

# THE ORGAN

REVIEW OF ARTS

LITERATURE ISSUE

VOLUME NUMBER 1

ISSUE NUMBER 6

JULY AUGUST 2003

FREE

## A Little Bird Said

Things to look forward to

**Tin House Summer Writers Workshop:** July 12-19, Tin House Magazine brings Denis Johnson, Lorrie Moore, Dorothy Allison, Rick Moody and more to Reed College for a week of readings, seminars and conversations on topics ranging from "Getting Into Print" to "Politicizing the Fictional and Poetic: When Writing Becomes Relevant." Faculty readings by Chris Offutt, Helen Schulman, Sallie Tisdale, Charles D'Ambrosio and others are free and open to the public, Sunday-Friday at 5 p.m. in the outdoor amphitheatre. Other events cost \$15-\$25; the whole series is \$350. See [www.tinhouse.com](http://www.tinhouse.com) for details.

**PCAC:** The Portland Center for the Advancement of Culture continues summer programming at the Modern Zoo (see story on this page) through August 31. July 11 and 12: "Les Petits Rats," a dance performance choreographed by Margery Fairchild (continuing at Disjecta). July 12: The Peninsula Artists open a group show, along with 15-plus new exhibitions by individual artist-residents. July 19 and 20: PCAC's Experimental Jazz Festival (coinciding with the annual jazz fest at nearby Cathedral Park). August 16: fundraiser and CD catalog release party. August 31: closing event. Admission prices vary. See [www.portlandart.org](http://www.portlandart.org) for updates.

**Richard Foreman Mini-Festival:** On August 8-9, Performance Works Northwest will hold a benefit wherein participants get one week to create stagings of short Foreman texts. Shows start at 8:30 p.m. at PWN's space, 4625 SE 67th Ave.

**ORLO Tenth Anniversary Beach Block Party:** The environmental art group celebrates its birthday with music, food, fun, aquatic art and a retrospective exhibit on July 19 from 3 p.m. to midnight at NW 29th Ave. and Industrial St. A water-themed video slam is scheduled for 10 p.m. and advance copies of *The Bear Deluxe #20* will be available. Free.

New people, places, series

**Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Gallery:** After a two-year search, Reed College appointed Stephanie Snyder as director and curator of the campus gallery. The 1991 Reed graduate, Portland native and artist previously worked as director of Columbia University's Macy Gallery and as an independent curator.

**The Know:** Located at 2022 NE Alberta St., the new art space is programming independent films, performance, and "otherstream" music. See [www.calendar.gracies.org](http://www.calendar.gracies.org) or call 503-BUG-NEWS.

**411 Collective:** The new collective at 411 SE Sixth Ave. offers a space for artists to explore improvisational music and dance, plus yoga, movement and life drawing classes and a weekly potluck.

**Motel:** Now open on NW Couch St. between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, Motel sells handmade goods and zines and runs a motel room-sized gallery that features young artists with that lo-fi aesthetic.

**M. Feldman Gallery:** The new gallery at NW 11th Ave. and Marshall St. opened June 5 with paintings of tree stumps and landscapes by Lee Musgrave.

**Alderbrook Station:** Architect couple Daren Doss and Lisa Chadbourne have renovated a three-story former net shed at 4910 Ash St. in Astoria, turning it into an art studio and exhibition space. *Tlohonnipst*, a ceramic and poetry installation featuring Anagama potters, opens July 5 at 6:49 p.m. (high tide). Call 1-503-325-6999 for details.

**Roving Echo:** La Palabra Café-Press cranks up its weekly philosophy café, a space for people to read and discuss selected texts, engage in free writing and hold readings and other events. Every Tuesday at 6 p.m. at 4810 NE Garfield St., \$5.

**Rhizomatica: An Occasional Cabaret:** Artist-musician Tim DuRoche and poet Lisa Radon launched a new performance series focusing on interdisciplinary and improvisational work. See [www.pacificswitchboard.org](http://www.pacificswitchboard.org) for announcements.

Artist Opportunities

**Juried exhibition:** PCAC announces a call to artists for its 2004 event (what's more, losers get a chance to be in a later "inclusive" show). Guidelines available at [www.portlandart.org](http://www.portlandart.org); deadline is August 31.

**Regional Arts and Culture Council:** Deadlines for Project and Professional Development Grants for activities in the year 2004 are posted on RACC's Web site at [www.racc.org](http://www.racc.org). Get application info online or at the Creative Services Center, 222 NW Fifth Ave.

Goodbyes and transitions

**Red76:** The 4-year-old art collective's lead impresario, Sam Gould, moved to Chicago with wife Laura at the end of June. Other members will continue to maintain a presence in Portland, while Gould helps open a new art space, MessHall, in Chicago with partners Temporary Services, Jane Palmer and Marianne Fairbanks (all of whom appeared in Red76's International Art Exposition in April) and others.

**My House:** After 13 months and over 40 events, the Eugene arts collaborative is calling it quits, marking the occasion with "The War on Boredom," a free evening of performances, art, games and more on July 26, 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. in Washington/Jefferson Park, Eugene.

## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This is the final issue of our first volume, meaning we've survived a year, by the grace of many good people. Our first five issues gave most of their attention to visual art and its extensions, mainly because that's what has been exciting and sexy in Portland lately. Which seems a good enough reason to devote this issue to literature — never a glamorous thing to make or consume (unless you count, say, Japanese court poetry). Still, the Northwest has an honorable and unflagging literary history.

As Heather Larimer notes in her interview with Tom Spanbauer and Joanna Rose, literature in Portland goes beyond Powell's and relentlessly rainy winters. Literary culture is cultivated by institutions as varied as Literary Arts, the Portland Zine Symposium (see story on this page) and Dangerous Writers, the writing workshop born in Spanbauer's kitchen. In her survey of experimental groups here and in Seattle, Ashley Edwards shows that we even have a robust literary avant-garde — one with a gregarious regional flavor.

But perhaps the most broadly relevant literary action is coming from the bicoastal *Tin House Magazine*, which gives us our strongest claim to national caliber publishing, thanks in part to its New York office. When *Tin House* announced they would hold their first Summer Writers Workshop here — bringing a pantheon of writers to Reed College in early July — it inspired us to do a literary issue and profile the magazine. As it turned out (like most good stories, unexpectedly), our writer took a less rosy view: Matthew Stadler delivers a funny, provocative arraignment of writing workshops in general.

One workshop faculty member worth tracking down is Charles D'Ambrosio, whose reappraisal of Richard Brautigan in this issue is a major literary event in itself. Also frolicking on Reed's lawns will be Jon Raymond, a *Tin House* editor (also my brother) whose soon-to-be-released novel tells the story of two friendships on the same Oregon land in different times. In this issue, he offers a lyrical, rompy defense of regional literature.

Also inside: features on the Oregon Biennial and writing in the West from the POV of poets, as well as fiction, reviews, art and advice. I'd also like to welcome our new art director, Steve Connell, who's given *The Organ* a new look and holds his own literary pedigree as the co-founder of Verse Chorus Press and former designer of the music magazine *Puncture*. We send our best wishes to our departing art director, Jason Hart, who designed the last 3 issues and now is launching his own design business. I hope you enjoy the issue. Summer tidings to all.

— C.R.

## Art Orgy

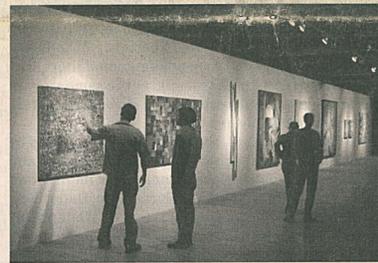
GETTING BUSY AT THE MODERN ZOO

by Camela Raymond

The tour took about an hour. Before we began, Portland Center for the Advancement of Culture's co-directors Gavin Shettler and Bryan Suereth got a volunteer started on tearing down a very large shelving unit in the middle of space 39c. They had assigned over 80 such plots to as many artists in their temporary exhibition hall — 100,000 square feet of interconnected warehouse and office structures a few blocks north of the east end of the St. John's Bridge. The following week of June 14 promised the commencement of their summer-long "arena rock show" of art called the Modern Zoo.

Most recently occupied by outdoor-clothing giant Columbia Sportswear, the crazy quilt of skylit, wood-floored vaults and airless, blue-carpeted offices on the sloping, riverbank end of North Baltimore Street was a well-timed gift. Well-timed for the property's new owners, Ken Unkeles and David Gold, who intend for the summertime traffic to lure artists and creative entrepreneurs to lease the cheaply priced space (a model Unkeles has pioneered successfully in other buildings, such as the long-standing "Feed and Seed" artist hive in the North Interstate industrial area). And well-timed for PCAC, the upstart nonprofit whose mission is to nurture and promote regional artists, because halfway into their first fiscal year expectations were rising for them to show their first hand.

MODERN ZOO / continued on page 8



## Everywhere Is Home

SOME NOTES ON LITERARY REGIONALISM

by Jon Raymond

Everywhere, if you ask the people who live there, is the most amazing, underappreciated, awful, beautiful, fascinating place on earth. The junkies there are the most sordidly distressed; the murderers are the most twistedly brilliant; the drugs are the most potent; the friendships are the most enduring; the landscape is the most haunted and sinister. Every city is certain its own bearded men are somehow stranger than those of everywhere else, and its teenagers are more precariously balanced on the precipice of nihilism and crime. Their mass transit system is the most efficient or the most dilapidated in the world. Their art scene is the most progressive and underrecognized, though likely not for long. The rents are going up.

Everywhere, in other words, is home, with all the gothic mystery and dysfunction that word implies.

How can everywhere be home, though, the most singular and important place on earth? How can everywhere be the center of the world?

This is the paradox at the root of regional identity, at once our most personal of experiences and our most commonly shared. Every day, the utter uniqueness of our relationship to place — our particular unity with a certain bayou or rain forest, and the memories that inhere there — comes up against its own generalized, widespread quality — everyone feels this way, so how can it be considered special at all? Our smug devotion to neighborhood or city is confronted by the smug devotion of other people to other places, rendering all of it, on some level, incredibly banal. Like our families, or our spiritual faith, or our dreams, our regional identity is a source of both fantastic sustenance and shame, and a powerful, largely private crucible of selfhood.

