

MISC. PROJ.

a poetry newsletter

number one
December 1996



"intellectual property

is also theft"

---Charles Bernstein

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edited by Mark Prejsnar
Atlanta

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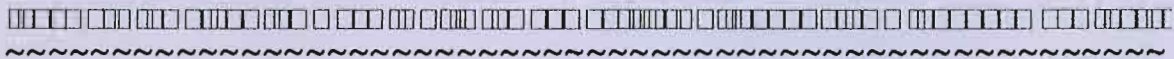
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Cal Taubman
three poems

Grind at Mill the Ages

nope it doesn't relate this notation
is one of the ancient ones

a script like an anchor
its up to forensics
for any sickness is evening
moving this would entitle you
blinding forces
talker to consciousness

the rest of fear
moves in with the national team
a psych note
stabs
move

quick back back reshoot

Milk Row

new as a rose it
obscures the mountain
ocean stress quick
morning song flies

order to give the
bridge date a violence
here this is swamp--
or plosives, thinking

total the fossil it
laughs with a rain
riff riff to the edge we
ask: burn in

Manifest

Stagger Lee was a dark and a quick
moving through the sentence.

catch him!

Look out, he said--
I'm
left, Ameriker, awful kind rumbling
(murder on trains);
not conjured
with
bargains for the wary--

to disobey
a blood gets to pumping

blacking out.

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Mark Prejsnar
essay

The Shape of Poetry, Shape of Changing

Good poetry is a moving target. The best work done in this country in the last fifteen years looks for its inspiration to Stein, Olson and Zukofsky. You'd have thought that these influences would be superseded by more recent ones, writers who would carry the impulse of those big presences on to us with adjustments and rebellions. But the flaccid mainstream poetry scene made it necessary to turn back and think about poetry that challenged human being, existential and thematic poetry existing in the here and now, in vivid realizations of sound and the other aspects of the basic materials of the medium.

The most important aspect of poetry is its sound. It's true that other dimensions can sometimes be foregrounded to the extent that they overwhelm

sound as a primary concern. The work of the De Campos brothers in Brazil is a central case: use of graphics unique to the feel of a poetry that is also aural, together with a sense of urgency involving modernist pain and socialist fervor, generate concrete poetry that relates to its place on the page. Almost all other concrete poetry fails to rethink its definitions (poetry, graphic art, writing, conceptual art) and their placement within cultural activity. Such concrete poetry ends up being very weak graphic work, crummy visual art, not writing. Many junctions of urgency need to intersect, for work that blasts poetry off its base within sound, to live as a disturbing presence.

(Sometimes those urgencies can also drive poems past the normal understanding of how sound and language-physicality work--even though they do not actually replace aural tools with something else. Both Olson and Spicer try to grasp new ways the physicality of words might shake a reader up, and they do so in a manner {and indeed in this respect they are quite consciously giving themselves Poundian permission} which is sloppy & inconsistent--a manner, an approach, that almost demands sloppiness & inconsistency you might say. There's a sense that the words are there for some disquieting reasons, and that their shuffled distraction reflects crisis. This feeling jostles and startles a new reader, so that she gives these poets a chance long before they make their first full coherent impact. Much the same could be said about Hart Crane too, except that an unhelpful literary scene confused him regarding how his own crises linked to those of the culture he was working within; and in a parallel fashion that scene encouraged a wash of literary prettiness that we certainly can hear in him today. There's even a danger readers in our time will try to dodge the staggering lightening his work detonates, put off by the erratic and clumsy proprieties.)

The best poetry will continue to respond to the modernist challenge. But it will evolve. In his book **Total Syntax** Barrett Watten meditates on the parallel paths of anglophone modernism and that other striking modernism, surrealism. He points out that surrealism tended to valorize the image, while our modernist moment and all the streams flowing from it valorize the physicality of language. There isn't room here to explore this dichotomy, which I consider central to our current situation. Suffice to say that many different streams are coming together...and breaking apart again. Good poetry is a moving target today. The challenging intensities of Clayton Eshleman and Alexander Will, the radical world-breaking (as world-building) of Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, a complete sense of musical construction in Clark Coolidge, unhappy lyricism as saving song-trance in David Shapiro, Nathaniel Mackey's twisted sonic balance. (I omit Susan Howe, as I can't encompass the breadth and depth of her work in a phrase.) These are some of the jumping-off points for younger poets, who will sound different, mutated, familiar....

