



Original editors of Hanging Loose, circa 1982. From left, Dick Lourie, Ron Schreiber, Emmett Jarrett, and Robert Hershon.

Celebrating 50 Years of Hanging Loose Press

ART

Arnold Mesches

LIBRARIES

The Death and (After)life of Great American Libraries ::
Mellow Pages, Bushwick, Brooklyn [Part II]

MUSIC

Caroline Cotto, Zack Daniel, Duckspeak, el sudar,
Fear Not Ourselves Alone, Charles Mansfield, Max Miller, David Warpaint

POETRY

Vi Khi Nao, Wanda Phipps, Maged Zaher

PRINTED MATTER

Joe Brainard, Laura Elrick, Italian poetry,
Cecilia Vicuña, and Rosmarie Waldrop

SMALL PRESS

Catching up with Dikembe Press/Fonograf Editions

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A Conversation with Editor Jeff Alessandrelli



INTERVIEW BY JACKIE CLARK

Boog City editor Jackie Clark speaks to Jeff Alessandrelli, founding editor of Dikembe Press, about Dikembe’s beginnings, starting a vinyl record poetry press, and how his work as an editor influences his own writing.

Boog City: What came first, the press or the manuscript? I am always curious how people decide to start a press, if it is because they have a vision and desire or if it is because they know of a specific manuscript that they feel like should be published. Can you tell me a little bit how the press was formed?

Jeff Alessandrelli: Dikembe was actually formed out of a reading series that my friend Trey Moody and I used to do in Lincoln, Neb. called The Clean Part. One of our last readings (Oct. 6, 2012) featured two of our favorite poets, Gina Myers and Graham Foust, and since we knew it was going to be the penultimate reading for the series we decided to make a little book to commemorate. Gina Myers provided poems from her then forthcoming book *Hold It Down* and Graham Foust offered up some translations he’d done of Samuel Beckett’s poesy manuscript *mirlitonades* and we gave away the chap for free at the reading. And our close friend Ian Huebert did the front/back cover art. It was a fun little ephemeral project, in essence.

After the reading Trey wasn’t able to keep going with things—his wife had just had their daughter Charlotte—so my good friend/poet Bret Shepard stepped in and we decided to turn our fun little ephemeral project into a fun little ephemeral press.

Tell me about the name, Dikembe Press. I understand that it is named after the basketball player but can you tell me what it is about him that made you want to name your press after him?

A lovely question. Like a lot of fledgling presses, we threw around a healthy amount of names at the start, from serious-sounding ones to Guided By Voices inspired ones. I can’t remember any of ‘em right now—as I’m currently in the process of moving apartments and towns, my life is boxes and boxes—but none of them really fit. We landed on Dikembe for two primary reasons: 1) he was/is one of our favorite basketball players and both Bret and I are big NBA fans and 2) slightly whimsical and of-the moment, it seemed to sum up the nature of a chapbook press. The name served to connote the press’ humble impetus.

How have you come across most of your manuscripts? Did you have open submissions or did you do some soliciting? Do you feel like there is an overarching theme or aesthetic that connects all of the books you’ve published? Or do you just consider each manuscript on its own merit? I wonder if there is something distinctive you are looking for when you read poems and, if so, if you might be able to give me one or two representative lines from your authors that really hit the nail on the head and why.

We do both open readings and solicitations. For our first books we solicited and for our last few we open-read. I personally think that in order to set the tone and overall vision for a press it’s best to solicit at the beginning and our first books served that purpose: Emily Pettit, Matthew Rohrer, Christian Hawkey, and Christine Hume are some of our favorite contemporary poets and we thus published chaps by them when we first got started. From there we’ve held open reading periods and published chaps by Justin Marks, Haley Rene Thompson, Jesse Nathan, Julie Kantor, and Drew Scott Swenhaugen. Next up are Rebecca Farivar and Paul Legault, the former of which we solicited and the latter of which came from our 2015 open reading period.

With regards to an overarching theme or aesthetic...hmm. All of the books are fairly different, so I’d hesitantly say no. That being said my personal goal for Dikembe as a press is to put out books that don’t last, that are utilitarian in scope. And I guess what I mean by that is this: a lot of chapbook and “full-length” (or whatever you want to call them) presses seem to be very intent on making



Jeff Alessandrelli.

Zach Schamburg art.

beautiful artifacts, ones that will (hopefully) last the proverbial test of time. I love these presses and own dozens and dozens and dozens of books by them. But at the same time books by said presses cost more and, in the end, eventually get discarded the same way everything gets discarded. (In the past couple of years I’ve had friends who run fairly “big” “small” presses who’ve moved apartments, houses or towns, and when they do so they’ve had yard-sale type situations where they sold a lot of their books. Which for a plethora of reasons seemed and seems weird to me. I mean, as someone who’s currently in the hell of moving I get it. But it still seems weird.)

Although the past couple of Dikembe books were perfect-bound, prior to those two each was tape-bound. And cheap to buy. I mean, they’re still nice books-as-artifacts with cool cover art (primarily by artist Ian Huebert, who’s also done stuff for McSweeney’s and Copper Canyon, among other places). And all of them have amazing words inside. But if you read one of our chaps on the subway or the bus or somewhere and, having hopefully enjoyed it, then recycle it, that’s fine by me honestly.

Representative Dikembe lines:

“It is not an answer I am mapping. A definite/ and timely expression of acceptance.” (from Emily Pettit’s poem “Because You Can Have This Idea About Being Afraid Of Something”)

“You want of course to know what the hum is about, but the hum defies your lust for narrative. I turn my back on plot, curling like an ear into my own sound carpet.” (from Christine Hume’s *HUM*)

“There’s a couple infinities that shape our ends. The internet’s much better on Belmont. I am splashed by a small puddle that makes a tear drop on my iPhone.” (from Drew Scott Swenhaugen’s “Amor Fatty”)

Each of these lines/excerpts sums up our wildly varying ideas about poetry.

Tell me a little bit about the daily operations of the press and who handles what. I assume that you also have a day job. How do you get it all done?

Bret handles all the proofing/InDesign matters and I mostly correspond with authors and deal with the bookstores that carry our books—Powell’s, McNally Jackson, and Berli’s, among others. The books are made here where I live in Portland, Ore., although that’s soon to change, as I’m moving to Omaha next week. Arting is primarily Ian Huebert but it really depends on the book. Bianca Stone illustrated Emily Pettit’s chap and Edo Rosenblith is doing Paul Legault’s.

Who does publicity, you ask? Shamefully, no one really does publicity. This is a major failing on our part and we do rely on our authors to help get their books in the world. Do you know anyone who wants an internship with a chapbook press?

Speaking of wondering how you get it all done, in addition to the press, you’ve also recently started Fonograf Editions, a vinyl record poetry press, which I understand has some connection to Octopus Books. Where did you get the idea to start a vinyl record poetry press and how hard was it to make it a reality? Can you talk a little about how you got hooked up with Octopus Books? Your first release was Eileen Myles’ *Aloha/irish trees*. Can you tell me about how that audio came to you? And how some of your future publications like Harmony Holiday’s *The Black Saint and the Sinnerman* (forthcoming fall 2016) were selected?

What I’ve learned about my own writing—and my own self—by running a small press is the power of endurance.

Honestly I’ve had the idea do start a vinyl-record poetry press for years, mainly because, snobbingly, I mostly listen to vinyl and have quite a few older spoken word poetry records—Wallace Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, etc. I actually wrote a longer piece about the process of starting Fonograf Editions and my goals and intents for it on the website The Fanzine; the title of that piece was “Bad Business is Good Art—Fonograf Editions.” In it I discussed the initial starting-up challenges and there were quite a few, from figuring out where to get the records made to where to get them mastered to timeline issues to artwork stuff. Making a record is pretty much completely different than making a book, so the learning curve was kinda steep. To be honest it’s also a really expensive process. That beings said, reviews of Eileen’s record are coming out this fall in a couple of prominent places and I’m excited about the prospect of making more. Next up we have Rae Armantrout and, like you mentioned, Harmony Holiday’s *The Black Saint and the Sinnerman*.

With regards to hooking up with Octopus basically everyone there is my friend or close friend, particularly everyone who lives in Portland. So it seemed like, and is, a good fit. And in terms of the recording of Eileen’s piece she actually took it upon herself to record it at a professional recording studio when she was teaching in Naropa last summer. So it was amazing to put *Aloha/irish trees* out as our first record—and serendipitous.

To be reductive about it, at this point the selection process for Fonograf entails asking poets that we like. I know that sounds simplistic but since it’s such a new endeavor that really is it, at least for now. I’m sure that’ll change down the line, though.