## THE DEATH OF REGIONALISM

Or is it? Some would argue not. Over the past few decades, the rise of something called "globalism" as the catch-all theory of world history has relegated the concept of "the region" to a somewhat forgotten place, a dark backwater in humankind's evolution toward modernity. Globalism, proclaiming itself the main organizing principle and narrative engine of

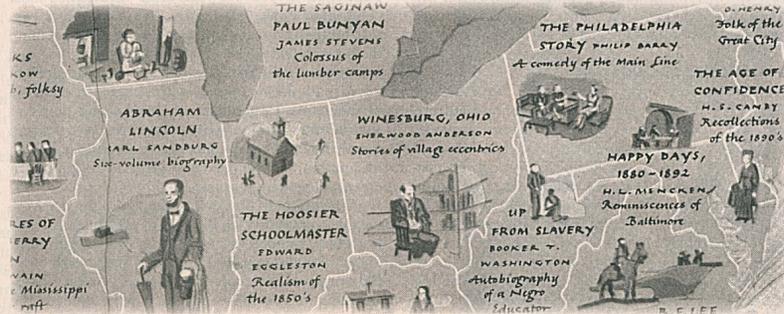


ILLUSTRATION FROM PICTURE FILES ("MAPS OF AMERICA"), PLACKBLASTIC, FOUND 2003

historical progress, casts the region in patronizing, if not pejorative, terms, a nearly extinct species in the face of the oncoming, worldwide integration of everything. The regional means minor, and partially developed, and lacking in real universal appeal. At its best, the regional is a kind of eccentricity.

Globalism, on the other hand, takes all of humankind for its subject and has a grand and

## Inky Fingers

THE 2003 ZINE SYMPOSIUM LEAVES ITS PRINTS ON PORTLAND

by Anna Simon

The annual Portland Zine Symposium has all the characteristics of a magic beanstalk. A group of Portland creatives, the magic beans if you will, were somewhat randomly thrown together three years ago and, after a remarkably short gestation period, they produced an all-out DIY zine festival that now stands as a summer highlight for anyone who has ever photocopied found clip-art. This year's symposium, "It Takes All Kinds," running August 1-3 at Portland State University, is leaving out in new directions to ensure no one — insider, outsider or paper-cut phobe — will be left behind.

Today's zine is usually a small, handmade magazine that's independently produced and distributed. But as veteran symposium organizer Alex Wreck points out, "When you talk about zines it's hard to explain them to people who don't know what they are." Though they often smack of punk aesthetics, the heart of the zine is outreach. "They're a way to fight isolation," Wreck says. Zine history goes back to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* pamphlet and got a big boost in the 1970s when sci-fi writers started publishing small "hobby novels." By the '80s the modern fanzine had come into its own as people started publishing whatever struck their fancy.

"It Takes All Kinds" came from the idea that zines aren't just done by hip kids in their 20s," explains Wreck, who is also the author of the zine series *Brainscan*. "Naysayers of the symposium say it's a kid thing, but as the event gets larger more types come out." This year the symposium hopes to draw 2,000 participants from around the country, double last year's attendance. The roster of attendees will include mothers who create parenting zines, hermetic authors who prefer to self-publish, poets, budding academics, comic book artists, sci-fi fans and curious onlookers.

Wreck may exemplify the typical zinester — she began *Brainscan* six years ago at the age of 19, while she was living in Salt Lake City. After moving to Portland she began helping fellow zinester Joe Biel (another original symposium organizer) run Microcosm, a grass-roots business based in North Portland that prints and distributes DIY parapher-

alia such as stickers, T-shirts, buttons, records and zines. Wreck loves recycling "trash" paper into her zines and has a seemingly endless supply of helpful information for constructing them, ranging from how to make your own paper to getting bargain copy rates and distribution. One gets the sense that she'll still be making zines as an old lady, living out her belief that zines are an art unto their own, not something you have to "grow out of."

Wreck and her fellow organizers would like to see more people grow into zines. "What happens at the symposium is what you want," she says. This year's events include panels and workshops on zines and age, zines in the classroom, zines as educational tools and zines and motherhood (childcare will also be provided this year). A panel on organizing your own zine events, from cut-and-paste parties to other conferences, will debut. And workshops ranging from the basic "Zines 101" to silk-screening and mimeographing techniques will return. Look for an advanced bookbinding workshop run by Booklyn, an artist-run bookmakers group from Brooklyn, N.Y., and a zine lounge sponsored by Portland's SCRAP for on-the-spot assemblage urges. Between workshops people can trade issues, swap stories and peruse distribution tables of DIY wares — at last count Biel had 70 confirmed tables. "And food," Wreck says. "We want to feed everybody!"

In *Brainscan* #19, which insightfully and elegantly details last year's symposium, Wreck recalls one attendee remarking, "I don't know the sound of my best friends' voices." For many, traveling to the symposium is their chance to meet people they've corresponded with but never met. And for all zinesters who spend long hours in private toil, crouched over typewriters or meticulously arranging prose on scraps of patterned paper, it will provide a rare dose of collegial affirmation — maybe even a handshake from an admiring fan. Set your browser to [www.pdxzines.com](http://www.pdxzines.com) for regular updates and newly added events.

Anna Simon is a writer who frequently covers current events and theater for the *Portland Mercury*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

damali ayo's interview with William Pope.L in your May/June issue ("What's Race Got to Do with It?") gives great insight into the artist's installation at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Sadly, this level of intelligent discourse was lacking during the opening night of the exhibit, *eRacism*.