NOTE: Since writing this essay I've discovered the excellent little magazine *Arshile*, and have found that the indefatigable Marjorie Perloff has an interview with the De Campos brothers in issue 3. This is in keeping with their admirable interest in visual dimensions (although some of the other concrete poetry they feature is vulnerable to the critique sketched above). Perloff of course should get some kind of (anti-official) medal, as the one academic consistently trying to explain real, modernist currents in poetry to the uncomprehending university. I actually thought I was breaking a bit of newish ground here, discovered in my case during a year's sojourn doing biological field research in Brazil in 1984. Kudos to *Arshile*...definitely check them out. The sources I would recommend (available in finer libraries) would also include:

for the Luso-conversant:

Signantia quasi coelum = signância quase céu. Haroldo de Campos. São Paulo : Editora Perspectiva, 1979.

Xadrex de estrelas : percurso textual 1949-1974. Haroldo de Campos. São Paulo : Editora Perspectiva, 1976.

and with some bi-lingual selections from both Heraldo and Augusto:

Brazilian poetry 1950-1980. Edited by Emanuel Brasil and William Jay Smith. Middletown : Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

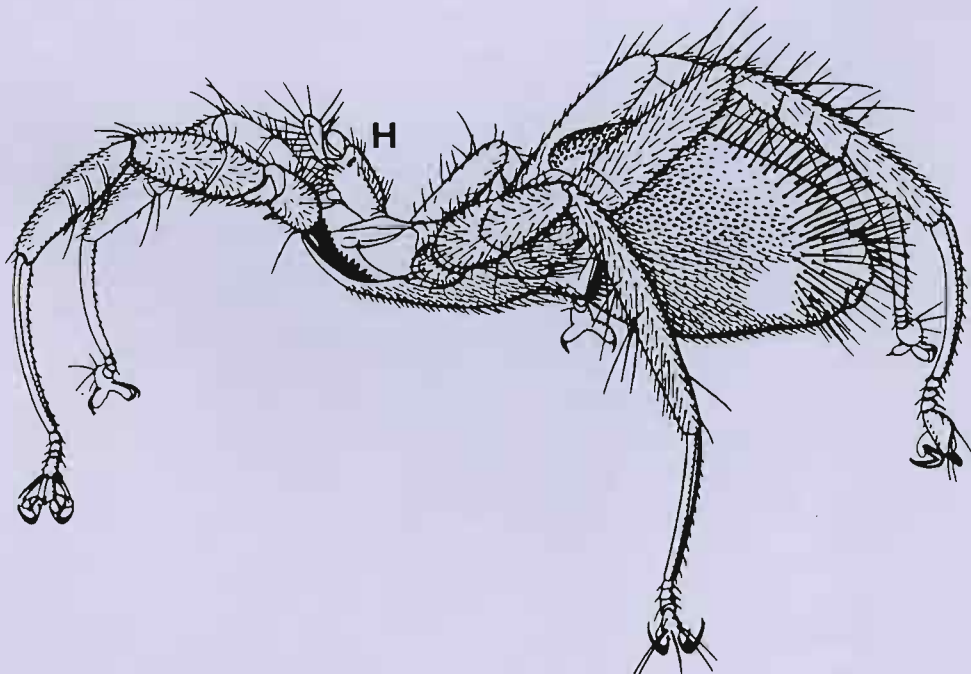


Figure 37. A wingless bat-parasite of the family Nycteribiidae. Note the long legs, the small head (H), placed dorsally, and the hooked claws.

Gina Entrebe
Two poems

Dolomite

An ordinary profile with long settled the line it inches.

A quick look at the economy it inches choir to same and
here the sizes melt when he returns here the quartz.

These were once a speaker, a tribe all the priest a timeless

Now swing the sign a door house to rent a sequence
unsure there in back nether the mind you pick

Ordinary profile it might be with a trim home all the
words determined a bee wriggles through sunlight
at the one afternoon an amazed mass in slim time.

Summer Codes

It's almost at the sixteen waves that hight history.

I novel that explodes know craniometry we drift we drift.

Actual the crane fly turns into a crane, and so...

Lantern into cat feet a near express that hovers into into and.

None the sand the shadow has impetus not furious junk sand.

Into the plot with laugh this is permits for turning, looking.

At the night at its slow slowness the engine goes off.

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John W. Law

Gun or Mount (Para)

this and that and that oh to have
it be that way: a massive
"well well" --- econo-slave,
tear up (oh baby),,,, missive

maybe in the one living
it's a total a given to atoms
or blown up, the strangely leaving
is that.... 78 RPMs?

now the unplenium I agreed to tape
are we this one way--
it savages a grafton humid & apt
this is a greeting--hey!

maybe to be is one mechanism
follow the told route electrical
via chicago train hammer maudlin
fine wail always impersonal

the pressing plant and river warp so,
a one quick improv I guess--
all the doctahs in wis-con-sin (er,)
sure couldn't help such a guest

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Mark Prejsnar
Review essay

Two Essential Anthologies

Poems from the other side of the century : a new American poetry /
edited and with an introduction by Douglas Messerli.
Sun & Moon Press, 1994.