Between Dikembe and Fonograf how do you find time to work on your own writing and/or how do Dikembe and Fonograf influence your writing? What have you learned about your own writing through the process of running a small press?

As I get older—I turn 33 in a couple months—I actually think about this a lot. For a while I was kind of hung up on it also; I got worried that my own writing (and personal life and real-world life) was suffering because I was spending too much time on things like Dikembe and Fonograf and other stuff that was more “labor of love” as compared to “labor of self.” But I guess what I’ve learned is that for me at least I have the desire to do it all, with the opportune word being “desire.” (I’m not sure if I actually can do it at all.) In the scheme of things my first full-length collection, *THIS LAST TIME WILL BE THE FIRST*, came out in 2014 and that wasn’t that long ago. I hope to have another out by 2018 or 2019, although who knows if that it’ll happen. But my modus operandi has always been to work on “stuff” a lot, whether it’s my own stuff or Dikembe stuff or Fonograf stuff. To me it comes down to a Biggie vs. Tupac kind of question. Biggie, no pun intended, notoriously only really recorded his raps when he was recording an album and when that wasn’t the case he wasn’t in the studio much. Tupac was the opposite—dude lived in the studio and he’s had the posthumous output to attest to that fact. Although I think Biggie is several million times better a rapper, I personally land on the Tupac side of things—I like to work. It gives me a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that I don’t get from a lot of other things. Sometimes I wish I was more into good movies or good television shows or good restaurants or even allowed myself more time to read. But in the end I’m somewhat proud of my work ethic. I’m not comparing myself to him by any means but there’s that semi-famous Marc Maron/Louis C.K. podcast wherein, after being complimented on his productivity by Maron, Louis says something along the lines of that being his only true talent—his drive and willingness to persevere in the face of turbulence. (For him it was television shows being cancelled and budgets being slashed and corporate overseers screwing up the works; for me it’s, of various kinds, literary and otherwise, rejections and rejections and rejections.) So I guess what I’m trying to say is what I’ve learned about my own writing—and my own self—by running a small press is the power of endurance. That all being said I start a new full-time job later this month in a completely new city and I’m going to have to make a lot of new changes—which will prove interesting for me to do, as I love routine and order and semblance. Life is change, though. Fingers never uncrossed.

Jeff Alessandrelli is the author of the full-length collection *This Last Time Will Be the First*. Other work has appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *Diagram*, *Gulf Coast*, *Boston Review*, and four chapbooks. The name of Jeff’s dog is Beckett Long Snout. The name of his micro-press is Dikembe Press.

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



Celebrating 50 Years of Hanging Loose Press In Conversation with Co-editor Robert Hershon



INTERVIEW BY JOANNA FUHRMAN

I have known Hanging Loose Press’ Brooklyn-based editor Robert Hershon almost all my life as a poet; he first started publishing my work in *Hanging Loose* magazine in the 1980s, when I was still a high school student. In addition to being a groundbreaking publisher, community builder, and witty raconteur, he has written 13 collections of brilliant, hilarious, heartbreaking poems. In honor of Hanging Loose Press’s 50th anniversary, *Boog City* asked me to conduct a short interview with him.

Boog City: When you first started publishing the journal, it was composed of loose pages in an envelope. Who came up with that idea? How many issues did you publish in that form? When did you stop?

Robert Hershon: In 1963, Ron Schreiber, a young instructor and Ph.D. candidate at Columbia, and Emmett Jarrett, an undergraduate just out of the army, started a handsome letterpress magazine called *Things*, as in [William Carlos Williams’] no poetry but in things. They got out three issues and went broke. They decided to try again, with a much cheaper format: unbound mimeographed pages in a printed envelope that served as the cover. If you liked a poem, you could tack it to the wall. If you didn’t like a poem, you could scribble a grocery list on the blank side.

At about this time, Dick Lourie came along and I followed soon after. Dick and Emmett had met in a Denise Levertov workshop at the 92nd St. Y, the first she ever taught. The late Gordon Bishop was another young poet in that workshop and, as Dick recalls, he was the one who came up with the name *Hanging Loose*. Gordon was briefly associated with HL but soon drifted away from the poetry scene.

We ran off the pages wherever we could use a mimeo. One issue we printed at Saint Ann’s. The covers were printed at a small shop Dick had found on 14th Street, run by a woman named Virginia Admiral. Many years later, I discovered that she was a close friend of Robert Duncan’s. And a while after that, I discovered she was the wife of Robert De Niro, Sr., the painter, and the mother of the actor.

Libraries and bookstores hated the loose-page format. Frances Steloff at the Gotham Book Mart would only carry the magazine if I hand-bound a sample copy. Nevertheless, we stuck with it for the first 25 issues. After that, we wanted a bigger page and a binding.

You are known for having poems by high school students in the magazine? When did that start? How did you come up with the idea?

In 1968, Dick Lourie, one of the earliest people to work for Poets in the Schools, suggested that we have a regular section of the magazine devoted to writing by high school students. I thought it was a terrible idea. I lost the vote and have been glad I did ever since.

Right from the beginning, we began getting remarkable work, from all parts of the country. In those pre-computer days and with *Hanging Loose* hardly a fixture on neighborhood newsstands, I don’t know how the young writers found us; they probably found each other first and traded information. What we were looking for were people who really wanted to write. We didn’t want to see warmed-over school assignments or tired imitations of famous poems. And we wanted to be in direct touch with the poets so we didn’t want submissions from teachers or parents, a rule that still applies. It may have been the Sixties, but there were still many strictures in place regarding content, especially for young writers, and that battle continues in high schools today. There were no restrictions on what HL would publish; sex, dope, death, anguish, love, and hate were all fair game.

Most of our young poets have gone on to other fields, but we’ve had a fair number of lifers—Meghan O’Rourke, Rebecca Wolff, Donovan Hohn, Alissa Quart, and a certain interviewer for *Boog*, to mention a few. We’ve published four well-received anthologies of work that first appeared in the HS section. After all this time, I’ve grown used to being approached by gray-haired people who don’t seem all that much younger than the editors. Hi, they say, I was one of your high school poets.

When did you start publishing books? How did that come about?

By 1972, we had been publishing the magazine for six years and since everything was done by the editors in their spare time, we had no wish to expand. But Ron Schreiber, a bit of a late starter, put together his first collection, *Living Space*, and badly wanted HL to publish it. We gave in. The book was a simple saddle-stitched affair with a cover drawing by Michaelen Hershon. Ron wanted to call it a Red Dot book, with said red dot to appear on the title page. Ron, who never learned anything much about production, didn’t understand that we could only print in one color: black. We gave him a red pen and he had to add the dot to the title pages by hand in all 300 copies. That was the end of Red Dot Books.

We didn’t think about books again until 1975. We’d been publishing Jim Gustafson, the wild man of Detroit poetry, and we thought someone should do a book of his. Then we thought: Hell, he’s our guy; we ought to do the book. So we published *Bright Eyes Talks Crazy to Rembrandt*. We quickly realized that it made sense to publish books in groups, so we added a book by a marvelous young California poet named Katy Akin and chapbooks by Emmett Jarrett and Jacquelyn Lapidus.

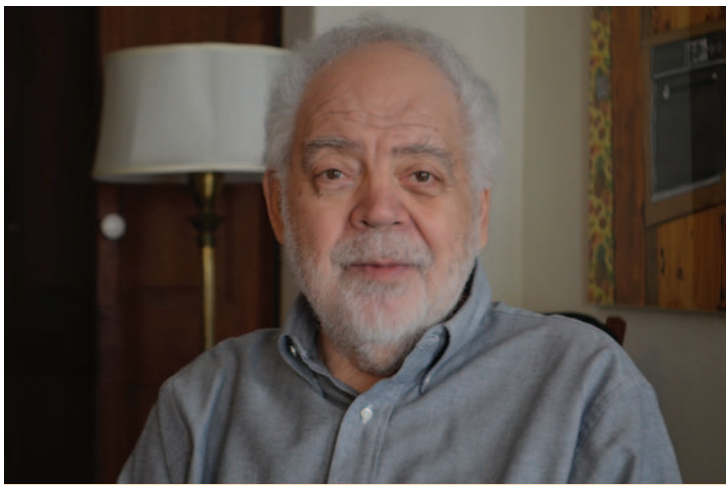
We’ve done about 240 titles since then, discovering along the way that books are easier to publish than a magazine, something that surprises many people. With books: No constant submissions, no subscriptions, no renewals, and no readers insisting on the latest issue as though the poems that were a few months old had grown stale. This is why so many small publishers who started with magazines killed them after they moved on to books. But we’ve kept doing the magazine, because we still really enjoy it and because it keeps us in touch with new writers. Most of the writers we publish first came to us through the magazine, including half a dozen or so who actually started in the magazine’s high school section. We consider supporting new writers and older writers who deserve more attention to be what small press publishing is all about.

