deemed marginal actually constitute the mainstream of poetic practices in the United States insofar as they have become a part of every facet of American culture. This is presumably a matter of actual numbers, a problem Seth Abramson and Stephen Burt, for instance, might pursue in their varying anxieties over tracking the "explosions" in the number of poets writing, if not reading, poetry in this country.

But if we take what I consider to be Magee's main point, that insofar as postmodern poetics permeate expressivity in general in this country, especially in advertising and popular culture, these practices assert not only a quantitative but also a qualitative advantage over the

outflanked but still entrenched minority of what had heretofore been known as the literary mainstream. Thus the question of the central v. the marginal, the mainstream v. the tributarial, is largely, if not only, a matter of institutional power. By institutional I mean not only the public and private educational system, in general, but also the bloc of media, libraries, bookstores (online and brick and mortar), mythologies, and historiographies that constitute, transmit, and reinforce the very concept of poetry.

No doubt these remaining links, however tenuous, between the most outlandish writing and speaking experiments and the immense history of poetics and poetry is why many have abandoned the moniker entirely. For example, despite its name, Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover's *New American Writing* almost always features what appear to be, at first glance (and often, on subsequent examinations), writings recognizable as poems. Of course, the magazine's title is expressive of its editorial openness to any form of writing, even those not easily categorized according to traditional literary genres. The point

here is that in choosing to publish "poems" under the general heading of "writing," they are signaling not only their openness to all modes of composition but also their recognition that generic writing remains an important resource for innovation. That many writers bristle when "poetry" is used to describe their language experiments is understandable. This is even if their impatience with generic pigeon-holing may reflect

either or both a determinate commitment to the mash-up and innovative, as well as mere laziness and cultivated ignorance regarding the

history of experimentation within the strictures of poetry and poetics..

These scenarios and issues are probably all too familiar for those who have been paying scrupulous attention to the implications of the various poetry skirmishes and wars. I simply want to mark this place, this moment, where and when poetry longs to become what it is not. It is here, now, between retention and protention, at the eternal, and thus indeterminate, border between the experimental and inscrutable, that poetry imagines itself as a god or goddess refusing the

solipsism of immortality for the ethical trappings of mortal responsibility. Or as some marine or landlocked behemoth moving "forward" or turning "back" to an amphibian existence, in short, a creature comfortable in the heavens and on earth, on land, and at sea, a monstrosity that wants to claim and occupy everywhere as its home.

Thus it is here, in this place, that the Occupation Movements appear to be precisely what poetry longs for: a mashing together of the private and public, an existence out in the "street," inhaling fresh air at last, among the "people." Nothing new here, either, as our history tells us, yet each new iteration of this desire to close the chasm between the "poetic" and the "language of the street or people" takes on different historical formations, formations whose efficacies writ large, however, are both directly and indirectly proportional to their institutionalization. This double, Janus-faced history and destiny of poetry in the United States, however oversimplified, is a reflection of the ambiguity of efficacy on general vis-à-vis an aesthetic, or anti-aesthetic, practice. Note: I am not talking about our responsibilities as citizens, as political, cultural, and social activists. Despite the example of Oppen, poetry and political or social activism are not necessarily mutually exclusive practices. Yet, the anxiety over the relation between aesthetic and extra-aesthetic activity haunts certain sectors of American poetry. No doubt much of this hand wringing can be

not changed in any radical way since the occupations, only taken on different strategies in relation to an altered field of struggle. Others I have spoken with have a similar position about their practices, saying that the struggle to calibrate aesthetic practice with social-political responsibility and resistance is continuously evolving.

Two of the projects I have worked on directly related to this calibration are a feature I edited for *Rethinking Marxism* that just came out this past month, "Poetry During OWS," and the blogging I did for *Harriet* this past April, previously alluded to. Here is the editorial statement I wrote for *Rethinking Marxism*, which explains how the feature was framed:

When I proposed editing a poetry feature to *Rethinking Marxism's* editors in summer 2011, my initial focus was on work by poets that critically engaged the ongoing economic and socio-political crisis of Neoliberalism. While corresponding with the editors, Occupy Wall Street happened, ushering in a mass movement against Capital and the disastrous relations that it has fostered in our contemporary world. As is historically typical of movements for social justice in the United States, many poets became vitally involved in the occupations.

The feature before you gathers some of the writing that poets have been generating in response to, and alongside, the occupations. Selecting participants, I wanted to provide a sample of a moment replete with possibilities for the future, glimpses and partial views of Now-time (Jetztzeit).

Offering few directives I only asked that the poets limit themselves to three criteria:

1. That they exemplify questions or problems integral to their poetry/poetics;
2. That they take into account the ongoing struggles for collective freedom and justice that the occupations represent; and
3. That their contributions be based in text/language.

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critical failure to find its referent in an actual existing reality). (See Rob Halpern's "Pornotopiaso," where he mentions Steven Marcus' work on pornography and utopia in *Damned the Caesars*, "Crisis Inquiry," Summer 2012, p. 97.) It has more to do with actual tangible work we conduct at the grass roots level—how do we as culture workers affect cultural and political policy through creative forms of activism, for example:

- What do we boycott?
- Where did we find a way not to spend money?
- How did we share resources?
- How do we communicate?
- What is our relationship to the community?
- What communities?
- What is her standpoint (our neighbor)?
- How will we engage our bodies?
- What is compassionate identification?

It is notable that the Occupy Wall Street movement successfully transitioned privately owned space into a makeshift commons through the valences of participatory politics. Much has been written about how late stage capitalism speeds up time and how time acceleration eats up or eradicates space, especially common, shared environments. OWS and the formation of an encampment in

Zuccotti Park on Sept. 17, 2011 presented a model for establishing a zone of assembly, a meeting ground: an ongoing recognizable location to gather and present energies, findings, strategies, and encouragements. This model was replicated throughout the United States in cities and towns.

Quite different than protest marches or rallies, which have much different temporal durations, the gatherings and living in at Zuccotti Park (privately owned by Brookfield Properties and intended by the owners for passive recreation) performed as a deterritorialized territory wrenching and/or negotiating space from seats of power and ownership. The modality of dismantling and reworking social and physical dynamics to engender political and social transformation is at the core of OWS. And as Bay Area poet and activist Lauren Levin points out, "'Empty' space is crowded—with ideology, deference, hierarchy, and fear, as well as with love and perseverance. In that crowd, we're searching for forms that allow action with others—forms that are self-reproducing, allow life-dense accrual, like a coral reef—but haven't hardened into script." (*Lauren Levin, "Preoccupation: Notes on Anne Boyer and Stephanie Young," www.lanaturnerjournal.com/books/levinboyerreview.html*) The rapidly shifting meanings of OWS contrast capitalism's stealthy ability

to mediate and control underlying meanings.

Zuccotti Park was reassigned as a zone of experience, a site where people could embrace the range of emotional valences that come with protest and political engagement—and engender an ecological (I'm using this word in place of "naturalized") maturity that developed among

Notable too, are the links between global warming and climate change with the proliferation of revolutions worldwide.

an approachable polis. That is a revolving group of people willingly open, engaged, welcoming, and primed for discourse, action, and interrelation—although, by no means representationally equal to use a keystone of democratic diction—one of the most abused words we humans employ. Green Card carriers and those with vulnerable immigration statuses expressed varying concerns with OWS, finding it a troubling space, even dangerous. Much discussion was made about the issues surrounding inclusion/exclusion and gender dominance in all aspects of participation.

There are impassioned precedents for OWS. The Arab Spring brought social consciousness to revolutionary involvement. Tahrir Square in Cairo prepped Americans with a paradigm of

contemporary revolutionary strategy using space itself as a social tool. Notable too, are the links between global warming and climate change with the proliferation of revolutions worldwide. Food shortages were one of the ignition events for the uprising in Egypt. I'd also like to call out Agnes Denes' Wheat Field which renegotiated how space could be used to demonstrate hierarchies of capital and the unsustainable situation of commoditization, financialization, and the violence that is employed to enforce capitalist motives through the industrial-prison-military complex. Another historical example reexamined in great detail these days is of course the Paris Commune of 1871.

And I would like to read to you an excerpt of Terry Eagleton's forward to Kristin Ross's book *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, because it summarizes the atmosphere with OWS.

"More than most classical revolutions, the Commune was a question of the rapid, dizzying transformation of everyday life, a dramatic upheaval in commonplace understandings of time and space, identity and language, work and leisure. The material preconditions for this lay in the nature of the insurrection itself. For the Commune, if one may risk the tautology, was a peculiarly political revolution, in a highly political society. Its base lay not in heavy industry and an organized large-scale proletariat, but in the seizing, defense, and transformation of a place, a city, a sector of 'civil society' where men

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traced to that favorite whipping boy of American culture in general—the academy. It may be that the "lag" in the distributive effects of innovative writing vis-à-vis the visual and performance arts—a central tenet of Language Writing—was due as much to technology as the intrinsic conservatism of academicization.

Whether or not the proportion of innovative writing practices in relation to mainstream, generic writing practices has increased or decreased, there is no question that the internet and desktop publication have given these practices—innovative and conservative—much greater visibility across the cultural landscape. One wonders, for example, what might the Black Arts Movement have been had it had the technological resources available to us today. I ask this question because of the expressly political and social impetus behind a great deal of the creative materials of the Movement, the fact is, we don't know how to measure the effects—we don't know what counts as efficacy—of either aesthetic or political practices. Yet insofar as this uncertainty is the very premise of any ethical practice—aesthetic or political, cultural or social—it is also the very ground of responsibility, not only to our histories but also to our present, when and wherever that is.