Questions asked by the audience at the artist's talk sounded like a replay of the infamous, circa 1985 *Conversation with Basquiat* video where a clueless reporter insists on validating his simplistic interpretation of the artwork: anger and blackness. "Is your work about anger?" is a time-worn reaction to difference and it misses the point. "Your work is really black" was another embarrassing comment. I expected better than this from Portland's art crowd. Pope.L subtly evaded the dualistic positioning of the questions with charming anecdotes of his childhood. This professor of rhetoric was incredibly patient with his interrogators.

Stuart Horodner and PICA deserve heaps of praise for bringing this important exhibit and artist to our Fair City. I originally thought that the installation was over-curved with the extensive wall text accompanying every piece. Rather than allowing the possibility for multiple viewpoints, these curatorial explanations serve to limit the range of interpretations, thus contradicting Pope.L's stated intention of getting people "to find their own ownership or relation to that." But given the public's lack of understanding shown at the opening talk, perhaps Horodner gauged his audience better than I knew. I only wish he hadn't voiced the paternalistic phrase "shepherding his career" in reference to working with Pope.L over the years. Wince.

*eRacism* offers a profound, nuanced, inclusive investigation of American culture. Get out of your black versus white thinking rut, Portland! What "race" is peanut butter? Are hot dogs angry? We are being invited to consider issues of sexuality, race, class, consumerism, addiction, deprivation, excess and waste, among other things. Look into the mirror!

Sincerely,  
Annin Barrett  
Southeast Portland

REGIONALISM / continued from page 1

logic formations and unified in a continuous ecology. The deserts of the Southwest, for example, or the plains of the Midwest, or the swamps of Florida, all constitute discrete regions in the larger geologic body of the United States. The borders of a region in this sense are naturally created — rivers and mountains and forests — and the binding energy is the weather (among the people, the struggle against it).

**POLITICS:** Regions are also the ground of sectional political activity, the scene where people "act locally," as it were. The population is mapped using multicolored canvassing grids, neighborhoods are districted and gerrymandered. Demographic shifts are tabulated by census, influence is peddled, grassroots campaigns are born, gentrification is fretted over. All manner of organizing and administrating takes place, apart from any larger state power or government, though also in tandem with it, to address political preoccupations from forest-cutting to organized crime to bilingualism, depending. The aggregate work of municipal, county and statewide bureaucracies governing their respective jurisdictions allows our schools to run, our toilets to flush and our stop lights to flash, as well as providing a testing ground for new rhetorical devices and campaign engineering techniques in the federal arena. A good example of the performance of regional politics: George Bush as "Texan."

**INDUSTRY:** Regions are also defined by their economic activity, the industrial networks that shape the land and the commercial activity that makes the parts interact. The effect of Boeing on Seattle, or agribusiness in California's central valley, or publishing in New York, is in each case massive and contained, practically definitive inside its realm, and then reaching outwards into the world from a single, entrenched hub. Regional economies exert power not only through their extraction and dispersal of resources, but also through their lens of perception, inflecting the idiom and gesture of whole populations. The difference between an alfalfa farmer in Fresno and a gallery worker in Manhattan is, among other things, a regional difference. Their postures and references seem normal in their place and become strange elsewhere.

**IMAGINATION:** Finally, beyond geographic, political and economic designations, the region can be construed in psychological terms, a receptacle of certain characteristics and personalities, a reliquary of disposition and prejudice. The friendly, bovine Midwest or the spacey, reckless West Coast. Pinched, conventional New England. The region is a theater of local history and family drama and a backdrop of peculiar types and stereotypes. It is the scene of unrecorded longings and dashed hopes that have nothing to do with the larger world at all, and which live entirely in the minds of its residents. Memories burble under the ground. Cliques and tribes define themselves loosely through weird rituals. The region is a resource of minerals and plant life, and also of dreams. (Sometimes these dreams are vivid enough to attract outsiders — a shared fantasy that becomes a self-selecting prophecy.) The region, like the city, is an idea.

Taken in all its facets, the region begins to look less like a specific place or province than a full-blown mode of interpretation: a web of affiliations and stories and reference points that quivers and gauges the world by its own set of measures. Through contact with the world outside itself, in conversation and trade, work and leisure, the regional comes to know its own shape in some way and arrive at some method of judging things. Through incremental developments in local taste and style, accumulations of images and folklore, the regional defines its residents' perspectives on the most fundamental level, our very sense of who we are and what we can relate to.

Contrary to claims made by Microsoft ("Where do you want to go today?") and other players in the information age, the fact of distance in the world, the dispersal of people over the surface of the globe, marks a definitive limit to our spectrum of experience and opportunity. The separation we feel from those elsewhere is a fundamental principle of our lives. We miss each other. We misunderstand each other. I am here; you are there. The regional inheres in the most basic of human interactions. It seems absurd to say it, but the last decade's barrage of propaganda surrounding free trade and the Internet has made the point almost fresh: People are utterly different from each other, and no amount of inundation by sitcoms or Starbucks will change that fact. Nor will the spread of popular culture alter the distinct regional education that forms the basis of most people's understanding of the world.