Ideally, we have a first book on every list. We’ve published the first books of Sherman Alexie, Kimiko Hahn, D. Nurkse, Maggie Nelson, Eula Biss, and you, to name a few, and the first poetry collections by writers with much experience in other genres, such as Hettie Jones, Michael Cirelli, and Jack Agueros. At the same time, we try to stick with the writers we love, so we’ve done seven titles by Sherman, six by Paul Violi, four by Wilma McDaniel, five by Charles North, three by Sharon Mesmer, three by Steve Schrader, etc. Considering that we publish only six titles in the average year—we’ve done as many as nine—some juggling talent is needed.

Most of our books are poetry, but we’ve also published short fiction, plays, art books, memoirs, and a collection of letters. Whatever the form, we’re always looking for the same thing: energetic, non-academic, non-pompous, non-cluttered, writing that knocks us off our chairs. So far, if I say so myself, so good.

How has being a publisher affected your own writing?

I sort of backed into poetry, in my mid-twenties. I never took a poetry class, was never part of a workshop. For the next few years, I published poems here and there and tried to figure out what I was doing. I was working as a newspaper reporter, then a trade magazine editor. Along the way, I got married, became a father. I didn’t know any other poets beyond hello.



Libraries and bookstores hated the loose-page format. Frances Steloff at the Gotham Book Mart would only carry the magazine if I hand-bound a sample copy. Nevertheless, we stuck with it for the first 25 issues.

Star Black photo.

So in 1966, when Dick Lourie and Ron Schreiber invited me to join them in editing a new magazine (co-founder Emmett Jarrett was living in Greece and joined us later) it was all news to me. We had so little to do at first that we held our editorial meetings in McSorley’s, scribbling yes and no on envelopes between glasses of ale. I realized quickly that I was no good at articulating why I made my choices: I don’t know, I just like it, and that that wouldn’t do. I began teaching myself how to analyze poems more carefully, how to argue my points, how to listen carefully to what the others were saying.

That process has been going on for 50 years now and it remains a lively part of my life. I like to think it’s also affected my own work. We have published thousands of poems by hundreds of poets and it’s hard to pick out just a few who have influenced my work. I like to think I’ve learned from many.

There is another aspect of this that has nothing to do with being literary and that’s keeping up with the unglamorous work that must be done if a press is to survive—packing books, writing invoices, answering correspondence, doing grant applications. In my younger days, I could pound a typewriter all day, turning out articles and speeches and other junk for a living, come home and work on my own poems for a few hours and still have the energy for *Hanging Loose* tasks. I rarely write for money these days, but my energy is not what it once was. The HL work is heavier than ever. Too often, I go to my desk intending to work on something of my own and realize hours later that I’ve created a small tower of HL mail and never even looked at my own stuff. So be it: I’ve written 14 books and I hope I can squeeze out at least one more. I suppose if it weren’t for the press I’d have had more time to promote myself, do more readings, etc. But the majority of people I love in this world (including Donna Brook, my wife) I met through poetry, frequently through *Hanging Loose*, and that’s very rich compensation.

You are known as being “a funny poet”? Were you born funny? What do you see as the relationship between humor and poetry?

Years ago, following the end of a love affair, I wrote a poem called “The Fifth of July.” I had to pause from time to time because my eyes kept tearing up.

I didn’t read the poem in public for a long time, but finally did at a large benefit in Park Slope. About midway through, the audience burst into laughter, which took me totally by surprise. Oh, you heartless bastards, I thought. But later, thinking on it, I realized the line was funny, that when I write that’s the way things often come out. I never set out to write a funny poem, but humor is apparently part of my DNA.

There are a number of drawbacks to being known as funny. If you’re introduced that way, there are two dangers. One is that the audience will take up the challenge: “I’d like to see the son of a bitch make me laugh!” The other is that people will start giggling at everything, including poems about your mother’s death, the Bubonic Plague, and undergoing chemo. I remember Kenneth Koch scolding an audience:

Don’t do that damn Poetry Project thing and laugh at every poem. On the plus side, people new to and/or terrified of poetry often come up to you after a reading and say: Gee, I never knew poetry could be like that. That’s pleasing but also troubling, a reminder that most people think of poetry as difficult and boring, if they ever think of it at all.

“Funny” is not a good adjective if you’re trying to build a reputation. Wonderfully funny poets like Kenneth and like Paul Violi, beloved by many, still never received their due from critics who demand solemnity and belaboring the obvious. “Funny” is equated with “light” and written off as minor. (By the way, whatever became of the superior light verse turned out by people like Ogden Nash and Dorothy Parker?)

Subject matter does not dictate tone. I think of a series of poems by Jeni Olin (now known as Truck) that were very lively, very funny. Each one was about a different antidepressant drug she had endured.

Joanna Fuhrman (<http://www.joannafuhrman.com/>) is the author of five books of poetry, including *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (Hanging Loose Press) and *Pageant* (Alice James Books). She is a former poetry editor at *Ping Pong* and *Boog City*. Her poems have appeared in various journals including *The Believer*, *Volt*, and *New American Writing*, and various anthologies, including *The Pushcart Prize 2011* and *Liscapes* (Steerage Press). She teaches poetry writing at Rutgers University, through Teachers & Writers Collaborative, Poets House, and in private workshops.

Robert Hershon is the author of 14 books of poetry, the newest being *Goldfish* and *Rose and Freeze Frame*. His work has appeared in more than 40 anthologies and in such journals as *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The World*, and *The Nation*, among others. Some awards include two Creative Writing Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and three from The New York Foundation on the Arts. Hershon also serves as co-editor of *Hanging Loose Press* (<http://hangingloosepress.com/>), one of the country’s oldest independent publishers. Hershon has taught for Teachers & Writers Collaborative and Saint Ann’s School, as well as fulfilling shorter residencies at the University of Michigan and the College of William and Mary. From 1976 to 2010, he served as executive director of The Print Center, Inc., a non-profit facility which provides printing services to literary publishers, schools, and colleges, and other arts and community organizations. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Donna Brook, a poet and children’s book author.

Reading is Writing is Teaching



Propagation
Laura Elrick
Kenning Editions

When you start teaching you begin reading differently. Sudden, like a cold snap. Reading is no longer about shaping and challenging your own writing and living practices. Now it's also about the classroom. It's impossible for me to read anything without considering at some point how this text could engage my students, demand something from them, stir, unravel, ground.



One of my personal favorites is Laura Elrick's book *Propagation*. The poems spiral down the left side of the page in column-like shapes, disrupting and repeating so that words and phrases we've stopped thinking about, we must think about. Meaning expands into new territories, never considered relationships form. Without any help from me, some undoubtedly grappling with the urge to make sense of it, the students speak to an odd destabilizing, a breaking open of the familiar at a skeletal level. They are viscerally experiencing what Erin Mouré draws attention to in *My Beloved Wager*: "We're not as open to the 'new' as we think we are. And, yes, the way we conceptualize is affected profoundly by language, its habits, norms, and structures, which then affect the way we see and hear." With Elrick, the language we all blindly rely upon cracks open, and it's been a thrill to witness my students getting into those "gaps," like Mouré, to "push words forward and make them tumble."

With this new fall just beginning, as I revisit my syllabi, considering places where I too can push more, it seems a most ideal time to reach out to a handful of writers who have impacted the way I teach and read and write, asking: who are your favorite poets to bring into the classroom and why?

Jaclyn Lovell is a part-time assistant professor at The New School, where she received her M.F.A. Wisconsin-born, she can still catch frogs with her bare hands and continues to smile on her subway commute from Brooklyn, her home for the last seven years.

Image courtesy <https://www.pratt.edu>

Reading Cecilia Vicuña's Spit Temple (trans. Rosa Alcalá)



Spit Temple
Cecilia Vicuña
Ugly Duckling Presse

When I watch Cecilia Vicuña perform, I think of how she lifts off whatever walls contain the performance. I first brought in *Spit Temple* to a group of Parsons students in the fall of 2014. Alongside the text we watched a recording (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXx9PWbQfZI>) of Vicuña performing pieces from "Performing Memory: an autobiography" (*Spit Temple's* first section). At that moment there were protests across



the country over the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson and the classroom felt like a very sanded down surface to be standing on, discussing the passive voice in political speech.