Thus, the question here is the role, if any, of "poetry" and poets, writings and writers, in the context of these social eruptions widely remarked for their nonpartisan facades. As for poetry, does it serve? Should it serve? Most important—what or whom does poetry, if it serves, serve? Those horizons toward which poetry gazes can, for convenience, be designated as the artificial and demotic, beyond which lies the inscrutable. Which best serves the collective desires of the movements? If we simply give in to difference, to the specificity of location, regional history, and cultural temperament, these sundry Occupation Movements will devolve into a smattering of discrete blips on the cultural screen, more or less liberal, more or less radical, and more or less conservative according to their contexts. Can poetry or a poetics be the cultural glue that binds these movements together, and, if so, again, what kind of poetry, what kind of poetics? It does not necessarily follow that the collective

spoken word model, the so-called human microphone, that has thus far dominated these Movements, can be retooled to do the political and cultural work that would represent a next "stage" of development since, to be blunt, we already have, for example, institutionalized soviets, otherwise known as art and literature committees impaneled by state and local art councils comprised, in part, of practicing artists, including poets. Thus the question is not about rescuing poetry or writing from institutionalization. It's about the particular institutions that will need to be built or rehabilitated to house the kinds of poetics "we" desire.

But who is this "we"? Defining the parameters of this "we" is absolutely pertinent to social and political activism, especially in the context of Occupation Everywhere.

As I hinted at above, the heterogeneity of some Occupation Movements, a sign, it is said, of their nonpartisan origins and evolution, is inextricable from their paralysis vis-à-vis actual concrete demands and programs. I appreciate Thom Donovan's response to that oft-repeated media question—what do they want?—but it hardly need be said that Thom's encyclopedic list of demands

and desires fall into two open categories—partisan agitprop and generic homilies. These remarks, I hope is obvious, do not constitute a criticism of Thom's response but rather a gesture of recognition, for Thom's list is generous and thus faithful to the heterogeneity of the New York Occupy Wall Street Movement.

But for a very different response, a more aggressive gesture, to which, by the way, I am sympathetic to, let's recall the Oakland Occupation Movement and its January 2012 confrontation with the Oakland police. It just so happened I was flying into San Francisco when the confrontation with the Oakland police began. If anyone watched, as I did, the live feeds as well as the mainstream media coverage of the confrontations, it resembled less other Occupy movements in New York, Detroit, or Cincinnati than it did footage from the Sixties and Seventies when "counterculture forces" arrayed themselves against the Establishment—that is, a conflict that was largely, though not exclusively, generational.

That generational divide was starkly drawn, and perhaps reinforced, the next day when, at a Small Press Traffic poetry reading, the events of the prior evening were criticized by some poets of my generation and lauded by younger poets, though both had participated in prior Oakland Occupy demonstrations. I take all this as a good sign of the growing differences, necessary differences, between the various Occupy movements. But this democratization, this acknowledgement that specific regional and local histories will shape the formation of any Occupy movement that arises from its context, undermines—but perhaps only momentarily—the radical and conservative elements within the movement as a whole. This is another way of saying that it is still too "early" to know if our specific agendas, demands, and programs will carry us "forward" from the sea and onto solid ground, or from solid ground to, around, a sea.

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OCCUPY AT ONE

Brother to All: Brer Brian's Occupy

BY JONATHAN
BERGER

Brer Brian has been musically institutionalized in New York for three decades over two millennia. As a player with such bands as Them's Good Eatin', Deep Sound Diver, Huggabroomstik and The New York Howl, he's no stranger to accompanying others. He's co-written art star musicals (among them the infamous *Lord of the Cock Rings*), busked on trains, been a teacher, a Guardian Angel, and a general bon vivant in New York's

collection of instruments the trumpet and to his list of stages Zuccotti Park.

"I can't remember if I first heard about Zuccotti from friends or from the news," Brian Brian, known occasionally as Brian Homa, tried to recall, "But it was an email from Barry Bliss that convinced me to go for myself."

It took one day in the thick for Brer Brian to dedicate himself to Occupy Wall Street and its sound. Carrying something smaller than his usual acoustic guitar, he joined Zuccotti's drum circle. "I slowly, shyly insinuated myself," Brian explained. "The trumpet and the drums were a perfect fit because it's one of the only unamplified instruments that get heard over the rumbling din—people try it with guitar but they get devoured pretty quickly. They loved it, so they adopted me."

Brer Brian plays a host of instruments. While he's most known in AntiFolk circles for his guitar mastery, he served as bass player for UFO Vs. The Mothership, keyboardist for The New York Howl, and, for the most part, got hornier and hornier with the Occupy crowd. "I did a lot of riffing at the park, soloing, and threw in the occasional high notes that would just resonate for blocks."

With practice, his trumpet expertise grew. "We played for hours and hours, so often I would throw in a theme; some jazz here, some hip-hop there. Crowds would always go nuts when they heard me throw in some of 'Mas Que Nada,' by Sergio Mendes, or 'Rockit' by Herbie Hancock."

'We played for hours and hours, so often I would throw in a theme; some jazz here, some hip-hop there. Crowds would always go nuts when they heard me throw in some of "Mas Que Nada," by Sergio Mendes, or "Rockit" by Herbie Hancock.'

varied music scenes. He may well be the only church organist who's been refused entry at the Sidewalk Cafe. His is a storied musical career, featuring a panoply of instruments and environments. Last year, he added to his



With practiced conversations, Brian's political expertise grew as well. Previously, he gave causes less lip service than he did his trumpet. Now: "I feel that we live in a soft dictatorship where people who caused a financial crisis change the rules to stay in power so that they can 'fix' the crisis they caused—looking at you, Bloomberg."

"Among other things, Occupy Wall Street redefined, perhaps only temporarily, the use of public space and the role citizens could play in the public discourse. We raised questions that needed to be answered, and we learned a lot about what kind of mess we're in and what might be done to get us out of it. We need to change horses midstream, because the horse we're on is filling the stream with manure."

A consummate collaborator, Brian was quick to encourage others to the party, inviting most everyone he knew to come down and experience the thrill of the Occupy movement. "I don't remember actually 'bringing' anyone to

the park, but almost everybody I knew ended up checking it out at some point so we would all hang out down there. Whenever other horn players came I harmonized with them and generally had a pretty good time."

Months later, Brian keeps tabs on the scores of friends he made during his Occupy days. "I try to run into them at things like the May Day march," he said. "It feels like a big reunion."

Brian gave any number of hours to the experience. "The movement gets a lot of flack for not having changed anything," he said, but found that the movement absolutely changed him.

"I might not have known between Ron Paul, Paul Krugman, or Chris Hedges before, but I certainly do now, and can hold my own in a conversation about health care and fracking and student loan forgiveness and Matt Taibbi and Ayn Rand, as well as blowing a high D."

www.brer.bandcamp.com

Jonathan Berger wrote this. Also, other things, at www.jonberger.com.

Can You Remain a Poet and Be an Activist?

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In my letter of invitation to contributors I also offered, "Lineated verse is of course welcome, as well as work that involves assemblage, appropriation, collage, and document; that is concept-based, or otherwise atypical of most printed objects traditionally identified as 'poems'/'poetry.'" The result, I hope, is a semi-collective text bearing witness to the emergencies of poetic form in relation to political and social action during the American Autumn.

When I was asked to blog for National Poetry Month at *Harriet* it occurred to me, as it often does, that I did not want to write through my own subjectivity or "voice," that something seemed inappropriate about this given the political climate. Instead I opted to invite no less than 80 poets to respond to a questionnaire in which I inquired how writers' practices had changed since the occupations began. Respondents included Brian Ang, Steve Benson, David Buuck, Anelise Chen, Stephen Collis, Lara Durback, Dan Thomas Glass, Lauren Levin, Richard Owens, Jennifer Scappettone, Jeanine Webb, and Brian Whitener. I hope that a much more comprehensive document can come together regarding the range of aesthetic responses to the occupations.

This past spring the conversation about the occupations turned toward the topic of violence, especially among the Oakland occupiers. There are a range of responses out there, and some are collected in a pamphlet David Brazil put together via his and Sara Larsen's *Try! Magazine*. I feel deeply ambivalent about this discussion, for reasons I have already voiced in a conversation with Brandon Brown at BOMBLOG, and agree with him where he recognizes that there are many personal reasons why one may avoid violent encounters with police at all costs, fear of what one

would do faced with police being a perfectly good one. Political violence, for me, is not something anyone should come to lightly, even though the oppressive forces of our society may come to it lightly—that is, objectively, impersonally (I am drawn to Slovenian culture critic and philosopher Slavoj Žižek's crucial distinction between "subjective" and "objective" violence, which distinguishes between violence that is inter/subjective or "personal," and that which is perpetuated systemically).

In the first few months of OWS, it was curious to see demonstrators interact with blue shirts. Clearly many wanted to are no sides really of course, just managers and workers, white shirts, blue shirts, and occupiers).

When Zuccotti Park was still occupied, something that impressed me were the various tents that provided medical and emotional aid to occupiers. This is something that we too often disassociate from struggle: mutual aid.

Occupiers would attempt to hug police. Police would have their photos taken with occupiers, like tourists. I don't know if these attempts to embrace police continue, though the terrain has changed with policies like snatch and grab, which target leadership within the Occupy movement. These policies are disturbing and need to be fought through political pressure and creative use of the law.

With regards to violence, I believe that occupiers must continue to create situations where the law is forced to act in dramatic ways. Beyond that, I believe that the only violence that is permissible is one of situations; which is to say, immanent to a process of attempting to act justly. Take Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," or Alphonso Lingis's "Innocence" in Elizabeth Grosz's *Becomings*; Take Friedrich Nietzsche's *Eternal Recurrence*; or the Black Panthers.