50 : a celebration of Sun & Moon Classics.
edited by Douglas Messerli.
Sun & Moon Press, 1995.

Sun & Moon Press has for ten years been the heart and soul of important poetry publishing in the U.S. Now Sun & Moon and poet Douglas Messerli have released two anthologies which are vital to thinking and feeling about contemporary poetry.

The first listed above is a sort of anti-Norton, an attempt to see U.S. (with some Canadian) poetry in the twentieth century as a working poet might see and respond to it, one smart and vibrant enough to have little use for the genteel hyper-anti-modernist personal-voice poem of the academy. It is interesting that Messerli quotes David Antin (in a variation on a famous quote) as saying "Anthologies are to poets as zoos are to animals." The model for this quip, usually though not invariably attributed to Rexroth, is: Poetics is to poets as ornithology is to birds. That quote of course could be read as pretty much an anathema on the grouping Messerli has generally been associated with, the language circle, who are the first important and creative group to theorize about poetry in the history of U.S. culture. (Pound preached at people, and furthermore his practice is important but his theory is usually seat-of-the-pants and awfully uneven; he had no group around him interested in theory; what Williams and Olson produced are fugitive snatches not connected with each other or with anyone else's theorizings; about the clarity and usefulness of the exchanges on poetry in the voluminous Olson-Creeley correspondence, the less said the better.) We will be reviewing recent works on poetics by central language poets such as Bernstein, Perelman, Andrews and Mackey in the next several issues of this newsletter. But even more interesting than this "deep background" is the different emotional valence of the two versions: the logic of Rexroth's quip is, poets can ignore poetics with just as little immediate consequence as avians remaining indifferent to a benign bird watcher. The logic of Antin's warning is flatly opposite: it says (quite rightly--that's why small attempts like the present magazine are necessary) that selection is power and helps keep a conservative focus fully in command of the available resources. Editors play this control game by cornering and "defining" some good poets, while excluding many others.

Since Messerli starts out his introduction stating these issues, it's startling that he nonetheless follows Donald Allen's legendary 1960 anthology The New American Poetry by breaking things up into cataloged sections--Olson, Duncan, Ginsberg, the Howes, Eigner, Robert Kelly and Clarence Major are historical and philosophical, for instance; whereas Mac Low, Baraka, Mackey, Bruce Andrews and John Taggart are performance-oriented and gestural. I wish he

hadn't done this. It's sort of an enactment of Antin's idea of a zoo, complete with the Latin genus and species names. The concern with politics, values and history in Baraka, Mackey and Taggart (to take a facile example) is just as great as their love of performative voice; this suggests that an arrangement somehow reflecting the feel and movement of the work included would have been preferable to any analytic grid--and no more subjective. (Tho' of course it would be subjective enough--not a bad thing.) I'm sure that the anti-Norton concept is key here: Only if it really introduces college classes and similar groups of neophytes to these vital currents, is the thing really going to work. That at least would seem to be the underlying reasoning. (At \$30.00 for a 1,135 page paperback, a major, directed, influential statement is being made..) So there must be some editorial handle to help readers cope with all this newness.

Apart from this, the thing is superb and hopefully will start marching through the institutions...(The release of an anti-Norton reminds me of the call by Ron Silliman a few years ago, for non-mainstream poets to try to burrow into the soft underbelly of the academic beast, and create space for good writing from within; unfortunately he pointedly compared his recommendation to the ga-ga delusion, which he fully endorsed, that the passive Democratic Socialists of America were going to capture the "Democratic Party" from within, and that this was the best way forward for the left! I hope poetic entrism is faring a lot better than DSA is, these days...) But much as it may function as a teaching tool, anyone who doesn't own a pretty outstanding library might consider getting this volume. (As a library professional and a pauper, I have to interject that you can help yourself, and Sun & Moon, as well as the cause of getting this stuff into more hands, if in the absence of thirty spare bucks you submit a written request to your public or academic library, asking that they acquire it.)