We talked about Vicuña's fragile media, biodegradable. That inadvertently became our counterpoint. Like here are the autumn leaves she filled a gallery with in 1971 in the Museu Nacional de Bellas Artes. Could we wade through them like a melancholy, like does that shit ever leave the body. Mistakes were made. Vicuña asks: If our personhood is our language, how does this play out in the unstable world. How does this likewise unstable language influence our surroundings, and those around us.

In the video, we watched where she lifts off

from the text as she approaches an audience member, lifting her left arm above her head with knotted red string and she kind of hovers there for a minute. Like she's measuring the haphazard knots against her own proximity to this woman, frozen maybe with awkwardness. She carries on, meandering the string, more interested in its interactions with whatever expectations it interrupts. Readings are so often a space of decorum. You read from the thing you say thanks so much for having me. Vicuña inverts these expectations by planting the focus onto the space itself.

In Rosa Alcalá's introduction to *Spit Temple* she writes that "[Vicuña] seems to welcome not only the unstable elements of the present moment as they intersect with her performance, but also acknowledges the site as its own 'text,' with its history, signs, movements." Alcalá compares Vicuña's string to "a web or a net." But there is no predation at the end of the net. She is not the sentence subject, driving toward its action, "weaving clouds / against death."

At the end of that semester, a student from Brazil brought up how he chanced upon a die-in in Union Square, and how out of place he felt as an outsider to this country. We talked about what it means to be an outsider to a hurt or an anger of another community. Like how we enact Vicuña's versioning of her texts in a context, walking around with our disintegrated grammar head first. When that class ended, I felt inclined to cry. But Vicuña is so dedicated to the conditions that are beyond her and beyond her work, that there is a subject that's supposed to disappear. If we are willing to let it. In a recent Harriet blog post (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/04/language-is-migrant/>), Vicuña writes that when living in Bogotá, she went out and asked everybody the same question: "What is Poetry to you?" and the best answer she got was, "que prosiga," "that it may go on."

Brooke Ellsworth's first book, *Serenade*, is forthcoming from Octopus Books in 2017.

Liliana Bizama photo.

Learning Through Lingue Altrui



BY PAUL D'AGOSTINO

When I was blissfully buried beneath books upon books while reading for comprehensives way back in my graduate school days, I chanced across an anecdote about how a great many 19th-century and early 20th-century writers who worked primarily in English were first exposed to certain canonical works of Italian poetry by their docents or professors. As it seems, rather than ensuring that their



students were proficient enough in Italian to comprehend the very words they were going to be reading, the instructors simply gave them the works to read. They'd go through numerous oral deliveries and even recitations from memory together, presumably with the instructor being the only person in the room with fluency or lexical proficiency in the language they were nonetheless all speaking, or at least vocalizing and quasi-reading.

The instructors didn't do this for casual or pretentious reasons. Rather, they did it to exploit one of the virtues of their students' lack of knowledge of Italian: if they didn't understand the words they were reading, they would be circumstantially forced to focus on the acoustics of the structures, on the flows and possible meanings of the sounds they were hearing. Attaining a certain level of non-lexical yet truly aural understanding would be ineluctable, and in fact perhaps more readily attained and retained, by not being filtered through or hindered by the meanings of words. As legend would have it, Eliot and Pound were among the poets whose first exposure to Dante was as such. They read the entire *Commedia* together before being trained in Italian language so that they'd get a purely aural feel for the storied poet's mastery of meter and rhyme, his delicately hendecasyllabic verses, the variable modes of pause and confluence merging all those tercets. And, as we all know, both iconic poets wound up being more than minimally molded by Dante's influence.

I found that tidbit of history to be absolutely fascinating, and I try to employ something of its logic in the various kinds of classroom settings in which I find myself, or even when I'm just doing a reading. To that end, my favorite texts to share with students—whether the students are in my foreign language, cultural studies, or studio art courses—are pieces in languages I

reckon they don't know, but that I think convey something exceptional in their very sounds, as I suppose any great poem perhaps should.

I love reciting sonnets by the 13th-century poet Cecco Angiolieri, in particular one called "S'i fosse foco," because it really sounds as crazy and diabolical as it basically is—all the while executed in a consistent sequence of periodi ipotetici, which are among the most refined grammatical structures in Italian. It's an utterly absurd text, and completely brilliant. I also enjoy bringing in sonnets by Petrarca or Michelangelo, ballate by Ariosto or Lorenzo de' Medici, or luridly erotic pieces by Giambattista Marino.

I like sharing favorite texts in other languages as well. It's a joy and a service to do readings of poems in German, for example, to help dispel that massively mistaken notion that German always sounds harsh. In certain texts, die deutsche Sprache sounds about as harsh as repeated whisperings of the word hush. Still, I most regularly come back to those old Italian poems, in part to adhere in even that way to the charm and rationale of that anecdote I chanced across as a student. To that end, of course, I also love bringing in the timeless words—or rather sounds—of Dante. As a further nod to my earliest studies of his works so many moons ago, I'll end this tripartite piece with these structurally relevant, quietly conclusive sounds: le stelle.

Paul D'Agostino (<http://centotto.com/paul-dagostino/>), Ph.D. is an artist, writer, translator, curator, and professor living in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Cecco Angiolieri via <http://www.ecomuseosiena.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ritratto-cecco-angiolieri.jpg>.

In Search of Honesty: I Remember



BY ALEX BENNETT

I Remember
Joe Brainard
Granary Books

I remember teaching Joe Brainard's *I Remember* for the first time to a group of art and design students. In this memoir-poem, Brainard begins each sentence with "I remember," and as he shares some 1,500 personal memories, he invites readers to enter the fullness of his world, weaving a narrative of disparate yet connected parts.

My students are usually confused when I introduce the premise of this poetic project (What do you mean every sentence starts with "I remember"?). To bring them into it, we take turns reading the memories aloud, one after another, experiencing the incantatory repetition of Brainard's memory machine. Sometimes students laugh at one of the poet's internal questions or blush upon hearing of his early sexual encounters. Many will sigh after an entry like, "I remember how good a glass of water can taste after a dish of ice cream." We share in the reverie of I've felt that, too.

The first writing project of the semester is to create an "I remember" à la Brainard. I commission the students to draft "I remembers" daily for 15 minutes for two weeks (no easy task). After several in-class writing sessions, students have felt the propulsive power of how one memory triggers another, which triggers another, and on and on. The form acknowledges the fluidity of time; some things are fixed in a chronology, and others make sense in unexpected orders. We remind each other that like Brainard's masterwork, no memory is too small.

Time and again my students are most impressed with Brainard's honesty. How does one share what so many of us keep hidden, out of sight and speech? By practicing the "I remember" form, we push ourselves to compose in crisp detail, to offer what we know to be true. This sets the tone for an entire semester (and lifetime) of writing.

My students re-create beautiful, wild, humorous, and heartbreaking memories, among many daily occurrences. As I read their compositions, I'm shocked at how they've taken on Brainard's challenge of authenticity, and that they allow me to read these (Was I this brave as an 18-year-old?). The "getting to know you" process is expedited.

I remember when I realized that I was just "a frog in a small well."

I remember my first glass of wine. My father gave me a sip when I was eight. My mother didn't speak to him for a week.

I remember the Sears North common room. Eric asked me, "Why do you wear this sweater everyday?" And I answered, "I actually think it looks nice." I remember throwing that sweater away in the big trash can junior year.

I remember knowing it would be the last time I would ever see you.

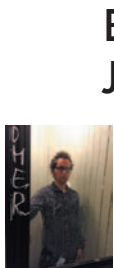
I remember the first times.

The power of the form's simplicity is confirmed in each class. From young to older students, writers of varying skill levels and linguistic backgrounds can create memoir-poems of their own, and in sharing our compositions, we feel that maybe we are not so "other" than previously thought. We are more like Brainard, and those around us, trying "to figure out what it's all about. (Life.)"

Alex Bennett received her M.F.A. from The New School, where she won the Paul Violi Poetry Prize. Her writing has appeared in *The Sosland Journal*, *The Best American Poetry Blog*, *The New School Writing Program Blog*, *Insights Magazine*, and elsewhere. She teaches at Parsons School of Design.

Photo courtesy <http://www.joebrainard.org>.