THE BIRTH OF REGIONALISM

In the 19th century, a movement of "local color" writers arose to explore the indigenous culture regions of the U.S., investigating various language groupings, ethnic communities and traditions of cuisine and religion and dress. They recorded provincial typologies and vernacular ways of doing things, and published their work in the form of lively character sketches in national magazines. As the *Saturday Review of Literature* explained in 1934, "Local color was a pursuit of dying idiosyncrasies of character and dialect in a country rapidly becoming standardized and, not so rapidly, shaping its culture toward an internationalism which, it was believed, laissez-faire economics would eventually make politically possible." (Which is to say, the regional, then as now, was perceived as endangered by a steadily advancing mass culture.)

The energy spent on documenting local color in the 19th century was brought on largely by deep nostalgia in the face of industrialization. The construction of railroads and factory towns, the invention of photography, electricity and steam engines, and the migration of large populations from afar had rapidly changed the nation on almost every scale. Local color scholars, sensitive to this fact, pursued objects of study that existed apart from any modern social or historical context, collecting remnants of a quickly vanishing time. The subjects they were drawn to were interesting precisely for their exclusion from larger cultural developments,

and thus the project became largely a classification of quirk and stereotype.

It was not until the 20th century that a more complex form of (self-defined) literary regionalism came into being. Unlike the backward-looking local color movement, however, this regionalism bore a distinctly modern outlook. "Regionalism," said *The Sociological Review* at the time, "in literary production consists in presenting the human spirit in every aspect in correlation with its immediate environment" — an objective, nearly scientific definition to describe the work of authors like Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis, who had begun depicting the Midwest in precise, unaffected language, and knitting their provinces into the tapestry of a larger world history. These authors recorded a community of characters that were not shrouded in the mists of time (although they might exist in the past), nor recognizably stereotypical (although they might have gone on to become stereotypes), and in doing so they participated in a broad movement toward indigenous ways of knowing in the arts. At a time when Woody Guthrie and Diego Rivera caught the popular imagination,



ILLUSTRATION BY PLACKBLASTIC, 2003

these authors shared in a fairly untroubled idealism regarding the brotherhood of man and a natural fealty for place and neighbor that was almost incidentally proletarian.

By the early part of the 20th century, the epochal social and economic changes wrought by industrial innovations in the mid-1800s had begun to come into some focus. "Looking back a generation," journalist William Allen White wrote, "one sees in perspective that the American story of the days following the Civil War, was in all its regional phases a frontier story. Yet no one novelist could encompass it. Today the new story of the rise of American industrialism is essentially a regional story with a different epic theme of the same tragic circumstances in every regional landscape..." That is, the transformation of the land by the factory, the railroad and the electrical lines; the upheavals in class and demography; the wholesale transformation of labor; the collective experience of industrialization did not spell the end of regional literature, but in fact led to its blossoming, as the same story in different locales bloomed into a diverse literature of broadly modern sensibility.

With World War I, the developments spurred by industrialization reached a kind of apotheosis, and regionalism took its place among other, more avant-garde artistic movements — Surrealism, Dada, most everything we have come to term "Modernism" — in response to the times. Unlike such expatriate writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, however, who favored the frothing, consumer side of the equation (i.e. formal experimentation in a Parisian milieu, supported by an industrial-philanthropic salon culture), the anti-expatriates, as they were, kept their eyes on the home front, recording the scene of industrialism's ground-level production. From their small towns and rural outposts, these writers documented the rise of regional factory culture, the settlement of the (Mid)western frontier, and the establishment of the rural bourgeoisie, while participating in the most advanced formal and ideological debates of their times, understanding in some way that the stories they wrote were part of a larger story with an undercurrent of enormous human catastrophe.

*Poor White*, by Sherwood Anderson, is an exemplary novel in the regional modernist mode. Published in 1920, a year after Anderson's most celebrated book, *Winesburg, Ohio*, *Poor White* centers on the invention of a cabbage-picking machine in Bidwell, Oh. The inventor is Hugh McVey, the eponymous Poor White, who rises from the sloth of poverty to pursue a quasi-artful career in the field of mechanical engineering. During long hours at the railroad station where he works as a station agent, he studies mathematics and physics, which he applies to the landscape of backbreaking agricultural labor he sees outside his window.

The effect (McVey's cabbage-picking machine on the community of Bidwell is profound, catalyzing the construction of a factory, the migration of an ethnic minority (Italians), and the growth of an industrial town complete with cheap worker's housing that we recognize now as a prototype for the modern suburbs.

The novel draws its picture in a series of interlocking stories, almost character studies, which transpire in overlapping episodes. Clara, a young woman, comes to age in a battle of wills with her father, who leads a team of industrialists in bilking their neighbors, among them a hired hand who once had a nearly psychedelic encounter with Ulysses S. Grant. As in *Winesburg, Ohio*, Anderson's interweaving stories depict the dreams and lovesickness of small lives, and through them he dissects a whole world in transit, capturing subtle gradations of class, emotion and landscape in the process. His prose makes a stylistic virtue of the indigenously terse vernacular rhythms Gertrude Stein's deceptively simple rhythms and Ernest Hemingway's jazz-age experiments in minimalism.