I am reminded when one speaks of violence, however, how

much work we need to do ourselves to prepare for confrontations with a violence outside that exerts a great pressure inside, to paraphrase Wallace Stevens. Robert Kocik, whose first prose collection I am publishing with Michael Cross this fall, has a lot to say about this. Social movements must be holistic or they fail. And this is where aesthetics can also provide. Because art and poetry address needs for care, for health, for well-being. This is an ever-possible function of poetry off and on the page.

When Zuccotti Park was still occupied, something that impressed me were the various tents that provided medical and emotional aid to occupiers. This is something that we too often disassociate from struggle: mutual aid. And it is also the reason for struggle, maybe its primary reason, to become a society of mutual aid. Poetry provides not just a Kantian critical distance from events and subjects, as I notice certain poets arguing for, but it binds and is immediate to intersubjective formations that undergird collective social action. In other words, there is the poetics of what we do when we demonstrate, or engage in strategic socio-political actions, or participate in general assembly, or make minute decisions that impinge on the lives of others (this is poetics too: active making, with an emphasis on the -ing). And there are ways that words nurture and sustain us, like medicine, somatic, and psychic. Subtle, as Kocik likes to say.

Thom Donovan edits the weblog *Wild Horses Of Fire*, now in its seventh year. *Displaced Press* put out *The Hole* earlier this year. He also edits an online feature at Art21, "5 Questions for Contemporary Practice," regarding aesthetic politics and the artist's role in public discourse and has edited a feature on "Poetry During Occupy Wall Street" for *Rethinking Marxism*.

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Occu-Folk: The Soundtrack to the Movement

BY TIM BARKER

I didn't really know what to expect last October, when I first crossed Broadway into Zuccotti Park. I'd been on tour from Minnesota, playing solo shows, planning to move to Pennsylvania, but decided to visit New York for a couple of weeks. My second night in town, I checked out this Occupy Wall Street thing that I had heard so much about. Upon entering the park, what really hooked me was the instant sense of inclusion I felt. As I walked through the well-organized camp, everyone welcomed me as one of them, rather than a hick, a tourist, or a spy. There was so much positive energy, so much love, enthusiasm and unity. That first night I had no sleeping bag, no blanket, not even a pillow for my head, but someone lent me a tarp and I slept under the New York City purple night sky. I met Alec Baldwin that night, but I was less impressed by him than those innumerable individuals that came out to protest the capitalist system, putting their lives on the line, stepping out of normal society and standing up for what they believed in. I knew I needed to stay, and one of the things that made it so was all of the music surrounding me.

Their were about as many different musicians as there were people. As I walked around the park there were millions of melodies. Just like people holding up signs or shouting in protest, there were people singing songs of protest. There was so much heart, so much beauty on display. I'd been playing protest music for seven years under the band name Ring of Truth, but this was the biggest band I had ever seen. The community was swollen with musicians, singing their songs of frustration and fire; I couldn't help but be drawn to it. It wasn't about musical talent or traditions, but having something to say and expressing it. The community was intimate; despite the vast numbers of bodies that came and went every day, it wasn't hard to find the comrades that would become my brothers and sisters.

Daniel Biaz introduced me to the People Staged, an open stage on the south side of Zuccotti Park, which would have musicians, poets, and other performance artists come and share their art for all to see. I wish I remembered more of the names of the people that played and I befriended. So much of the entire months-long experience remains chaos and blurs.

One night, Geraldo Rivera was filming next to the People Staged, while I played. He and his crew kept invading our space, so while I was on stage, I asked the crowd, "Who is here for music, art, and poetry?" There was a loud cheer. Then I asked: "Who is here for Geraldo and the fucking news?" Boogie ensued.

I asked Geraldo and his crew to move back and give us space, twice. No reply from the corporate media jerk, so I asked the crowd to link arms and take five steps back, pushing Geraldo and his lemmings out of our stage area... it was stunning, watching the crowd do it to watch them get pushed out. Later, when the producer of Geraldo's show asked me if they could film the stage as their closing shot I explained, "You have to check with whoever is playing at the time." He asked who that would be. I had no idea: it was an open stage. He asked to speak to the person in charge, and I told him, "There's no one in charge, and we are



all in charge." The idea of horizontal leadership was beyond his grasp of understanding, so he left, accusing me of being an asshole. I will never forget standing up to a member of Fox News, and teaching a corporate producer about horizontal leadership, how we don't need bosses and owners to make amazing things happen. One of the beautiful aspects of Occupy was the absence of leaders. No one was "in charge;" we all were.

As the movement progressed, historic counter-culture figures would join us. The legendary David Peel would oftentimes come down and steal the show singing his anthems of protest and smoking marijuana. Over time, he became a great friend. I can remember spending many late nights hanging out with him, talking about music. "New Home," one of the songs on my new E.P. was composed at McDonald's (also known as Occupy's public bathroom) with my friends Jack, Lana, and Stephen, while listening to David Peel talk about music.

On the People Staged, I saw some of the most perfectly passionate performers I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. There were poets—like my tent-mate Germ—who could make you laugh, cry, and fill you with passion making you want to rise up and smash the state! There were women like Tank with the voice of an angel and the passion of an inferno. There were guitarists of astonishingly different skill levels, but all so passionate and all so real. There were bands, like the Occupy sanitation workers who transformed into a bluegrass group whose name I can't recall. There were even people that would get up and tell stories, both moving and funny (one guy spoke of getting kicked out of Disney Land as a kid for knocking over Mickey Mouse). It wasn't all serious and political either, we shared all aspects of our existence: love, happiness, sadness and sorrow, just everything. Despite the collective decisioning and the signs and the chants, all fundamental aspects of my Occupation, The People Staged was, to me, the creative heart of Occupy Wall Street.

I quickly bonded with this great guitar player and vocalist, Stephen Baldwin (no relation), and Paul Stein, an accordion player. At first we were all doing our own thing, then Stephen started joining Paul on this one song about marching to the Occupy beat. Every time I heard them, I

would sing along. I started seeking out Stephen and slowly, started learning to accompany him. In many ways he became not only my friend but also my mentor - which speaks to the level of intimacy in the Occupy army. At first we played some of Stephen and Paul's songs, many of which were Occupy versions of folk traditional songs like "Down By The Riverside." Around Thanksgiving, we started writing some new originals that were the domain of the Occuponics, as Stephen had come to call us. Some of the early Occuponics anthems, "Mayor Bloomberg" and "Hard Times," became notable Occupy singalongs. We would do a lot of Beatles songs, and throw in requests like John Lennon's "Imagine." Often, we would jam out new tunes on the spot: we would just gather in a circle and someone would start playing a riff and then someone else would come in with another part, and the whole circle would join in, adding element upon element, until someone would just start singing. The spontaneity, the improvisation, the collectivization, it was Occupy Wall Street in musical form. All of these people would come in with different ideas, different backgrounds and together, create something unique and beautiful.

Soon enough, the people would look for the Occuponics at Occupy events, and why not? We were the roving bards of the Occupation, a movable musical feast, whether at Zuccotti Park, one of the various pop-up Occupy Town Square events, or Union Square. There was no official schedule, no official line up, it was grass roots, spontaneous and amazing. People would join the band on the spot; the Occuponics were all-inclusive. We didn't need a stage: we could start anywhere there was a lot of traffic, and soon, a crowd would assemble around us. Christmas at Zuccotti Park featured a large circle of people, many layers deep, singing along to Occuponics standards and Occupy versions of Christmas classics. I'd like to think that the Occuponics caught the spirit and the heartbeat of the movement, and helped move that movement forward.

It was never uncommon to see big name celebrities down at the park—even if you didn't know it at the time. It was only after he walked away that I discovered I'd had a nice, extended conversation with Lupe Fiasco. Most of the celebrities who came down were supportive of the cause and treated us with respect. One of the things I love about this movement is how there was no leadership, that we were all equals and all important. Zuccotti hosted the likes of

Riotfolk artists Ryan Harvey and Evan Greer, folk legends Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie, and folk-rock institutions like David Crosby and Graham Nash. Tom Morello (guitarist for Rage Against Machine and Audioslave) was even a member of the Occupy Guitar Army, a substantial selection of guitar players that marched the 99 miles from Philadelphia to NYC this last July.

Much as I like to glorify my Occupy Wall Street experience, no story is complete without crisis. I enjoyed three jail stays during my time in New York. I have seen cops joyfully beating on protesters, left bloody in the streets. I saw rapists and drug dealers bussed in from Rikers Island to try to break the camp, but it didn't work. Even after the notorious November raid, the movement lived. One cop tried to arrest me while I was I played guitar for a live radio show.

After the raid we all found sanctuary where we could. I stayed in Brooklyn, in Queens, in

I asked Geraldo and his crew to move back and give us space, twice. No reply from the corporate media jerk, so I asked the crowd to link arms and take five steps back, pushing Geraldo and his lemmings out of our stage area.

squats and on street corners. While crashing in a Park Slope church, I would put on subway punk rock shows playing songs on trains with friends Allegra, Dillan, and Bear. Impromptu, improvisational, dance-infused public performances with friends under the streets of the biggest city in America! Cannot be beat. Our musical movable feast continued.

Just as 1960s music was an integral part of that old youth movement, so protest music today found its soundtrack in a thousand ragged voices. While there hasn't been any clearer consensus on the Sound of Occupation as there has been as the results of it, I am really proud. I am proud that some of my songs have become Occupy anthems. I am proud that I was able to contribute as a notable member of the Occuponics and the movement in general. I am proud that I accidentally arrived in New York and Zuccotti Park, and made my voice be heard.