The other anthology is not, as I imagined when I heard its title, a sampler from the book series Sun & Moon Classics, but a sort of festschrift in its honor, with previously unpublished poems, fiction and drama by Sun & Moon authors. (This volume represents the fiftieth in the series.) Jackson Mac Low's exceptionally textured and musically varied pieces are even more exciting than most of his work of the last ten years; the long stage piece by Mac Wellman was a revelation, disturbing, profane, truly stage-verse of a Jacobean in-your-face weirdness--suggesting that I've been completely uninformed about an amazing writer; Lyn Hejinian's poem seems uncharacteristically meandering, but may repay attention, and David Bromige's substantial piece is remarkable, the best thing of his I can remember seeing; but it also reminds me that I have to go back to his books, which I haven't looked at carefully enough....

And so it goes, immediate responses intense enough to demand more thought about particular writers, leading to other readings and other responses....this is surely the best possible function for an anthology.

João Tijucal
four poems

Rag Content

paper
 mate

A newness almost
 phoneable

Heavy hangs
the ground
that wears
 the sled

that wears out

Water Mark

Slip slide in

All the times
 trains run

a polluted river
in the
leaving eye

Systemic

Sliver
as you go
into the blear.

Cyber sum
ack ack to a
form less
ness,

ogre able
to move
& broke bod.

Out of the
experience.

Runoff

Express
my desire

cleaned out
burnt down.

Ex stress
clearing out

mirror sayer
blank drive.

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Mark Prejsnar
two poems

Jabber at Mollify

ado

insomniac weathered

clean shot hull ricket ricochet nice going
added to sample fang sting wharf

it was that a tronical beak mire
a quick study running in melt

all tun make realisms
ail tone mocking racialisms
oil town miking rendition
 schism at the last laugh

would this be near

 it hits at the center
as if as if as if as if

nugatory to the blister load

 actual the
path to privity here take this a summit
with legs the con game changes hands
 screw 'em back on

nah, hovel home with a tear
a loam raking table upset

noun'd apt me flow times increment
outcrement

fakery snake slip

it hits at the center

one more up on
at the bus stop
pull away

iridescent
mild walt inning
to change ears
wavering sad a light
hear narrowcast
all tape lemur
shot at quick
secure the quake hands

the program of the know-nuttin party
by "one of 'em"

are we
an ache empties or teach angles
this here ya got one more
beep a poetic lexicon
for the auto

insomniac weathered

it just goes to slow
anchor that trash can

Metallic Construction

thus and so

a crane crushes alloy

amble,
pigeons on tap

ragweed afore

that seeps toward aviary

memoir accumulation

a kind of alms

ah ah ah this aggregate impasse
this is what ersatz means to me

decker of a black slam hard zomb finish coffee
then it carves "table"

brush strokes of
the hot impasted wax
 iconic thrill
a flag for balled treasons

onward--
on war

a guerre in touch with feelings
I find it so moving, that is
emigrating

a drain rushes alleys

oogle mashpee

train to the downtown

a little more oomph

rag is focused unclear
can ya beat bein human?

refugee not refuge

a nerve total
premise is loam
accentuate the positive
clinical slough

a creature discomfort
a kind of benefaction
or putrefaction I forget what he said
a farewell to alms

gritted slide
a crane crushes
axis of alloys
jeer train
tutorial nubulae

this involves clubs
as crush

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**JOURNALWATCH--
new & recent little magazines of value.**

Arshile. Includes fiction, poetry and has an especially strong emphasis on visual arts (origin of the name?). Have published William Bronk, Robert Creeley, Clark Coolidge, Ron Padgett, Douglas Messerli. I feel that for my taste,

despite a great opening few issues, there's a bit of unevenness in the poetry selections recently. Worthwhile. Subs \$18.00 two issues. P.O. Box 3749, Los Angeles, CA 90078

Disturbed Guillotine. The most consistent new little magazine I seen. Includes poetry, fiction, essays. Have published Clark Coolidge, Diane Diprima, Clayton Eshleman, Robert Grenier, Aselm Hollo. Cool very minimal sense of visual design, black & white mod protopunk, which ain't original, but which I like very much. Introduced me to energetic poets who aren't in my personal style (they tend to have, um, original names: Mark Amerika, Antler)..but whose Beat-crazy drive isn't stuffy or academic. Both Language & Sulfuric tendencies here. Highly recommended. Subs \$14.00 two issues. P.O. Box 14871, University Station, Minneapolis, MN 55414-0871

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Tangled Web They Weave-- surfing for poetry

The Web is strange. It's empowering, but for an odd group of people. Quite an interesting clutch of site names and descriptions are found at the pages that collect URL's for poetry. Some of the ones we won't discuss here:

Agricomm Cowboy Poetry.

"Dark poetry that reminds you of Edgar Allen Poe, written by a teenager."