On Rosmarie Waldrop's 'Alarms & Excursions'



BY JEFF T. JOHNSON

I am in dialogue when I write a poem, but not with a prospective reader, not even the 'ideal reader,' but with language itself." Rosmarie Waldrop, as much as any writer, has been crucial to my thinking, teaching, and writing practice over the past eight years. In 2008 I lived in Waldrop's hometown of Providence, R.I., where her influence is as pervasive as it should be everywhere poets know they have a poetics. I use the term poetics to refer to poetry (and poets) situated in the world: writing and thinking as engaged cultural practice, where one's concerns literally and literarily shape one's writing. Rosmarie Waldrop's writing taught me that. In particular, her essay "Alarms & Excursions" (<https://prattms101.wordpress.com/texts-and-contexts/waldrop-alarms-and-excursions/>)—which originated as a talk for a series on "The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy"—showed me how context, form, and thought can be written together. That the essay is a sculpted transcript of a lecture speaks to its formal concerns. The essay enacts itself, speaks (to) its own form, without abstracting itself from its speaker.

"I decided to circle around this mysterious interaction of private and public that is poetry with theses (things I believe or would like to believe), alarms (doubts), and excursions into quotes, examples, etc." So "Alarms & Excursions" enters its own theater of the mind, arranging itself under the interspersed headings



THESIS, ALARM, EXCURSION. The essay title "is an Elizabethan stage term for off-stage noise and commotion which interrupts the main action"—precisely what Waldrop is doing from the stage: calling to the mic the maelstrom of thought that happens elsewhere during public discourse. Drawing from the palimpsest of thinking text to annotate the proceedings.

Among the moving tributes to the poet and teacher Stacy Doris that appeared after her death in 2012, many written by former students of Doris who went on to teach writing, I remember this detail: She did not teach the same class twice. I think about this every semester as I prepare to prepare to prep a syllabus. Do we ever teach the same class twice, even with the same theme and plan? But I believe, beyond any burden of truth, that Stacy Doris reworked every class and syllabus in their entirety, always with new course themes, texts, and approaches. This is my model.

No syllabus is written in a day or a week. They are written over years of experience attached to particular moments of reading, writing, and thinking. I'm not sure how many times I taught Rosmarie Waldrop's essay, and I may never assign it again. But it informs everything I say and do as a teacher, and is key to my poetics. Once more, out of context: "[F]or this very reason its existence alone constitutes an alternative to what is and hence a criticism of it."

Jeff T. Johnson's (<http://www.jefftjohnson.com/>) writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Fanzine*, *PEN America*, *Jacke t2*, *Encyclopedia Vol. 3*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, and elsewhere. He lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

Steve Evans photo.



Wanda Phipps
Bushwick, Brooklyn

waltzing nostalgia

now everyday i hear
the bells at st. mark's church
ringing in the hours
and the noise of street traffic,
then party people
occupying the sidewalk
through the night
a new apartment
full of new sounds:
doors slamming in the hall
humming refrigerator
and the arms of a mini art
installation moving on the
mantle: gold painted
prosperity kittens with
their arms constantly waving
and the words: ukraine
shall overcome
& crimea is ukraine
painted on their bodies
i am back in a neighborhood
where i used to live years ago
things are familiar
yet foreign too
i run into old acquaintances
from when these few blocks
held a tribe i felt a part of
or at least dangled on the
edges of or dallied there
but so many places are gone now:
sunshine deli, gargoyle mechanic,
the gas station, the telephone bar,
kiev diner, st. mark's books
but i can still visit the same parks:
tompkin square, liz christy garden
all the community gardens
and once in a while gaze
into the same eyes
older but still recognizably
mirroring back the same souls



Maged Zaher
Seattle

The Recovery Diary

Cairo – Dokki square – haven't been there in many years – a week left to leave
Egypt – I am meeting a friend – the drowsiness of a stranger observing the cars

Cairo – Zamalek – nothing

The smallness I entered a while ago – it is called madness

Maybe the problem with Seattle (or Amerika?) is that nothing happens there

I like the names of Rosa Luxemburg AND Antonio Gramsci – to tell stories with
heroes you don't know

Cairo – 2016 – Julio Regini - an Italian student studying the Egyptian proletariat
dead after or during torture

To be obvious: how to tell a history you don't understand?

There is brutality but also beauty in this insistence on production – on technology
– what I lost in kindness I made up for with accuracy



Vi Khi Nao
Iowa City, Iowa

From Swans in Half-Mourning

XXXI.

Early in their courtship, Veronika would walk Cynthia along the lake, hand in hand,
watching the swans' beaks drink in the beacon of water laminated by the falling
light. Cynthia's hair would fall over her shoulder like six mute pieces of tupperware
falling off the edge of a table.

XXXII.

"Sister, are you done yet?" the brother cried. 1) When Cynthia tossed the shirts into
the air and when the shirts climbed onto the brothers' bodies, the forest began to
open its arboreal thighs to the sky.

XXXIII.

For several years after their wedding night, Cynthia and Veronika remained
abstinent. They didn't climb each other's bodies because they were afraid of
making a sound. Of converting their mythological flesh into desire, and desire into
music.

XXXIV.

Borrowing God's memory, Cynthia wished she could easily blow the floral fabric of
starwort into six shirts.

XXXV.

The Voice of Veronika spoke: "I wish sometimes when I come into a room, all of
my body parts would disassemble like your brothers, Cynthia, so that everyone's
speech and the landscape's oration could slowly reassemble me back into poetry
and I would become a complete woman."

XXXVI.

"Sister, are the shirts ready yet?" the brothers asked in between panels of light.
When Veronika pinned her to the bed, Cynthia was able to understand the
expansion of her brothers' wings.

XXXVIII.

Cynthia had stashed their finished shirts in a closet. There were five hanging there.
She was working on the last shirt. They felt hope climb their throats like a croaking
frog.

XXXIX.

God is on his knees, his monarchal butt cheeks pointing at the empyrean theater
of human existence. There. There. Yes, it's true he has lowered the protean skin of
the sky and shepherded it into a definite vessel. And, yes, it means he has already
blown the horizon into the neck of a recumbent bottle. The landscape of the mother-
in-law's memory can be asphyxiated, then preserved. He holds the cork of the
bottle 2.2 centimeters away from the mouth of the bottle.

Poetry Bios

Vi Khi Nao's (<http://www.persecondpress.com>) poetry collection, *The Old Philosopher*,
was the winner of the 2014 Nightboat Poetry Prize. This fall Coffee House Press will publish
her novel *Fish in Exile*. **Wanda Phipps'** (<https://mindhoney.com>) books include *Field of Wanting: Poems of Desire* (BlazeVOX [books]) and *Wake-Up Calls: 66 Morning Poems* (Soft Skull Press). Her poetry has been translated into Ukrainian, Hungarian, Arabic, Galician, and Bangla. **Maged Zaher** is a poet and translator who won the Seattle's Stranger Genius award in literature in 2013.

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Arnold Mesches

Gainesville, Fla. and Williamsburg, Brooklyn

Arnold Mesches (<http://www.arnoldmesches.com/>) was born in the Bronx, New York. He has had 141 solo exhibitions to date as well as countless group shows and is in the permanent collections of The Whitney Museum of American Art, The National Gallery, The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, The Metropolitan Museum of Art among others. He has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts, a New York State Fellowship, a Florida State Fellowship and three Pollack-Krasner Grants. He lives in Gainesville, Fla. and Brooklyn, New York and is married to novelist Jill Ciment. Jim Costanzo photo.

Artist Statement

By combining unlikely juxtapositions, both in painting techniques and disparate imagery, I have tried to re-create the sense of utter instability and sheer insanity that I feel has so often permeated my years. Instead of, as in my salad days, veering toward the overt, I have, for some years now, found myself depicting our time with a sense of unreality bordering on the more unsettling absurd.