Now, I have found myself back in the Midwest, no longer as involved in Occupy, living less of my life in protest. Stephen and Paul, my Occuponics co-conspirators, are still in town, and can be found playing with the Brooklyn Tax Dodgers, a performance art troupe. Paul Stein administers occuponics.com, and both curate an active Facebook page. When I return to New York this winter, I will be more of a musician and less of a protester, but I will still take my guitar down to the Park, or wherever the Occupation next takes root. I will still support the movement through song. I still have something to contribute to the good fight. One of my favorite bands, Chumbawamba, has said, "Music will not change the world, but the action that music can inspire can change the world." I hope that my words and my songs can help to change this system that we are railing against.

Tim Barker's folk-punk musician identity is Timmy R.O.T. originally from the Midwest and again relocating to New York City. For more information, visit www.facebook.com/pages/Timmy-ROT/353214918068919.

OCCUPY AT ONE

David Buuck

Oakland, Calif.

From ‘Mayday Mayday’

A test of poetry:

To read this aloud
To sound it in the mouth
Which one does in the body
In the moment of its actioning
But not when reading
Not when scanning the screen feeds
Which is a different rhythm
In one’s body
An anxious sense of time
Moving too fast
To make tactical decisions
Appropriate to the conditions

‘No stay away orders’
Kingtender: anyone know if anti-repression happening?

The conditions now – there – demanding
Couplets – ?

But my thinking-writing can’t think stanzas
Or syllable counts

Jack frost: jasper’s 38. march 28

Boots. Breaks between raids

It’s 254 in Boulder
And I’m with you in Oakland
Except I’m not
I’m safe here in Boulder

Writing – ‘poetry’ – ?
In whatever time this is
My duration is not theirs there
Things happening too fast
For poetry

And that’s ok if

This is what poetry looks like

On Mayday 2012

Eliot Katz

Hoboken, N.J.

***Even a Poet Laureate
Doesn’t Deserve
to Get Beaten by the Police***

As someone who doesn’t care much about government awards or titles given to artists, I still say a 70-year-old former Poet Laureate of the United States should have some extra layer of protection from getting beaten with billy clubs by a Berkeley police-riot squad. I once read with Robert Hass at a conference at Rutgers University on Poetry & the Public Sphere, and thought he had some terrific environmentalist & other poems. It was inspiring to read in Sunday’s NY Times that he and several poet colleagues had bravely put their bodies on the line. How did so many police officers around the country learn in unison to become so unlawful so soon after the Occupy movement was born? And who is teaching these rogue cops how to bruise and break poets’ ribs, how to block and arrest journalists in their running shoes, how to pepper-spray sitting students, and how to destroy thousands of books from the Occupy Wall Street free library? How is it that government officials and rows of men and women wearing uniforms of ceremonial blue can be so oblivious to the importance of such resonating social symbols? And why hasn’t our poetry-loving President weighed in? We shouldn’t have to risk our physical safety to speak our minds! Eventually the police violence will end and the nation’s eyes will be forced to look squarely at the issues—of economic justice and democracy, continuing war and racism, universal access to education and health care, deteriorating foundations of housing and jobs, how to keep the planet livable for all, politicians and elections bought and paid—being raised by the growing Occupy protests. Until then, I suggest poets exercising our freedom of expression in public consider wearing some protective padding over our vulnerable semi-colons.



Deck of Deeds
by Rodrigo Toscano
(Counterpath, 2012)

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Pictures from the Occupation

Images and Text by Lee Ranaldo

Living down in lower Manhattan has been pretty wild for the last decade, to say the least, with the occupation of Zuccotti Park/Liberty Plaza last fall being only the latest happening of note. I live quite nearby and had been witness to many of the daily marches up to and back from City Hall, and drew a lot of inspiration from the commitment and spirit of the various folks I've encountered. ¶ I spent a lot of time in the park, brought my kids by to see this free-speech city growing there (and later to also see it swept out by the powers that be.). I contributed what I could, and took many photos and made many sound recordings. ¶ I guess a general comment at the time was that there was no "center" to this gathering, ideologically—but to me that didn't seem to be the point. The park (and "movement") seemed to be a nexus for all those dissatisfied with the status quo (w/ a healthy dose of joy/revelry thrown in—at times it felt like the parking lot outside a Dead show). Most seemed to realize that the changes they were standing their ground for were quite major, outside of even general legislative parameters—more of a complete redesign of our system, really, about the most complex thing possible; an honestly "revolutionary" attitude. I think the point was more to throw the Earth off its axis a little bit, turn the general dissatisfaction almost everyone was feeling into a groundswell, and see what happened next.

Lower Manhattan
September 2012



Wong Revives the Heroic Victim

BY ABBY HAGLER
how to survive a hotel fire

By Angela Veronica Wong
Coconut Books

Remember that episode of *21 Jump Street* when the girl lit her prom on fire? It aired in 1987, so I don't blame you if you



don't, but Angela Veronica Wong's book *how to survive a hotel fire* makes me think of it. On the show, the girl who soaked her paper hearts in gasoline and decorated the gym with them had a mental disorder called Heroic Victim Syndrome. This girl could be Wong's narrator; she displays all the symptoms.

"We Remember the Umbrella Like a Ghost Limb"

I'll be honest: Heroic Victim Syndrome doesn't exist. The writers of the show needed to explain why young women randomly torch their homes and schools. The *Jump Street* police psychologist said that a heroic victim will "stage a bizarre fire, usually on their own property, where they will sometimes appear fantastically dressed for the occasion as part of the drama. The heroic victim dying in the fire." Despite the dictums of psychology, our real-life reactions remain inexplicable. Wong's narrator herself says:

If I had a super power it would be the ability

to control fire: cause things to spontaneously combust or just

burn.

But be honest with me: have you ever seen a heartbreak? Not really. Not even your own. The DSM-IV has not recognized a broken heart as a disorder so a broken heart does not exist—except for the signs. Heartbreak leaves clues. Because it is an inexplicable pain, a lover will look for evidence of it outside of herself. This is how narrative is created according to Roland Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse*, where Wong derived her epigraph. In it, one lover refuses to wait for the other

and leaves her. This is where *how to survive* begins.

A rejected lover is a writer whose narrator infuses every scene with a theme of love, of doom, of pain. Barthes says that the lover "must 'get over'" and that "the love story ... is the tribute a lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it." Wong joins other authors, such as Jenny Boully in *[one love affair]** and Alain de Botton in *Essays In Love*, who use Barthes to explore voice of this lover/writer. Each author uses scenarios full of evidence or "figures," as Barthes says—mundane objects and actions—which become symbolic within the lover's narrative.

"The Only Way To Become A Bird Is To Set the Trees On Fire"

A survival guide is not a narrative of healing; it is a collection of the worst possible scenarios. It is a lived anthology of cautionary tales. The best part about *how to survive a hotel fire* is that there are things happening that should not be happening. Some would call them weaknesses of writing or character, but they are what make this book work: its refusal of linear storytelling; its refusal to be step-by-step self-help; its refusal to heal. Barthes explains that the lover's narrative will take a form more like "the flight of mosquitos."

Less a story, this book enacts Barthes' process of reconciliation: the inside with the outside; destruction and healing; the past struggling against the present self. His first chapter is titled "I am engulfed, I succumb..." Wong's narrator, who speaks in present tense as if she is still engulfed, has the advantage of hindsight, as shown in the first poem "Because You Are Not Here." Rain symbolizes dark emotional spaces. It concludes:

the day it stops when we think:
is this it
and we remember the umbrella
like a ghost limb
as we pass through the sun and spend
most
of our time talking about
what it was like
when it rained.

It seems fitting that the prom's theme on that episode of *Jump Street* was "Young Love Will Never Die." Slowly, Wong's narrator transforms herself into our heroic victim. The choice of a hotel is apt. This story is not a single story, but a composite of unsuccessful relationships—the same interior with different people every time. This is the story of every failed relationship; it is one of our modern folk tales. The narrator says in the first of many "How To Survive a Hotel Fire" poems:

When I get married I will invite all the

men I have ever slept with. They will all be members of the band.

We have all been this narrator. We all could be her. (Re-reading the book, I even found a couple forgotten-about bartenders' numbers shoved in the back.) The voice emerges from an inner space without identification, though I assigned her a gender. It shows us its context—nondescript hotel rooms, the interior of a house, of a heart in pieces. To reconcile this heart with the holistic outside, the lover begins to break things. She begins from high up:

Every time I feel I've lost something I throw plants over my balcony. I don't watch just listen as they hit the sidewalk below.

Oscillating between the comfort of prose and the strictures of lineated verse, the narrator divides against herself as well. She bursts blueberries despite trying to follow the recipe; collects sock after sock with holes though she

This is where how to survive begins. A rejected lover is a writer whose narrator infuses every scene with a theme of love, of doom, of pain.

wants to learn to sew; throws the house plants back to nature; breaks bread; lets the sheets keep their ink and mascara stains. She wants to heal, so she creates a personal mythology about being broken to help her. Such a mythology based in those real-life mundane moments and awkwardly poetic realizations. This narrator does everything typical of a lover on the mend: try hobbies, cry into pillows, put on shiny clothes and go dancing. In the end, she writes herself a fairy tale titled "In the Kingdom We Are Now." This book becomes as much about survival as it is about how writing shapes that action.

We understand a victim who writes needs empowerment. The victim of chance must seek recompense. The victim of circumstance must pull up some bootstraps. The victim of time must stop it. How many of us have needed to write for these same reasons? But it is very hard to call the voice speaking from *how to survive a hotel fire* "victim" since she has quietly, wisely, become legend.

Abby Hagler studies poetry at Columbia College Chicago. A former social worker, she is enjoying riding bikes, teaching writing, and making delicious coffee.