Poetry dedicated to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Deep, decadent, depressing drivel by Tammy Douglas.

I'll only mention that ALL of the above are accurate descriptions. Some of the sites you **should** check out:

Recursive Angel. <http://www.calldei.com/~recangel/>

"...specializes in the cutting edge of poetry, fiction and art." Well no not exactly. But one of the few web sites currently publishing good poetry by little-known poets. (And golden oldies: recently Pound & cummings pieces appeared, a reasonable indication of their allegiances.) Definitely one the good ones.

Demo. <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/silliman/demo>

We need more of this--stand alone poetic texts. This is Demo, a chapbook-length poem by Ron Silliman. Doing this might threaten the commercial viability of our best publishers...but I figure I'm a little weird to want to read new poetry on a screen, not in an attractive print book. An installment in Silliman's alphabet series, much like Toner, the one book in the sequence I own. Silliman's work plays more with natural speech & social space than much language-writing...it's his take on politics.

AVEC. <http://www.crl.com/~creiner/syntax/avec.html>

AVEC, a print journal and publishing operation, is one of the best and most important forces for poetry in the U.S. This is the finest website we've found so far. Well-designed. Recent work by Laura Moriarty, Keith Waldrop, David Bromige, Peter Gizzi, Julie Kalendek, Ann Lauterbach. {See our next issue for comments on Bromige's own excellent website.} Info on AVEC's books and journal, crucial parts of our poetry scene. Links to other non-mainstream publishers.

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Books Noted and Highly Recommended

**{Reviews of many of these titles will appear
in future issues of *Misc. Proj.*}**

- T.J. Anderson III. At last round up. Somerville, MA : lift, 1996.
Bruce Andrews. Paradise & method : poetics & praxis. Evanston, IL : Northwestern U.P., 1996.
John Ashbery. Can you hear, bird : poems. NY : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.
Charles Bernstein, Dark city. LA: Sun & Moon, 1996.
Joseph Ceravolo. The green lake is awake : selected poems. Minneapolis : Coffee House Press, 1994.
Dennis Barone and Peter Ganick, eds. The art of practice : forty-five contemporary poets. Elmwood, CT : Potes & Poets Press, 1994.
Arkadii Dragomoshchenko. Xenia. LA: Sun & Moon, 1994.
Clayton Eshleman. Under world arrest. Santa Rosa : Black Sparrow, 1994.
Michael Franco. The journals of the man who kept bees. Somerville, MA : lift, 1996.

- Barbara Guest. Selected poems. LA: Sun & Moon, 1995.
- Charles O. Hartman and Hugh Kenner. Sentences. LA: Sun & Moon, 1995.
- Lyn Hejinian. The cold of poetry. LA: Sun & Moon, 1994.
- Susan Howe. Frame structures : early poems, 1974-1979. NY : New Directions, 1995.
- Steven Jonas. Selected poems. Hoboken : Talisman House, 1994.
- Robert Kelly. Red actions : selected poems, 1960-1993. Santa Rosa : Black Sparrow, 1995.
- Ann Lauterbach. And for example. NY: Penguin, 1994.
- Nick Lawrence. Timeserver. Somerville, MA : lift, 1996.
- Tan Lin. Lotion bullwhip giraffe. LA: Sun & Moon, 1996.
- Nathaniel Mackey. Discrepant engagement : dissonance, cross-culturality and experimental writing. Cambridge : Cambridge U.P., 1993.
- Ange Mlinko. Immediate orgy & audit. Somerville, MA : lift, 1996.
- Ron Padgett. New & selected poems. NY: Godine, 1995.
- Bob Perelman. The trouble with genius : reading Pound, Joyce, Stein and Zukofsky. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1994.
- Bob Perelman. The marginalization of poetry : language writing and literary history. Princeton : Princeton U.P., 1996.
- Kit Robinson. The champagne of concrete. Elmwood, CT : Potes & Poets Press, 1991.
- Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, eds. Poems for the millennium : the University of California book of modern and postmodern poetry. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1995-
- Kurt Schwitters. Poems, performance pieces, proses, plays, poetics. Philadelphia : Temple U.P., 1993.
- David Shapiro. After a lost original. NY : New Directions, 1994.
- Gustaf Sobin. Breaths' burials. NY : New Directions, 1995.
- Joseph Torra. Keep watching the sky : poems. Cambridge, MA : Zoland Books, 1996.
- Rosmarie Waldrop. A key into the language of America. NY : New Directions, 1994.
- Marjorie Welish. Casting sequences : poems. Athens : University of Georgia Press, 1993.