Anderson's template of regional literature

— the almost biblical genealogizing of families, the composite, imaginary landscape, the fascination with the grotesque — went on to influence subsequent writers, in particular Southerners such as William Faulkner, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor, all of whom turned his devices toward the purposes of their own countryside in some way. With them, the regionalist impulse flourished again, culminating in a Southern Gothic hothouse of narrative tropes and haunted landscapes, practically overrun with incestuous children and octoroons, dwarves and drunkards, living out the sins of their fathers and mothers under suffocating nightshade and weeping willow trees. Most everyone agrees, it was a good time to be a Southern writer.

In other places, between the wars, other writers captured the complexities of their own time and place. One count finds over 2,000 regional fiction titles published in the years between 1917 and 1937. In the Southeast, Julia Peterkin's *Black April* and *Scarlet Sister Mary*; Maristhan Chapman's *The Weather Tree*, *The Happy Mountain*; Minnie Hite Moody's *Death Is a Little Man*. In the Midwest, James T. Farrell's *Gas-House McGirt*; Ole Edvart Rølvaag's *Their Father's God*; Edna Ferber's *Come and Get It*. In the Northwest, H.L. Davis's *Honey in the Horn*; Bess Streeter Aldrich's *A Lantern in Her Hand*. The list of largely forgotten titles could go on and on.

Since then, although the moniker of literary regionalism has fallen away, the technique has continued on in many forms. *The Corrections*, ultra-zeitgeisty book of recent seasons, is the story of an adamantly, even obstinately, Midwestern family. Road writers from Jack Kerouac to David Wojnarovich, the literary children of John Dos Passos, obversely make a pastiche of the regional tableau. Even the groundless metafiction of someone like Donald Barthelme exudes its peculiarly baked, Greenwich Village sensibility. As William Allen White wrote last century, and which probably remains true today, "In the nature of things the Great American Novel must be a composite of regional novels. Always, since fiction began to appear in the United States, it has been regional fiction. Fashion in American fiction has changed, but its regional characteristics remain."

GLOBAL REGIONALISM

Jonathan Franzen, in his commentary on the state of today's novel in various magazine articles and interviews, describes two main currents in contemporary fiction, more or less, both of which bear glancing relationship to issues of regionalism: there's "Systems" literature, on the one hand, as embodied in the work of Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis and others, and "Domestic" literature, as embodied by Alice Munro, Paula Fox, Ann Beattie and others, each of which has its merits and its limitations. On the Systems side, Franzen finds writing inundated with media savvy, full of flows of data and televisual reference: a critical literature fluent in technologies of popular culture. On the Domestic side he finds small, psychological portraits of lives in duress: a character-based literature of intimacy and humble, punctual epiphany. Other people have made other taxonomies of contemporary fiction and have generally found a similar fault line, one tradition grounded in the blue-collar anomie of '70s naturalism, the other in the buzzing, mediated energy of postwar postmodernism. In any case, people seem to say, the main traditions of American literature have somewhat fallen away from each other, with big ideas on the one side and little emotions on the other.

By this model, the city has become the setting of socially engaged, idea-driven literature, the backdrop, if not the agent, of great historical



ILLUSTRATION BY PLACKBLASTIC, 2003

endeavor. The city provides the density and scale necessary for the expression of panoramic concepts and the very architecture of importance. The time-tables of media culture assume almost organic status, deadlines and release dates substituting for the blizzards and hurricanes of nature, and the ambitions of magazine and film employees become the master narrative of our times. Celebrity is always very close.

The country, on the other hand, has become the scene of emotional interiority, a warren of kitchens and dive bars populated by a world of uniformly beautiful losers, Carver country stretching from one edge of town to another, united in a beery sepia tone. The minute mood changes of troubled couples register with exhaustion, leading sometimes to reconciliation and other times to infidelity. Lost parents and children abound. Terminal illness plagues the land, borne with dignity and awe. People are powerfully unhappy.

This is an unfair characterization of contemporary writing, of course (and diverges from Franzen's), but it does hold a grain of truth. In any case, it's mostly just a useful dichotomy for illustrating the problem that writers of any moment face in creating stories that address the diverse complications of human experience. The trick, people often seem to think, is in somehow combining two tendencies into something better than their parts, and in doing so to forge an art that is both heartfelt and intelligent. To think and feel at once, and to make the audience think and feel as well. This ambition is then situated in relation to the specific context of a writer's life.

But what is that context? What are the defining historical currents of the times? That's a tough question, with many different answers, depending on who you are and what you want. History plays out differently in different places and snares people in wildly different ways. But perhaps there are a few things that some of us could agree on: In the big picture, the world is now exiting the worst crisis in recorded human history, a century of genocide, with no promise that the worst is yet over. Our national political narratives seem to lead inevitably to airborne murder, and the most chauvinistic ideas of citizenship and patriotism are presented as natural and good. We have become accustomed to blatant state and corporate deception. The characters offered by the media for imaginative identification are depressing and unreal. By and large, America's public face is characterized by vulgar exceptionalism and self-ignorance.

It is a grim picture, and according to many, the contemporary novel is powerless to change it. The Systems novel, for its part, gazes at the mechanisms of pop culture and globalism with smarmy infatuation, while the Domestic novel shrinks away preciously. And further, TV and the movies long ago cast the novel aside anyway, to a place where it can no longer engage with history in any meaningful fashion. The form has lost its prestige as the story of our culture has moved elsewhere. The ambition to write novels, by some descriptions, has come to look like an abdication of some kind, a disengagement from the world, a career of angsty existentialist solitude.