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Stephanie Gray Matters

BY CHRIS MARTIN
I Thought You Said it was Sound/
How Does that Sound

By Stephanie Gray
 Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs

I'm going to try and sound out what's given in Stephanie Gray's latest chapbook, *I Thought You Said it was Sound/How Does that Sound*. First there is honesty, which also sounds like distortion, but could equally be called texture, ambiguity, tension, delay, or doubt. Seedbed feedback blooming bass

flowers with treble petals. It's how sound sounds on the inside, when it's doubled-back on the original sounding, folded over thought and thought's own sound. Like, what is the sound of a thought about sound?

What I love about Gray's work is how it genuinely asks this kind of question (and countless others) while abandoning all hope of a sound (right) answer. The questions are the engine. She writes, "a rickety wooden rollercoaster...riding on the interrogative like you favorite hardcore firework." Halfway through a

poem you hear it roaring, layer upon layer. And Gray's language never works against the roar. She says dude and means *dude*, and then she says *Scalapino* and means *Scalapino* (as in Leslie), each new layer another gel in her sound lighting. Soon enough you're climbing on stage with her, the hand she fished down into the crowd having grasped yours in one of those serious forearm-to-forearm tugs born of real trust. The sound flows and floods, slow food for the ears. But like, hamburgers, right?

Because soon we're considering the heavy metal of Queens diners, and Gray's poetry is fiercely, proudly blue collar, her approach to content inclusive. When was the last time Journey showed up in the same poem as Lyn Hejinian?

Gray is part of a growing number of writers committed to popular culture in a devotional, totally non-ironic way. Poets like Dana Ward and Lindsey Boldt.

"I always remember at the working man's beach as a kid it was like the sound I heard in my tunnel vision half asleep when you hear the over familiar classic rock song on the battery operated radio and you also hear the waves and the radio has sand on it and in it for over years and years and it still works."

What sandy sound is coming out? Kansas, Alabama, Boston.

It's funny, but Gray never makes fun of her subjects, she allows each piece to participate on equal footing. Like, bring everyone on stage, okay? Overcrowding, redundancy, interruption, cacophony: these are not problems in Gray's poems; they are necessities. This is social poetry. This is popular poetry. Everyone's invited.

In other projects Gray's writing focuses more pointedly on this blue collar aspect of her work, or on the intersection of her writing

This is Gray's great gift: electric she reaches out. Her poems are tough and fragile and wrong and a conversation about making it right.

with her gorgeous filmmaking, or on queer experience in the big city, but this chapbook turns all of its attention to sound. Gray herself is hearing impaired, and that fact is foregrounded whenever she presents her work in public. She's an amazing reader, and it's not "in spite" of the distortions produced by her hearing impairment, but very much because of them. Gray is unafraid in her exploration of "bad" sound and sounding, something that is brilliantly unfurled throughout this chapbook. "I heard it totally clear but it was beneath the mud, it was clear as day but no one understood what it meant except the voice was clear...the clear voice singing the murkiness."

In one poem, "Matching impedence at the oval window," she makes a sort of litany of the ear, alternating structural elements with observations: "Oscillating effect / Waves of ocean in the air / Ossicles / Icicles dangling in December out of electricity." Ossicles are the three smallest bones in the human body, and here they reach out into the fragile, frozen world through sound. This is Gray's great gift: electric she reaches out. Her poems are tough and fragile and wrong and a conversation about making it right.

Chris Martin is an editor at *Futurepoem* books and the author of *Becoming Weather* (Coffee House Press), *CHAT* (Flying Object), and enough (Ugly Duckling Presse).

Jimmie Walker's New Memoir Dyn-o-mite

BY RISA MORLEY
Dyn-o-mite: Good Times, Bad Times,
Our Times-A Memoir

By Jimmie Walker with Sal Manna
 Da Capo Press

In Jimmie "JJ" Walker's new autobiography, *Dyn-o-mite: Good Times, Bad Times, Our Times-A Memoir*, he name checks a whole lot of people. But they aren't just name checked, they are an integral part of his story, and the story of American comedic television.

His path to fame, in what is the cliché, because it is true, is a rags to riches story. Not quite ever back to rags, but when you are a pop icon in the true sense of the word, the only way from the top is down. Although Walker likes to say he was always mid-ladder—seeing people go up to the top and waving goodbye to them as they slid back down.

Walker came up from the projects of the South Bronx and was a struggling stand-up comedian and radio DJ before hitting the big time with *Good Times*. He was mentored by an already famous David Brenner, who tells Walker he is "too black." Walker learns the ropes and how to grow his comedy from solely African-American audiences to a more mainstream, white audience. He works in small clubs and in the Catskills, and also does college and small city tours with other comics who befriend him.

He begins to get spots on the big shows that were the trajectories for comedians of the time, including *The Jack Paar Show*, *The Mike Douglas Show*, and *The Dinah Shore Show*, and then finally *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. He gets the spots thanks to some early on friends who have hit celebrity,—Freddie Prinze, Brenner, Bette Midler, and Barry Manilow among them. Of course by then he is "not black audiences," his show going from too Black to not Black enough.

He is flown to the promised land of Los Angeles and auditions for a TV pilot. When he gets the call that he got the part of JJ on Norman Lear's *Good Times*, he is in a dumpy hotel in Fargo, N.D. performing at a college. He didn't even know he was auditioning for the role that would make him a household name.

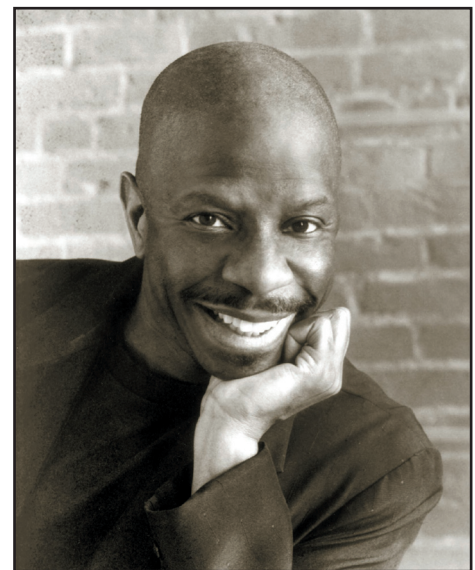
Relocating to L.A. for the role, Walker's house is a hotbed of then unknown comedic talent, including David Letterman, who still has him appear on his show today, and Jay Leno, who shows what a miserable wreck he really is by not inviting Jimmie or other comics to appear on this show when he himself hits the big-time in a series of ironic twists. The biggest twist of fate being Walker starting a management company with his own money to back his friend Jay Leno's career, only to be stabbed in the back by his partner who manages Leno to this day. Walker would pay writers \$50 a joke for his stand-up act. The comic list is long and broad and includes a young Byron Allen, Leno, and Letterman. It also included a young Bob Odenkirk, who would become Mr. Show, but is reaching a far bigger audience today as Walt's corrupt lawyer, Saul, on the hit show *Breaking Bad*. Walker's soaring popularity prompted *Time* magazine to name him "Comedian of the Decade."

Walker's soaring popularity prompted Time magazine to name him 'Comedian of the Decade.'

Walker's exclamation of "Dyn-o-mite" on *Good Times* would become a household catch phrase. With his *Good Times* era of super stardom, he would become an overnight sensation, eclipsing the seasoned actors, and stars of the show, Esther Rolle and John Amos. The tension on the set escalated as Walker tried to override the writers to make JJ funny and turn

the Norman Lear created drama into a comedy. It makes the show a huge success, as well as showing a real black family struggling to survive in the projects of Chicago. The show was groundbreaking and entertaining.

The book is a very interesting and fun read. It goes into his politics (an outspoken conservative, dabbling in right-wing talk radio and



Rock's shows. While doing press for the book he appeared on shows from *The Tavis Smiley Show* to *The Today Show*, as well as his true friend David Letterman's long running *The Late Show*.

I recently had the opportunity to see his mentor Brenner perform at The Metropolitan Room in New York City and when asked about Walker, Brenner couldn't praise him highly enough. Of course, emphasizing he was his mentor. Brenner agreed with many things Jimmie said in the book and added that Walker was not only a great comic, but also a true friend and great human being.

Walker's first love now and always is stand-up comedy. As his career approaches the five-decade mark, this past June he received the Great American Comedy Festival's annual Johnny Carson Comedy Legend award. Johnny would be proud of this painfully honest portrait of the life of a comic.

Risa Morley-Medina was an editor at *The new voice.*, and has been in the music business for years. She still watches reruns of *Good Times*.

Ghost Writers

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Greying Ghost chieftain Carl Annarummo.

BY KIMBERLY ANN SOUTHWICK

The “About” page on Greying Ghost Press’s website is vague. It’s vague when it comes to information on the origins and staff of the press. This is not because editor/designer/founder Carl Annarummo doesn’t want people to know about how Greying Ghost began, but because he’s modest—and good at what he does. Greying Ghost’s website doesn’t praise all of the hard work and effort that Annarummo puts into the press’s beautiful books, but it lets the design of the books, quality of the authors’ work, and the reputation of the press speak for themselves.

But we’d like to give Annarummo himself some credit here. The only other staff member at the press is his wife, who helps him with design decisions and ideas as well as finding materials

It’s fun taking a piece of scrap paper that would otherwise go into the recycle bin and having a dozen ideas pop into my head. This could be a gift tag! A greeting card! A bookmark! It fits into our aesthetic in a sense that I try and use as much repurposed material as possible.

from thrift stores. He says that the origins of the press aren’t too interesting, but the source of its name has a nice story.

“It came to me in a dream while on my honeymoon,” says Annarummo. “It involved golden plates and a rather large stuffed animal collection, one of whom whispered their name into my ear. In other words, I have no idea where it came from. I used to keep a notebook of made up book titles, band names, aliases, and wrestling personas. Most likely it came from there. Also, the name came about four years before I moved to Salem, [Mass.], which is weird because Salem is supposedly the most haunted town.” Greying Ghost’s closest big East Coast city is Boston, not too far from its base in Salem.