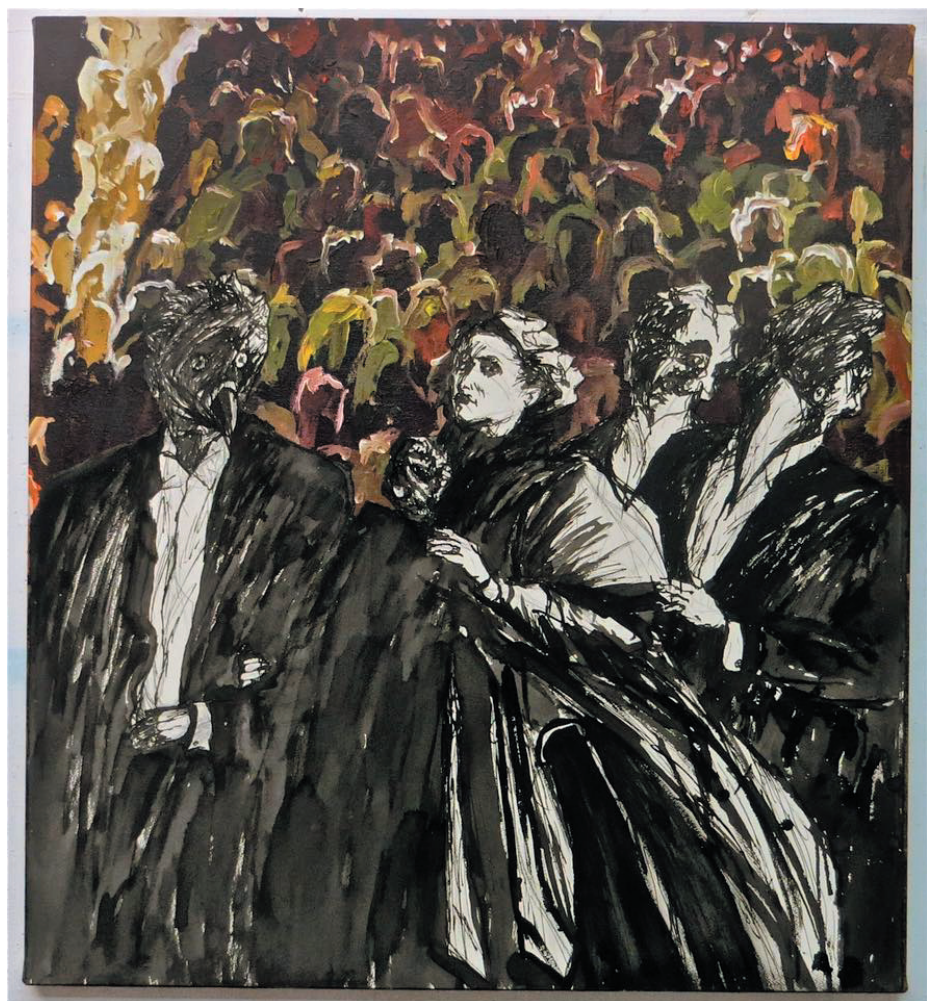
When one insists upon making social comments as their source material, the temptation is to express one's anger, to vent the fury of one's reaction to the apparent injustices and continued bloodletting. But, personal anger can be a lonely futility. It never involves others. The world is more complex than this kind of one-sidedness. Absurdity, as a concept, on the other hand, can transcend immediate frustration by asking the viewer to question, not only what they are seeing and feeling, but, more importantly, why they are questioning their awakened uneasiness. Hopefully the dichotomy only increases when one is seduced by the richness of the painting's surface and the enticing vividness of color; beauty as an art language to complement the darkness and humor. This is the core of my recent work.



Double Vision 24", 33" x 30", mixed media on canvas, 2016.



Band 2 29-1/4" x 27", Ink washes, pen+ ink, a/c, 2016.



Black Forest 19" x 30", ink wash and pen and ink on paper, 2016.



Brushes 80" x 87" acrylic on canvas, 2010.

IN DEPTH

Duckspeak Riveter

<https://duckspeak.bandcamp.com/album/riveter>



An ambitious album that realizes all its aims. Powerfully yet sensitively produced by Catherine Anderson of Robot Princess fame, this is Giovanni Colantonio and company's best effort yet. The sequencing and cross-fades alone are masterful and reward listening to the album in track order—nearly a lost art in today's world of endless singles. Colantonio has an earnest sincerity to his vibrato that is quite disarming, and the flurries of guitar work and other melodic flourishes serve him well. Standout tracks include the driving, driven "Should Have Worn Black," the sweeping melodic grace of "Ohio," the swirling "Starlings & Cardinals," the near-skanking "There Will Come A Day," and the sentimental journey of "Tunnels." There's something particularly satisfying in the narrative progression of "Ohio," from reminiscing about all the praise heaped on the state by the former lover—and yet when he went to the "gem state" he lost her—to the narrator deciding he's done waiting for something that's never going to happen, he'll never get his lost love back.

"Should Have Worn Black" has been a favorite of mine at the live shows, and the album delivers on its dark promise. "Starlings & Cardinals" starts out bouncy but stops in the middle for 30 seconds of field recording of birds cheeping, only to gradually fade back in for an entirely different feel, details softly sketched in guitars trilling like birds, filling it in like a drawing, sounding a little like The Shins, all building to the beautifully relatable climax: "And when you look outside your window/ at the starlings and the cardinals/ do you feel the tragedy?/ Does it strike you like it strikes me?/ That every second we don't speak, the world keeps spinning casually/ Indifferent to human needs/ and indifferent to me, your life goes on and on [...] without me."

"So It Goes" is aware of its own pretension in talking about death when the mean age of the band has got to be like 27, but the almost-country tune is deceptively happy, with little licks throughout that could almost have been written by Mike Nesmith. (Full disclosure: I was listening to *Riveter* for about three weeks on shuffle and repeat, along with the new Monkees' album, *Good Times*—also excellent, by the way—and this was one of the tracks where I couldn't tell the difference between the two records at first. High praise, indeed.)

"Tunnels" is a slow-burning ballad with distorted guitar riffs drowned in reverb over a lush bed of picked guitar, reminiscent of Red House Painters or Robert Quine's work with Matthew Sweet, with lyrics about encouraging and celebrating the brave women in the narrator's life, even as he admits "[he] can't even begin to understand the pain of it." It ends with a swirling vortex of NiN-like sound, which is somehow the perfect end to this all-around satisfyingly well-conceived and -produced album. —R. Brookes McKenzie



R. Brookes McKenzie was born and raised in NYC and has been writing and singing her entire life. She has been part of the open mic/antifolk scene since 2010. Her favorite mics are the Sidewalk Open Stage and the Mic Downstairs at Under St. Marks. You can read her poems at <https://brookesmckenzie.com/> and find out about her band, Lucky Witch and the Righteous Ghost, at <https://www.facebook.com/witchghost/>.

Fear Not Ourselves Alone
i have had enough of this life

There was a time not too long ago that if a band wanted to release an album with any type of polish, they would need to head to their local studio. But times change and the era of the bedroom pop musician is upon us, where the right equipment and software can give any band the chance to level the playing field. This opening of the floodgates does come with its set of drawbacks, as the musical landscape is now littered with bands who can release an album without giving it the proper care it deserves or extra ears to help filter the ideas. So a good bedroom pop album is a welcome find. Fear Not Ourselves Alone's EP "*I have had enough of this life*" is one of those finds.

FNOA is a trio based out of Queens, N.Y., headed up by Ivan Incandenza, who is the band's vocalist and lyricist. Their sound is not an easy one to describe, as they pull from varying inspirations on the EP's six songs. The album's opener is a punchy track called "Mother" which betrays their screamo influences. The song's lyrics paint a brutally honest picture of body dysphoria, beginning with the question "Did my mother hate her body when she was



18?" and ending with cries of desperation as the song confronts the way our pasts can scar us. The theme of traumatic histories is touched upon again in the second track, "Breeze," but this time does it with a synth-lined melody reminiscent of Animal Collective.

The changing nature of FNOA continues through the EP. The song "Crowded Rooms" would not be out of place on a Weezer or Pavement album. The cohesion of the recording comes from the weight of the lyrics. "Crowded Rooms" looks at the effect others have on your mental state and can be seen as a callback to the scarring pasts found in the opening track. The EP's high point comes on the fourth track "Seeing," which harkens back to '90s shoegaze with light airy guitars and synths that fill up the sonic landscape while still being extremely catchy. The EP is not a perfect one as track five, "Studying," is a mumbling distorted mess of a song that is thankfully less than two minutes long but still leaves a blight on a great record. The final song of the album, "Apologize," is also flawed. With a weaker production quality in comparison to its predecessors, the song lacks the ability to deliver the gravitas that its lyrics ache for. For a song that gives the album its intense title, the song is weak and ends the album with a whimper instead of a bang.

Despite some flaws, Fear Not Ourselves Alone shows great songwriting and a varied musical skill set on "*I have had enough of this life*" and I am interested to hear if this band will live up to their potential with future releases.

—E. Niveous Rayside



E. Niveous Rayside (<http://nurein.songlander.com/>), 38, Queens, is the creator of the online annual music competition "Nur Ein" as well as the frequent contributor to the website *Songfight*. Rayside is also a singer and guitarist, and is one half of the musical duo *Lucky Witch* and the *Righteous Ghost*. When he's not making music or writing about music, he's busy being the father of two teenagers.