Maybe that's so. But maybe not, too. It all depends on where you're coming from. For those with less investment in the pedigree of the form, not so prone to "death of" scenarios or dramatics about cultural decline (people born in the West, for instance, where everything looks kind of small in relation to the mountains and the trees, and where people live lives far from the culture of "great literature"), the novel still seems like a pretty interesting device, maybe even more so for its marginalized status. The novel remains a solid vehicle for narrative suspense and character revelation, for instance, and continues to answer the obfuscations of national public discourse with the tools of complexity and ambiguity. If anything, the novel's distance from the hot center of popular culture is a benefit in some ways, allowing it more latitude to tell its story how it wants.

Furthermore, in the context of globalist narratives of converging world everything, the specifically regionalist novel allows for an interesting departure. The regionalist novel by its nature speaks in a voice of sideline skepticism and long, ingrown memory, the proverbial old man on the bench. It understands that even when things happen everywhere — the popping of a real estate bubble, say, or the spread of some faddish spiritual belief — they happen everywhere in particular places and to particular people in particular ways. The new microchip factory appears on a plot of land that once held a meth lab; the man who built the factory is a drunken hippie dwarf. By molding the stuff of history into the form of local plot and character and setting, the regionalist novel allows us to see familiar things bearing a larger meaning. It allows us to talk back to history in some way, and maybe even bend it a little, if we're lucky. By attaching the past to the present, the periphery to the core, the regionalist novel enters into larger patterns of history to register some small effect, constructing counterhistories that move outside common-sense narratives of globalism and military imperialism. The regional novel, perhaps paradoxically, makes the world seem larger and more diverse.

REGIONALISM HERE

The Northwest has historically been a place where people go to escape from history, where big transformations pass by without registering or arrive in hobbled, belated forms. It is a place of half-measures and unfinished projects, lost momentum, where starting over often leads to agoraphobia and paralyzing self-reflection. It has lived the apocalypse of Manifest Destiny so long that it has grown comfortable with eschatological ravings and visionary predictions of fire. This is a place where the end of the world is as quaint as an old shovel.

There are stories here, though, even when nothing happens for long stretches of time. Our gleaming corporate parks are scenes of epic ego and inspiration and unseen economies of mental labor. Our alternative spiritualities, with their fusion of religiosity and capitalism, lead to radical personal transformations while casually demolishing notions of coherent tradition under their churning influences and appropriations. Our landscape moves in rhythms much stronger than anything humans could match.

Arguably, the rise of globalism brings to these stories a degree of political heat. The narratives we live here, simply by diverging so far from the norm (moving backwards where others advance, or going slowly when others go fast), contradict everyday plotlines of empire and consumerism. Distant developments in currency, culture and religion come to roost in unpredictable ways, providing rich themes that play out in an unforeseeable manner and which then travel again as new fiction. The political, emotional and financial truths of our families and friends bear witness to the lies that power would tell us. As folklorist B.A. Botkin said in about 1936: "In spite of the tendency of the provinces to substitute their local myths for the national myth of Americanism... regionalism has done much to destroy that 'all-destroying abstraction, America...'"

Everywhere is the same in this way. Everywhere has a history full of characters we have never met before and images we have never seen, whose simple existence implies even larger worlds behind them. Perhaps, just as regional modernists once blossomed in the wake of industrialism, so regionalist attitudes will strengthen again in the face of corporate multinationalism, to tell stories of life on the ground with some purpose, even passion.

Jon Raymond is a New York-based writer and associate editor at *Tin House Magazine*. His first novel, *The Half Life*, is the story of two friendships in Oregon. It will be published by Bloomsbury USA in spring 2004.

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## Manufacturing Contact

\$395 BUYS YOU DOROTHY ALLISON — BUT NOT THE WRITER'S LIFE

by Matthew Stadler

Samuel R. Delany likens the summer writing workshops in which he has enjoyed teaching to a swarm of third-world beggars crowding a handful of bourgeois tourists as they disembark from a train — the famous writers are the tourists; students are the beggars. The desired miracle is that someone from the train will see you, recognize your brilliance and sweep you away. The point of Delany's essay (a part of his book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*) isn't to condemn the lottery of summer writing workshops, but to contrast that kind of "networking" with a less dire, more durable thing he calls "contact" (something that happens, for him, more often among strangers at a porn theater than at the hundreds of writing workshops kept afloat by the dreams and wallets of unpublished writers).

The direness of Delany's image is misleading: workshop students rarely out-and-out beg. His image obscures the intense, almost forced collegiality of these retreats. The dramas of need and inequity are usually played out behind a scrim of politesse and ease, a fact that Delany acknowledges further on: "The writing workshop may be a class war, but it is a very pleasant war, obsessively polite." For a week, everyone — the paying and the paid — enjoys the fantasy of a benignly moneyless surfeit of opportunities and fellow feeling. Grizzled veterans trade quips with unpublished comrades over cocktails after working on their manuscripts. This is the fantasy writer's life, to which the hopeful student has bought a one-week ticket.