Annarummo founded Greying Ghost Press in March 2007, and he has been putting out books regularly since. The press has attracted writers of excellent caliber from its inception, including Brooklyn Copeland, Dan Boehl, J.A. Tyler, Kathleen Rooney, and Joseph Riippi. Annarummo reads through the submissions “usually while commuting to work or during a lunch break,” he says, taking notes and finding what he wants to publish.

What does he want to publish? “Those five or six chapbooks

I would walk through fire in order to get into your hands,” he says. “That group of books I’d take a bullet for.” It is that kind of passion is what has seen Greying Ghost thrive.

The Greying Ghost website is run via Tumblr, and Greying Ghost also keeps up with its fans via Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, letting people know not only about promotions, but also things like what kinds of music Annarummo is listening to, updates on Boston Red Sox games, and jokes in various levels of hilarity.

The about pages tells fans and writers that more information about an upcoming open reading period will be announced before it happens in December. If you’re curious whether or not your manuscript would work for the press, you should purchase and peruse some of the past titles that are still available. Also, take into consideration that Greying Ghost doesn’t put stock in what genre a manuscript is in when deciding what to publish.

“There are so many genres and sub genres and sub sub genres that it makes my head spin,” says Annarummo. “I hate cover letters, especially the ones that try to explain their style or influences. Let me figure that out for myself!”

Greying Ghost Press thrives in print. The books are crafted with care, and the results are not only gorgeous, limited run print copies of books by excellent writers, but they are also unique in the true sense of that word. The press deserves admiration for its efforts in a digital-based modern society to continue to promote the kinesthetic sensibilities that eBooks and other digital formats cannot yet, and most likely will never, master. What makes Greying Ghost’s physical books stand out in comparison to many other small press’s is not just the ability to capture that relationship between ink, words, and paper, but the ability to continually and consistently put out strong work.

This is also not to say that Greying Ghost thwarts all interest in digital formats. In fact, there’s an ebook page on their main website. When asked about these, Annarummo says, “I’ve done a couple and both were joyless tasks. One was an archived edition of our then online lit mag *Corduroy Mountain*. The other was a collection of my own poems. I’m still sniffing out the pros and cons of eBooks. When they’re done right, like *Blue Hour Press*, they are gorgeous. I’m just nowhere near that level.” Perhaps when digital formats become not just more manageable, but more desirable, Greying Ghost may put more of an effort into that section of their site. For now, their letter-pressed covers and uniquely styled physical books are extremely worth the affordable prices they sell for.

Take the most recent title, *Pistachio & Iris* by Pinetop Deadfish. The catalog entry entices us with an excerpt and then promises “you’ll feel like a teenage Calvino on his first loopy roller coaster after drinking an imported beer. When this chapbook awakens you, you’ll thank us.” At a cost of \$5.50, any modern reader on a minimum wage salary should

consider purchasing this book. As if that is not enough, Greying Ghost offers free pamphlets with each order. You’ll receive up to three writings by authors Greying Ghost admires. Recent pamphleteers are Neila Mezynski, Nicholas Grider, and Wendy Xu. Helen Vitoria also will be featured on a Greying Ghost pamphlet soon. Vitoria excitedly announced the selection of her work on her website, praising Greying Ghost for its passion for literature.

One of the most difficult things for a small, independent press would have to be raising funds. Greying Ghost has been lucky in this area says Annarummo.

“I’ve been extremely fortunate in that the previous chapbook has always paid for the one that comes next,” he says. “Our print runs are pretty low so that helps. Plus I do everything in house, so my overhead is quite low.” Some of Annarummo’s printing materials include a small letterpress, rubber stamps, a laser printer, and a healthy stock of ink. In addition to selling books online, Greying Ghost sells its titles on Etsy along with other paper ephemera, such as gift tags.

“I’m learning letterpress, so it’s a good way to practice,” says Annarummo. “It’s fun taking a piece of scrap paper that would otherwise go into the recycle bin and having a dozen ideas pop into my head. This could be a gift tag! A greeting card! A bookmark! It fits into our aesthetic in a sense that I try and use as much repurposed material as possible. Endpapers from old maps, books. Cover paper from discarded sheet music. I try and

Please see SOUTHWICK page 14

Greying Ghost Bibliography*

- Least* Jon Cone
Pistachio & Iris Pinetop Deadfish
Plus or Minus Weston Cutter
The Point or What I Cannot Recall Tyler Flynn Dorholt
Bye Land Tony Mancus
Black Box Judson Hamilton
Going Attractions Brian Foley
Treesisters Joseph Riippi
Profil Perdu Jennifer Pilch
Once Was A Weather Trey Moody
Pretend You’ll Do It Again Josh Russell
P.O.D. (Poems On Demand) Jordan Davis
Sky Poems Nate Pritts
In Lieu of Hartshorn Travis Brown
Polaroid Parade Paige Taggart
I Ain’t Asked Any Pardon For Anything I Done Sasha Fletcher
ZZZZZZZZZZ [a well] J.A. Tyler
By Deer Light Garth Graeper
These Strangers She’d Invited In Jac Jemc
After Robinson Has Gone Kathleen Rooney
Third Print The Corduroy Mtn.
And What Is Left, As Much As The Hands Will Hold Andrew Borgstrom
Nanostars Michael Bernstein
The Poughkeepsiad Joshua Harmon
Office Work Jackie Clark
Self Help Poems Sampson Starkweather
Credo J. Michael Wahlgren
Second Print The Corduroy Mtn.
Nine Live Two-Headed Animals Eric Amling
Sugar Means Yes Julia Cohen & Mathias Svalina
Our Us & We J.A. Tyler
Michigander B.J. Love
The Bowling Sommer Browning & Brandon Shimoda
The Plesyre Barge Jon Cone
Springtime Sea Bathing Troy Urquhart
Gorilla Math Michael Bible

- No Rainbow* Judson Hamilton
Les Miseres et les Mal-Heurs de la Guerre Dan Boehl
Folded Into Your Midwestern Thunderstorm Kristen Orser



- Helen Mirren Picks Out My Clothes* Andrew Terhune
The Deviants Jack Boettcher
When I Moved To Nevada Jamie Iredell
Hank Williams Peter Berghoef
I Am In The Air Right Now Kathryn Regina
The Pond Zachary Schomburg
Stands As Mediation Thomas Hummel
Boring Meadows Colin Bassett
Inside A Red Corvette Becca Klaver
Borrowed House Brooklyn Copeland
First Print The Corduroy Mtn.
Border Looks Like Making Love Ryan Daley
Help Adam Fielded
At The Pulse Laura Carter
I Will Unfold You With My Hairy Hands Shane Jones
The Tornado Is Not A Surrealist Brian Foley
Walden Book Allen Bramhall
Naturalistless Christopher Rizzo
News Of The Haircut Peter Berghoef

*from most to least recent

Stephanie Gray
Flushing, Queens

POETRY

You know that kind of thing

You know it was a whatever we’re gonna do kind of thing
You know it was a get here whenever you can kind of thing
You know it’s really just a whoever knows whoever kind of thing
You know honestly it’s just like a say what you want kind of thing
Actually to tell you the truth, it’s really just whoever can get it done first kind of thing
You know it’s really just a just for today kind of thing
You know it’s really like she don’t really care kind of thing
You know, to be really honest with you it’s a she just really likes her kind of thing
You know frankly it’s a this is what we’re just gonna do kind of thing
Basically, it’s a let it all go kind of thing
Totally, it was a never seen this before kind of thing
Amazingly it was a we’re gonna push this thru no matter what kind of thing
I hate to say it but that is a total now where are we gonna go kind of thing
To be blunt with you it’s a dead end kind of thing
And of top of that, really it’s a deadhead not Phish kind of thing
U know, really people, it’s a RU w/ me kinda thing
They want me to say it’s a Metallica kind of thing but what they don’t know is that really this is a Megadeth kind of thing
Look, we all want to say it’s a feel good kind of thing but really it’s a we just kind of slipped this in so we can all enjoy it kind of thing
I told you, it’s a do what you want kind of thing!
Be cool with it dude, it’s a whatever goes kind of thing
Man, you think this is some free for all kind of thing?
Lady, what do you think, this is a we’re gonna say yes to whoever comes in here kind of thing?
It’s just, I don’t know what to say, it was a we’re really not sure how this is gonna play out kind of thing
We were hoping it was all a “change you can believe in kind of thing” but it’s just really the same as it ever was kind of thing
I want to believe that it’s a totally truthful kind of thing but my sense is that it’s a essentially a little bit cloudy kind of thing
Really, it’s just a let’s try this out kind of thing
To tell you the truth, it was just a total for show kind of thing.
Yeah I know, you know that kind of thing?
That kind of thing? No way?!
Look, man. We’re looking at, basically, this is the first day of the rest of your life kind of thing.
Dude. It IS a this is your life kind of thing.
Basically that’s correct, it was a “this is your brain on drugs” kind of thing.
All I can say is that it was, like a I don’t really know what I’m doing kind of thing but I’m just gonna do it kind of thing.
Essentially, it’s like this is the total end of it kind of thing.
To be blunt, this is one of those it aint going nowhere kind of thing.
It was basically a stop you in your trax kind of thing.
It was just nice, really nice, you know that kind of thing.
Look this isn’t like when we were in high school kind of thing.
On second thought, it isn’t even a when we were in college kind of thing.
Look, basically the whole situation is a watch your back kind of thing.
She’s basically acting all like “now don’t you ever forget it” kind of thing.
Really it’s a no one ever forgets it kind of thing
You got to remember, this is a so serious don’t even try to mess it up kind of thing.
You know, all the ladies in the office love it, it’s that kind of thing.
The guys at the garage, you know, they’re all over it, it’s that kind of thing.
The kids at school? They absolutely hate it, it’s that kind of thing.
Everyone on the street loves it, it’s that kind of thing.
Word on the street is that everyone’s basically in love with it, totally, it’s that kind of thing.
Look, I’m telling you the professors hate it, it’s that kind of thing.
They love it as much as brussels sprouts, it’s that kind of thing.
You really wanna know, it’s the end of it, really, it’s basically, totally, that kind of thing.
It’s simple, really, it’s just totally simple, it’s that kind of thing.
Don’t forget, this is a leave your ego - and besides that - your ambitions at the door kinda thing.
It was just everything went as wrong as it could go just, you know that kind of thing.
All I can say it was “no, no, no” no to this, no to that, just that kind of thing.
Look it was really just a, you know, here we are, at the end of the line kind of thing.
I don’t know what else to tell you but it’s basically like, really, this is really the end I have nothing else to say kind of thing.