Max Miller
Pretty Waste

<https://maxmiller.bandcamp.com/album/pretty-waste-ep>



The first track "No We" is an extended meditation on the first 20 seconds of the single ("there is no 'We', there is no 'Us' and I'm not sure there ever was") that serves as a kind of teaser for the main attraction. "Pretty Waste" is a boppy, beat-driven track that includes a high-pitched noise that would be obnoxious by itself but is transformed in the stop-and-start rhythm to an interesting melodic element, reminiscent of Aphex Twin's use of ambient noise in music. Miller white-boy raps in the style of Beck or the Bloodhound Gang for most of the track, and his lyrics about existential despair are poignant ("Wake up (for what?!), get dressed (for what?!), go out (for what?!)") until the song dissolves into a gorgeous wash of choir backing vocals over meaty guitar twangs.

Miller's voice on this EP is a slightly nerdy everyman that lends the title song a sort of shaggy dog tale feel, in which he dismisses the very idea of love as a pretty waste of time. To me it sounds like he's never really been in love, because when you really feel it, it's worth all the heartache.

"Dead in My Tracks" is a muted yet compelling number that sounds like it could be a long-lost track from *Midnite Vultures* or *Guero* ("Missing" springs to mind). The two remixes included to round out the EP are solid, with Modem supplying a particularly dynamic take that plays with the temporal references in the original, freezing on a dime and starting back up again ("into this vacuum where there is no sound") on a sick beat with fat buzzy riffs. Doug Linse also provides a dreamy, synth-laden remix that would not be out of place on his new LP *Heads Up Against The Jazz Wall*). I look forward to hearing what Miller comes up with when love finally finds him. —RBM

IN BRIEF

Charles Mansfield
Birthday Card

<https://charlesmansfield.bandcamp.com/album/birthday-card>



Atmospheric and brooding, Charles Mansfield's new EP features intricately woven guitar playing and self-assured, confident delivery of his introspective lyrics. ("Things in the night/ might be spookier/ than they appear" from the title track, "The thought of why not just try/ isn't better to try and fail than not even try at all" from "Large Dog"). This is a logical next step in the evolution of Mansfield's music. Recommended if you like Freedy Johnston. —RBM

Zack Daniel
The Names They Give Are Dumb

<https://zackdaniel.bandcamp.com/album/the-names-they-give-are-dumb>



Young Zack wears his influences on his sleeve in this charming new record. His high, pure voice soars on standout tracks such as "Not So Sure," "It's Been A Long Time," "Hard To Explain," and "North Avenue"—at times he sounds like a young Art Garfunkel or Kurt Heasley from *Lilys*—and the

music contains nods to The Beatles, The Kinks, The Beach Boys, and David Bowie. "Yes, Don't Stop" is a dreamy ballad with the central paradox of love at its center: "And I know the words/ The words are "Yes" and "Don't stop"/ To make me stop from loving you/ To make me fear for losing you". —RBM

Caroline Cotto
The Devil In Me

<https://carolinecotto.bandcamp.com/album/devil-in-me>



Deftly recorded and produced by Alex P. Wernquest, Caroline's debut EP is a raw howl of passion and pain from the depths of a tormented soul. Ronnie Wheeler plays intense slide guitar over some grungy, crawling, Doors-esque blues licks, and Boog City alum Jesse "Cannonball" Statman skillfully hits the skins, but the real star is the young Cotto, who bursts forth like a blues butterfly emerging from her cocoon fully formed, her sound unfolding in the mold of her musical heroes Amy Winehouse, Jeff Buckley, and Fiona Apple. Short and sweet at four songs long, it leaves the listener wanting more. —RBM

SOUNDCLOUDS
WE LIKE**el sudar**

<https://soundcloud.com/elsudar>

A new side project by the perennial LES stalwart Mr. Joe Yoga, el sudar (which means "the sweat" in Spanish) is an exciting new direction from Yoga—instead of guitar-driven balladry, the listener is treated to sparse and dark, old-skool synth jams interlarded with playfully autotuned/distorted vocals and peppy ravewave/electronica beats. The lyrics are mordantly amusing when they can be understood, but deciphering the meaning is half the fun—"Fuck Donald Trump" disses Snapchat, conscious rap, Chex Mix, and I Fucking Love Science ("Fuck I Love Fucking Science/ Fuck I Love Fucking Science/ I fucking hate science" is my favorite line). "All I Do Is Dream About \$\$\$" is a sinuous, pounding deep house meditation on mo' money, mo' problems punctuated by high-pitched wordless "coocoo"s like a parrot on a dance floor ("All I do is dream/ about the awful things I know will come/ when I have money" is the sting hidden in the celebration). "OH NO!" is the full-on existential dread of someone trying to motivate themselves but doomed to procrastinate, wrapped up in chipper horns and classic '80s handclap drum patterns turned up to 11, which sounds happy enough on the surface until you listen to the lyrics. el sudar's live shows are also a lot of fun, especially when he takes off his shoes and throws books into the audience on the unreleased song "No Books." Recommended if you like Daft Punk, RAYNBEAU. —RBM

David Warpaint

<https://soundcloud.com/davidwarpaint>

Warpaint's Soundcloud is a treasure trove of hidden gems, from the plaintive yet powerful "I Owe You One" to the deceptively ornate playing on "Blackshear" that belies the beautiful simplicity of the melody to the funky covers "Suit & Tie" and "I Try," he shows off his disparate influences and moves between genres with ease. "Experiment 7" and "Six Feet Underground" are standouts, telling a story in an elliptical manner that adds up to a lasting impression. His sound is distorted and punk rock but his melodies are catchy and his timing impeccable. These songs together could easily make a fine album, but Warpaint is ambitious and is working on a full-length in the studio. —RBM

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The Death and (After)life of Great American Libraries :: Mellow Pages, Bushwick, Brooklyn [Part II]



We return for the second half of our conversation with Matt Nelson and Dolan Morgan (<http://www.boogcity.com/boogpdfs/bc107.pdf>), talking about the evolution of Mellow Pages Library. Unfamiliar?: This beloved indie library was founded in Bushwick, Brooklyn by Matt Nelson and Jacob Perkins in 2013, occupying a sliver of, and then a considerably larger, studio space at 56 Bogart St. Their collection of more than 4,000 titles has been built by donation, and now lives in a trailer with a sweet vintage feel in the yard at Silent Barn (603 Bushwick Ave.).

Matt (and Jacob) and I have been friends for a good many years now, and I know they share my passion for independent library, archive, and cooperative projects—a passion out of which this library was born. Matt and I are joined to talk about Mellow Pages’ continued evolution—and about the larger landscape of independent archive and library initiatives—by Dolan Morgan, who’s taken over the charge in MP’s current manifestation at Silent Barn.

Boog City: I read recently that membership libraries (some of which are quite expensive to join) are having a bit of a renaissance—as coworking spaces come of age and this historical precursor to the public library once again seems to have not only relevance but appeal to those seeking refuge, resources, and a space to work that’s more private than a public library ... I’d venture a guess that most people have no idea this is going on, did you? That said, why don’t we talk a little bit about Mellow Pages’ structure in terms of membership and other considerations.

Matt Nelson: Well, before Mellow Pages and then during my time there, I worked at a private library in Manhattan. I learned a lot about private libraries in the city because of it. To me, they catered to a small slice of humanity, but at the same time, every blue moon, a friend would come in and join. Paid month-to-month, they’re not outside of that horrible switcharoo-adage of “for the price of one Williamsburg latte you could [blank].” Private libraries are so under the radar unless you’re in the know, and can often act as a social symbol instead of as a library. But they’re usually super polished and have quicker and more specialized access to books depending on what type of library it is. That’s a trade off though. One of the original complaints about Mellow was that we were pulling people from using the public library, which in turn diminishes numbers which affect year-end totals which influence allocation money. I love public libraries and could not imagine the world, let alone a city, without a warm, free place for information and refuge. It would suck if it cost money to borrow a book or have a place to access a computer. Think of how many people that would exclude, prohibit, and hinder if you had to pay to learn or look for work?

The way Mellow Pages started was supposed to reflect a certain community, aimed at building a collection quickly through obligatory member lending. If you lent 10 books (books deemed worthy if not small press [we were such shits] then you could check out books. It was important to us to always be free as a space, as a source to learn about small press books. You did not have to be a member to be welcomed in because the point was small press. We wanted people to see them and feel them and read them, all of which you could do in the space. But to take one of them home, we felt you needed to feel connected. What better way to do that than having your own precious books in that self-same collection. If you didn’t want to do that, I think we were charging \$20 for a year. Both of these membership options were exclusionary, say if you didn’t own books, or had \$20. Some people did trade other skills/time/objects for membership, but what we advertised was books or cash. And then, in our second year, as we started figuring the finances, we figured out that we couldn’t survive the way we were going. So, we made the book membership available only for additions of small press we didn’t already have. Otherwise, membership was \$5/month, and since we were having so many events, we started to charge for use of the space. Always though, we were open, when we were open, to anyone coming in and hanging out and if the coffee was brewing and there was a clean cup (or were willing to clean a cup), it was available.

DM: Membership at Mellow Pages is totally free now, which is super exciting. I mean, I like it. There are a lot of books. And you can read them all and nobody will ask you for money. You don’t even have to sign up. You’re already a member, if you want to be. Just close your eyes and it’s true.

I think we can all agree that there are upsides to both of these iterations—I’m not sure I’m even looking for a clear preference for one or the other. I do think it’s a rare privilege, though, to be able to step back from both stages of Mellow Pages and take stock of what’s worked (and not) during its evolution. Now there’s a reason I called this interview “death and (after)life,” even though MP is very much alive, or having a second life, whatever you prefer. I think it’s important to talk about how our projects remain viable, and what succeeds as much as what fails. What allows MP to persist, now? It’s open only two days a week, for limited hours, and continues to be staffed entirely by volunteers. Where are the books that don’t fit in the trailer? Is the collection still searchable? I know that in the second, larger, Bogart space, rent became an issue even though no one was paying themselves for FT labor (something I understand well).

MN: Dolan, Tom Oristaglio, and the tenacious Eric Nelson are who make Mellow now. They’re (with a very bright light on Dolan and his heart for agreeing to take the brunt of responsibility) keeping the small press library alive in a very wonderful way.

Dolan Morgan: The main thing that allows Mellow Pages to persist now is the amazing community at Silent Barn. Silent Barn offered to house Mellow Pages, and the library has been lending books from there since last August. It’s super nice. The library exists in an interconnected community of people, from local students, to bands, to theater groups, to artists from all over the world. It’s a change of pace in a lot of ways because the library is not turned specifically toward the literary community, but faces out instead toward a wider array of communities in different disciplines. When people come by the library during a noise show in the main room, it’s a pretty altered space from when local high school kids come by during their art opening in the back gallery. But it’s really nice to be able to offer access to books or smiles to this parade of different people no matter what’s happening.

I’m glad to see that MP lives on, though I was sad to see its time in more expansive digs—and the incredible programming you guys were able to support there—come to a close. What would it have taken/what would it take to keep the library open, full time somewhere indoors, or, I don’t know, in a full-size trailer, bus, or truck? I know it’s a challenging and tricky endeavor, but I do think it’s an important thought exercise. Is it possible? Could people even be paid to be there? How? Or, why is this not important to try to achieve? Or, why is this not worth trying to keep up, at least for now, for you? Both MP and Chloe, whose founders I interviewed in a recent issue, are now popped-up inside other, hybrid spaces. Do you think this says something about the future of efforts like these?

MN: I think there should be libraries everywhere. Coffee shops, in front of apartment buildings, bathrooms, my god, the bathrooms that would benefit from some literature, parks, schools, post offices while you wait in line. Books should be in every nook and cranny. But many nooks and almost every cranny costs money to be in, and I don’t know anyway around that. I think it’s always important to try.

DM: Yes to libraries everywhere! And all kinds, too. As for what it would have taken to keep Mellow Pages open in its previous form? Hmmm. Maybe \$1,300 a month? Something like that. Or maybe it would have taken something else entirely. I can’t say. In the meantime, Mellow Pages is a place where you can reliably 1) get a book for free, and 2) hang out and feel comfortable in an otherwise weird world. I’ll always cherish every second I spent in that little corner on Bogart Street, and in some ways our digs have indeed gotten smaller—but in other ways, I think they may have gotten much bigger. It depends on how you view the community. Yes, the books are in a trailer, and that trailer is smaller than the room where they used to live, and some books alternate in storage for a bit. But those books in that trailer are also in an enormous and welcoming and collectively run community space now, comprised entirely of people dedicated to the neighborhood and to showcasing the work of other people. When you’re at Mellow Pages these days, you’re also at Silent Barn. And Silent Barn is pretty fantastic. We are a super tiny part of that community, but we’re very happy to be there. Because now, when you’re at Mellow Pages, you might also be at the first ever U.S. showcase of an amazing Ukrainian arts collective. When you’re at Mellow Pages, you might also be at a local vendors market (where I got a great Capri Sun juice box wallet). Or you might be at an independent comics and zines festival. Or you might be at a fundraiser and art opening for local high school students. It changes every day. So, in some ways, there’s a lot less programming, and in other ways, there’s a lot more. Plus, people still take books and then they are smiling. And people sit and relax in the yard. Of course, if we could also pay people to be here—or, heck, why stop there, if we could pay people to read the books, or just to be alive at all—that’d be great. In the meantime, 100 percent free access to a constantly evolving array of small and independent press books, housed in a vibrant and active community center, will have to cut the mustard.

Absolutely 100 percent in favor of libraries everywhere! I’m in the process of growing two pop-up library models myself, one in Stonefruit Espresso and Botanicals in BedStuy, and another traveling translation library that was at the Poetry Festival this summer, as a start. I do think that, in particular in NYC, the more books can appear in spaces like Silent Barn or in other spaces where people who like books but hadn’t planned for them in their precious, heavily vied-for free hours and can be pleasantly surprised by them and end up taking one home that changes their life. That’s super powerful for me. I must add though that in looking around for stories of New York indie libraries, I came across perhaps an equal number of surviving efforts as those that lived short, if bright, lives. What is it about New York, other than the obvious financial challenges, that makes running an indie library particularly difficult here? Or, maybe you don’t think it is?

MN: The best part about New York was how it felt like a rotating nexus. You could get places. The trouble I have with thoughts of a library elsewhere is how do people physically get there? I’ve been around L.A. now for almost a year and I’m constantly amazed that people show up for anything. I mean, even if you have a bike. I don’t know. New York is also a destination. So many people travel through on book tours or to see friends. The rent is prohibitive, but I don’t know anywhere else in my limited experience where there are so many book people huddled and coming together.

DM: New York eats people.

As a publisher, I’ve recently come up with a mantra that works for me: “I’d like to make money, I plan to make history.” Which is to say, I’m still hoping to figure out a way to sustain the press and myself financially, but I feel like a huge success in so far as I’ve worked hard to secure our books in public, institutional, and indie libraries, which feels like something akin to immortality in a way that’s hard to put into words. While you can’t buy a beer with the zero dollars you might get from a book you donate to a library, there’s something really valuable there. I’m not quite sure what I think will happen to the virtual traces of this article, or of any of our born digital media, but I feel somewhat confident that books published in bulk that are housed in collections dedicated to their care have a chance of survival far into the future. What are your thoughts on archival agency as a revolutionary act, of sorts? As people committed to books, what are your thoughts on what needs to change and/or be further explored and supported in education, social and cultural spaces, and/or creative practice to work towards securing a voice in—or against—the canon?

DM: Somehow, I’m not especially driven by preservation. Everything crumbles and disappears, and the resources to stop that tide are locked in a vault someone forgot to give us the key to. I’m more interested in offering a place where a few rare ideas can live for a while, right at this moment—and to do so with and through and around other people.

Do you see mellow pages as a project that will continue to evolve, be passed down, move like a hermit crab? What’s in MP’s future, and what’s in yours? Will it always involve archival projects and/or libraries in some way?

MN: This one’s all yours, Dolan.

DM: Ha! Well, I can definitely say this: that’s a great question. _____

Lynne DeSilva-Johnson (<http://www.theoperatingsystem.org/people/>) is a slinger of image, text, sound, and code, a frequent collaborator across a wide range of disciplines, a community activist, and a regular curator of events in NYC and beyond. She has served as an adjunct in the CUNY system for a decade, and as a K-12 teaching artist since 2001. Also a social practice artist and poet, she has appeared at The Dumbo Arts Festival, Naropa University, Bowery Arts and Science, The NYC Poetry Festival, Eyebeam, Undercurrent Projects, Mellow Pages, The New York Public Library, The Poetry Project, Industry City Distillery, Independent Curators International, and the Cooper Union, among others. She is the founder and managing editor of The Operating System, which is based in Brooklyn, where her family has lived since the 1890s. Follow her birdsong at @onlywhatican.

Matt Nelson likes libraries and books and has published An Apologies for Apologies (Big Lucks) and Please Don’t Make Me a Character (Shabby Doll House). He encourages you to start your own library meaning help your friends read books.

Dolan Morgan lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where he helps edit The Atlas Review. He’s the author of two story collections, That’s When the Knives Come Down (A|P,) and INSIGNIFICANA (CCM). His work can be found in The Believer, PANK, Electric Literature’s Recommended Reading, Selected Shorts, and the trash.

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Jon Axell photo

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