Radomir Luza
North Hollywood, Calif.
Gotham

I spent five days
And six nights
In your dog pound
Recently

The police state
That is Times Square

The somber jamboree
Of the 9/11 memorial

The cold harbor
Of St. Patrick’s Cathedral

I understand Gotham

But eleven years later
Will you ever be the same

Will the joy return
The flood of peace
Wash you clean

When will the thoughts
Of the blood and bodies
Leave your skull
Like forlorn soldiers
Marching off to war

I love you Gotham

But you bend my brain
Like an Oleander fading
A headlight dimming
A door closing

V.K. Sreeelesh
Thelassery, Kerala, India
Milking hills

When I was a kid
Hills trickled their milk
Down the channels, that
Froth with a “shoo”
That we mimicked, and
We kids scooped the cool
In tiny our hands
Tasting better than
Our mother’s—Now
They’ve grown old,
And are like aunties
In the street with no milk,
But only the “shooooo”.

About the Poets

Lynn Behrendt is co-editor of the dream blog *Annandale Dream Gazette* and the author of *petals, emblems* (Lunar Chandelier Press). **David Buuck** is the founder of BARGE (the Bay Area Research Group in Enviro-aesthetics), and co-founder of *Tripwire*, a poetics journal. **Stephanie Gray** is a poet and super 8 filmmaker. Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs just published her chapbook *I thought you said it was sound / How does that sound?* **Wil Hallgren** is one of the founders of *The National Poetry Magazine of the Lower East Side*. His collection, *Where Three Roads Meet*, is forthcoming from Upset Press in 2014. **Eliot Katz** is the author of six books of poetry, including *Love, War, Fire, Wind: Looking Out from North America’s Skull*; and *Unlocking the Exits*. A longtime activist for a wide range of peace and social-justice causes, an interview with Katz about the politics of Occupy Wall Street is up at www.litkicks.com/OccupyKatz. **Radomir Luza** is a playwright and theater critic in Los Angeles. His play *The Blood Will Murder Roses* was performed at Boog’s Poets Theater Night at this summer’s Welcome to Boog City poetry and music festival. **Dan Raphael** is the author of over a dozen books of poetry, including *Impulse & Warp: The Selected 20th Century Poems* and works at the Oregon DMV. **V.K. Sreeelesh** is a freelance journalist who writes about travel and politics in the Persian Gulf region and Southwest India.

Lynn Behrendt
Red Hook, N.Y.

I Saw a Shirt

I saw a shirt that said
Got nukes? Cuba does
Mega Geek
Sons of Comisky
Happy New Yr
We survived
Rosemary is my homegirl
I’m proud to be white
“I love New York” in Arabic
High heels, high hopes
Love all; trust few
Feh
Christina sucks
Just Kiss Me as she leaves
sunset Plaza in Los Angeles
I am a motherfucker
Straight pride
Bodybuilding
While you were reading this
I farted
I am a drunk
Working Class Hero
Porch Monkey 4 Life
Angel
I screw trainwrecks
Too hot to care
King of dorks
If his package ain’t packing,
ship him off to another biatch
I’m Gandalf
MILF
US ARMY
Hey world, I bite
my thumb
at thee
Eat beef clip art
Occupy all streets
Love me; don’t eat me
2 cold 2 know I’m cool
My little Princess
Pants
I have no opinion
Change your incandescent lightbulbs
to fluorescent
I am important in ways
that don’t mean a damn thing
I love Jesus
Feed me candy
I went to Key West for spring break
and all I got was this illegitimate child
Not my fault
Coming soon in big block letters
They’ve found something
that does the work of five men:
>>>

one woman
I’m too pretty to do homework
so my brother does it for me
May the odds be ever in your favor
I (picture of an elephant)
the San Diego Zoo
I invented this swagger
Not everything stays in Vegas
I’m mean-ass
Support Darwinian evolution:
kill a weakling today
Nobody likes a nobody
I am Republican:
are you surprised?
I’m going to the prom
The mighty
If you like my guns
you’ll love my rocket
I’m retired but I work
as a part time pain in the ass
Back in black is rampant in schools
Girl
So I’m kind of a big deal
No future
Poker freak
Hey LeBron
how’s my dick taste?
Favorite grandbaby
Smart cookie
Human
Take care of uterus
Some dudes marry dudes:
get over it
I love wine
I’m naked under here
That’s how I roll
Not in the band
Only this
Pump up the fruit
I eat more pussy
than cervical cancer
Everybody has to believe
in something; I believe
I’ll have another beer
I own Disney
There’s a party in my tummy
When the rapture comes,
we’ll get our country back
I’m too pretty to breathe
so this respirator does it for me
Get high
Marines suck
Eat shit and die
Reborn
Office rat
I’m with me
I’m too stressed
to pay all these bills
I scored high on my drug test
Bullshit 80s baby
I slept on the Great Wall
I have a feeling you may be a douche
Think of me as the Barbie
you’ll never get to play with
My heart is behind bars
The world is my ashtray
I don’t mind if you kill me
Sorry if my loud pipes
disturbed your phonecall
Zombie pony
I will be masturbating within the next hour
I have lupus: what’s your excuse?
I can’t—I am a Mormon
Talk to me in French
Eat bananas
Bible camp blood bath
Does this shirt make my tits look big?
Get out of my head
I’m out of my mind at the moment
but feel free to leave a message
I beat anorexia
Dip me in chocolate
and throw me to the lesbians
If you knew my family you’d understand
Fat people are hard to kidnap

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Dan Raphael

Portland, Ore.

Suddenly Mountain Night

breathing like an internal sculptor or a baker using flour from several continents
with varied social norms, introducing whats introduced.
no one can talk the eggs into opening, maybe because they have no limbs,
because their geometry encloses their universe, fasts meant to be broken,
don't fill the tank before you climb the mountain,
stirred by wind, yeasted by wind,

comes in like darkness from its summer way south,
like i cut myself 10 minutes ago and only now is blood,
an infrared window into muscles a quarter mile long:
all the cables, knitwear, porcupine sprouts, peristaltic conveyors
gibboning among a series of reactive bubbles as if my stomach is about to boil,
how rumors of certain foods make me hungry even if I just ate

night food, fried not fresh—find me a 2AM salad, peaches after bourbon,
as if carbohydrates can forgive what ive just done,
I anoint my forehead with sausage grease & toast ash,
I like eating while walking but wish the food could keep up with me—
I need both hands to get through this overpopulated air,
the immeasurable coastline of my disentangled brain

if we could see the watershed like an eagle we wouldn't build roads like this,
cities over-ruling the inevitable:
give me rain and gravity and I'll move anything,
explosives to speed natural time purgatives justifiers
every cell in me freezing for a hundredth of a second
seeing the moons moon, the neutrino faster than light,
not that the sun changed but the earth questioned its relationship
I thought someone was behind me & turned so quick

POETRY

Wil Hallgren

Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

From 'Where Three Roads Meet'

The horse's breath freezes
the links of the bridle,
and the stirrups touch snow,
on a windswept knoll
a single flowering plum.

Small and simple things, cups
stacked in a cupboard,
the creak of the treadle, grain
stored in crocks,
sparks off a burning log.

With black specks on the horizon
closing in quickly
it is a most inconvenient time
to suddenly remember
the voice of my mother singing.

New from Kelsey Street

An Atlas of Lost Causes by Marjorie Stein



Mine is an atlas of lost causes. It is a relief to let go of hope. Its absence may allow the infinite to move in, where each wish can find its perfect candle to blow out.

The murder mystery as an asymptote: throughout her exquisitely careful, relentless layering of stunning phrase after stunning phrase, we feel Stein getting closer and closer, forever approaching the impossible and unidentified crime that she's exploring ever more minutely all the time.

— COLE SWENSEN

POETRY, PAPERBACK, \$16

PERIL AS ARCHITECTURAL ENRICHMENT



by Hazel White

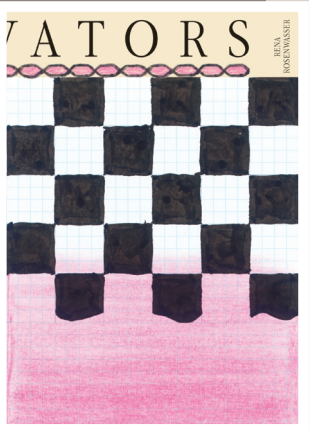
The canopy of a tree, say a poplar, like a round house, removes the site of vulnerability — the obvious entrance and back with no protection. Privacy can creep about in the leaves and below them, hang here as lungs on the outside.

I set this book down and wept....It is the most beautiful piece of writing I have read in many years.

— BHANU KAPIL

POETRY, PAPERBACK, \$16.95

ELEVATORS



by Rena Rosenwasser

Amorphous forms alighted like film. Shapes gave up their names. Gender lost its essential glue. I was moving in and out of my substance as if I had numerous sleeves.

This passionate psalm poem is a labyrinth inside a travelogue inside a dream.

— JANE MILLER

POETRY, PAPERBACK, \$17

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Stacking Up: Betsy Fagin on Occupy and the People's Library

CASAMASSIMA from page 1

only a centralizing factor in a person's life—be they artists, students, professionals—but also a space that reaches beyond research and academics toward community sustainability, creative literacy, and information sharing.

I completely agree with this—the notion of the library as a rarefied, silent place doesn't really suit what's happening in the world in these times. I think it's an outmoded notion we can do without. There can and should be as much passion in libraries as there is in the rest of our lives—and hopefully we're all living engaged, passionate lives! When we held Liberty Park, the library quickly became a gathering place—a social, noisy, joyous place, filled with art and music, with poetry readings, film screenings, meetings, and debates. The library was where people came together.

What factors prompted the creation of the OWS library? How does it attempt to change, or evolve, the role of the community library as the locus of revolutionary thinking and action?

Sorry to disappoint, but it really didn't come from a place of theory at all. There was a pile of books that needed organizing and stewardship. Those of us who stepped forward to care for the books and the collection formed the library working group. I suppose theory, mission and vision grew from there, but originally it came from service and direct action.

I'm a librarian who saw books that needed organizing and people looking for information resources. That's been one of the greatest challenges, how to hold the space for a library without any actual physical space. The People's Library went mobile immediately after the raid—we distributed books from shopping carts and bicycle carts and backpacks we carried on our backs. We sent anarchist lit to friends in prison and conducted teach-ins and read-ins in various spaces. We created pop-up libraries at actions and in marches.

One of the primary aims has always been to empower and engage the community, and I count the existence of other People's Libraries around the country and around the world as evidence of our success. Many of them were wiped out in systematic raids, but some are still going strong. Biblioteca Popular Victor Martinez (@BibliotecaPopul) just opened in East Oakland last week and it's gorgeous; they're doing fantastic work! Together, we're doing something right.

Frankly, I'm not out to teach anyone anything, but I'm happy to explore ideas of what a library is and can be along with whoever finds that an interesting project. Our library created

itself and we adapted with it to the situations we find ourselves in. One of my hopes is always that people will claim their own authority and empower themselves to meet their own needs and those of their communities. Libraries can be a vehicle for this process, but anything can really—there's no one path.

Can you describe the administrative, as well as the philosophical, function of the OWS librarian?

Again, I have some resistance to framing it as a philosophical or theoretical problem, so don't really want to talk about it that way. What was important, and remains important to me, is being in the streets, peopling the commons, taking up the necessary space to build community, explore new ideas and express our dissatisfaction and dissent as well as our joy in a physical, tangible way.

When we were in the park, one of our roles as librarians was kind of as tripmaster for those who might not know how to handle heavy theory. Funny to think of it that way. But

economists, political theorists, (Slavoj Žižek popped by for example). But there was also always an air of synchronicity: people would tend to find what they needed to find—every reader their book, every book its reader.

In light of the NYPD's razing of over 5,000 books, what are some of the biggest obstacles to conducting information literacy, locally and nationally?

I'm part of an active lawsuit against the NYPD and the City

of New York at the moment. The issue isn't just one of

information literacy at this point, but something more fundamental—the ability to gather in the commons and express dissent. Information literacy—media literacy, political engagement—are crucial, but without the freedom to assemble to discuss our concerns and share information, what can we accomplish? How can we create change? The issues are connected. The destruction of libraries and the privatization and militarization of public space are dire threats to freedom.

Now that the OWS library is a year old, what does the future hold for the collection and programming?

I think that now that we've made it through the first year, I feel happy to step back from the library. The future of the collection is in the hands of those willing to take responsibility for it. I haven't worked professionally as a librarian since the birth of my son six years ago, so I don't feel as attached to the professional issues that are dear to

Thom Donovan photo

some of my colleagues in the working group. One of the joys of a horizontally organized consensus-based model is that it goes where the energy is. It's very fluid by design. I can only speak for myself, not for the whole working group, but the way I see it absolutely anything could happen: that's the beauty of it.

Christophe Casamassima is the editor and publisher of Furniture Press Books; co-founder, with Douglas Mowbray, of Poetry in Community; and teaches in the film studies department at Towson University. He is the author of five books of poems.



Betsy Fagin (r.) at the People's Library.

something in the question sort of implies that folks can't handle heavy theory and I don't think that's accurate. We didn't stock the library or curate the collection—the collection was made up of what people felt we should have. There were professors in our ranks, but we weren't there to teach anything; we were there to connect and to share, to explore things together, to investigate, to discuss. Even the notion of "layman" and "general public" sounds totally condescending to me. The idea of top-down education is kind of funky. We did have teach-ins with

Ghost Writers: Exploring Greying Ghost Press

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find a use for everything."

Paper ephemera is not only fun for Annarummo to produce and sell, but it's also a good source of inspiration for design elements, it seems. Other inspiration comes from small presses and journals alive and well this day in age.

"I devour a ton of stuff," says Annarummo. "A lot of chapbooks and zines and comics. I can't even funnel it down to a list. I grew up reading fanzines and crudely put together magazines and hand-drawn comics. That style will always stick with me. Right now I'm trying to balance high-quality book production with my love for the Xerox machine." That juxtaposition of high and low art is something that Greying Ghost illustrates well in their efforts to produce affordable yet beautiful books.

Annarummo may be modest on the Greying Ghost website, but he is willing to admit that he loves what he does and takes pride in that. It is great to see someone who lets his project speak for itself on his website, but who is willing to take credit for the hard work he puts forth. For someone who says "I'm just trying to keep up" when referring to what he is doing with book design in comparison with other presses, Greying Ghost is doing a great job.

I asked Annarummo about what he sees in Greying Ghost's future. In one year, he hopes to be putting the finishing touches on more chapbooks. In five years? "Maybe having a completely letter-pressed chapbook. Also, my plan is to have a little shop somewhere. A hole in the wall sort of place. A champion of small and independent presses. Selling books and wares. Making books while selling books. Living the dream."

The writers he publishes, as well as the readers of these excellent books, can surely appreciate his passion. "I get really excited about what I do," he says. "I put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into every project. I'm always willing to deliver a stack of pamphlets or hang up flyers or go the extra mile. People can see that, and that's why I think they've taken an interest in the books."

The d.a. levy lives event in New York brings Annarummo to the Big Apple via bus. Eric Amling, Sasha Fletcher, D.J. Dolack, and Tyler Flynn Dorholt will be reading at the event. This will be "the first real Greying Ghost event ever," admits Annarummo, "It will be great to finally put names to faces. So swing by. It'll be grand."

www.greyingghost.com

Kimberly Ann Southwick lives in Philadelphia and runs Gigantic Sequins.

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and women lived and congregated, traveled and talked. It was a revolt not so much within the means of production, rooted in factory soviets and the revolutionary working-class party, as one within the means of life themselves."

Ok, so for our forum, how was your conception of social-political space affected by your experience with OWS? What revelations about social interactivity did you have, if any? Now that OWS has moved to the working group stage and there isn't a visible central location how are you parsing revolutionary developments?

How are we thinking through the consequences of the bigger social space we find ourselves in, namely the industrial-military-prison complex that uses prison sentences as a punitive measure to restrain dissonant, rebellious, revolutionary members of society—this is being hastened by new executive orders, namely the National Defense Authorization Act and other stringent measures that greatly impinge on civil liberties and militarize local law enforcement. Will we continue to protest when protesting is criminalized?

Jacques Rancière's essay "The Uses of Democracy" notes that participation in what we normally refer to as democratic regimes is usually reduced to a question of filling up the spaces left empty by power. Genuine participation, Rancière argues, is something different: the invention of an "unpredictable subject" who momentarily occupies the street, the factory, or the museum—rather than a fixed space of allocated participation whose counter-power is dependent on the dominant order. (*Jacques Rancière's essay "The Uses of Democracy," quoted in Claire Bishop's book, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, p. 283.)

Think about subjugation of everyday life, climate change executive orders, debt slavery, class slavery, drone attacks, war economies, mediated empire, narcissistic subjects, means of production, precariousness, violent appropriations, and Walmarts of the world. What is "genuine" participation?

Please talk about how you've put your body on the line and what hesitations you have about getting involved on the body level. Let's open the forum up to Tyrone Williams and Thom Donovan's presentations and field all of our questions as we go on.

Say it With Stones will publish Brenda Iijima's forthcoming book, *Early Linoleum*, next month.



d.a. levy lives

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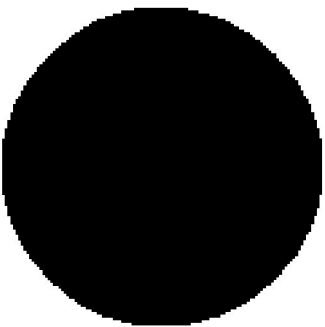
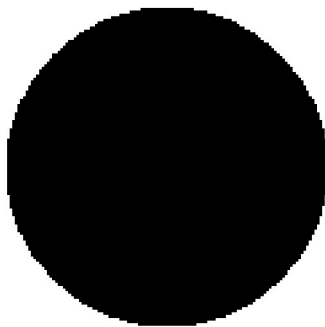
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Readings by Eric Amling, DJ Dolack, Tyler Flynn Dorholt, and Sasha Fletcher, with music by Tara Hack. Event hosted by Greying Ghost editor Carl Annarummo. \$5 suggested.

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