It should also be noted that the setting is rarely so squalid as a Calcutta rail station. Workshops occupy some of the most stunning real estate in the world: mountain villages, coastal enclaves, forested valleys. ShawGuides Inc. ([www.writing.shawguides.com](http://www.writing.shawguides.com)), a site that catalogs the 1,417 of these annual meetings that bother to contact it, is indexed not by faculty or philosophy, but by season and country. Its pages unfold like a sumptuous travel brochure: castles and palazzos, island paradises, idyllic Arcadias where hopeful writers will pay a lot of money to cross paths with their more successful heroes. This summer, *Tin House Magazine*, the "bicoastal" literary journal founded four years ago by Win McCormack, adds Portland to the list. (From the *Tin House* summer workshop brochure: "Portland is located between the rugged Oregon Coast, miles of wine country, and the snow-capped Cascades and offers an array of day trips. If you will be planning to stay on in Portland past the close of the Summer Writers Workshop, *Tin House* will be happy to refer you to area hostels, bed and breakfasts, and hotels.")

*Tin House's* inaugural workshop has drawn 60 hopeful writers to pay \$850 each (tuition for one three-day class — double that to take two classes; \$450 more to buy six days of cafeteria meals and a bed in a Reed dorm) to come spend time with Denis Johnson, Rick Moody, Lorrie Moore, Dorothy Allison, Chris Offutt and a dozen others. (Nineteen more students will attend on work-study or full scholarships.) Most attendees expect to get some education, learning craft or what-have-you, or to find that intimate moment that establishes collegiality, solidarity, a bond of some sort, linking them to successful writers. In Delany's terms, they will come to "network" in the hopes of establishing "contact."

Access is just one commodity *Tin House* will peddle in common with all the other workshops, and here comparison shoppers should rank them high. Denis Johnson's only other summer appearance will be at the Wisconsin Association for the Deaf's annual meeting, where he's slated to lead a workshop on "Alcohol, & Other Drugs Abuse Treatment." (I accept the possibility that this may not be the same Denis Johnson.) By contrast, Pam Houston (not invited to *Tin House*) will be available in Malibu, Spain; Aspen, Boulder and Ouray, Colorado; Taos, New Mexico; Provincetown, Massachusetts; at her regular faculty gig at the University of California at Davis; and through her special "Pam Houston Workshops," held for a month every summer at her ranch in New Mexico. Thank you, *Tin House*, for not inviting Pam. While the Denis Johnson exclusive is just for an evening reading, *Tin House* also has three-day workshops with Helen Schulman and

Charles D'Ambrosio, only available here.

Alas, the rest of their catalog is not rare. Dorothy Allison can be had this summer for \$395 up in Port Townsend, Washington, or \$495 out on Maui; Percival Everett costs only \$350 at the five-day long Hassayampa Institute for Creative Writing in August, and his workshop at July's Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop at Texas A&M University is free (that one looks like an excellent bargain — two weeks with Everett, Edwidge Danticat and Yusef Komanyakaa, among others, all for free); *Tin House* editor-at-large Elissa Schappell is actually cheaper later in the summer when she gives a workshop at the lauded Squaw Valley Community of Writers conference (\$675); and, while Todd Haynes is always delightful, paying *Tin House* \$850 to hang out with him in Portland is like paying the bus driver a thousand bucks for a ride through downtown. (He usually gives it away.) Ditto, alas, for D'Ambrosio ([malpede@yahoo.com](mailto:malpede@yahoo.com)) and Miranda July ([mjuly@joanie4jackie.com](mailto:mjuly@joanie4jackie.com)).

Workshop purveyors generally recognize this problem, and that's why they describe these get-togethers as "workshops," rather than elaborate, expensive parties. Charles D'Ambrosio isn't just going to hang out with you, he's preparing a three-day class. D'Ambrosio will focus on longer short stories, "a form," he told me by e-mail, "that shows how ragged a story can get before it ceases to be a story and begins to edge out of the form into something else." But D'Ambrosio said he won't be helping his students learn to write. "One of the promises of a workshop is that you'll learn tricks of craft that will unlock either your writing or the door to publication, but it's a fundamentally false promise, it seems to me, if only because writing is so deeply based on failure. Or accidents, both of which are a little hard to teach in a classroom or anywhere else for that matter." Perfecting craft (or, in *Tin House* brochure parlance, "developing a greater range of tools and techniques") isn't going to happen in this classroom. "If stringing together a series of successes was really necessary to the act of writing," D'Ambrosio continued, "I don't think I'd bother. The ideal of good citizenship that holds sway in a classroom — maintaining a certain elevated level of discourse — puts the format at odds with the work of writing. Good manners may be important at dinner or in a classroom, but they stink in writing."

The other burden of the summer workshop is lack of time. Reflecting on the value of the two years he spent in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, D'Ambrosio recalled that "time was the most valuable thing I got from going to Iowa — time, and a little financial support — which is just another form of time." Similarly, workshops that meet over many years, such as Tom Spanbauer's ongoing kitchen-table group, Dangerous Writers, generate kinds of contact and support quite unlike those made in the course of three meetings. Over years, rewards come; in a week one simply remains open and hopes for the best. As D'Ambrosio concluded, "it would seem that a workshop like the *Tin House* deal must draw people for a variety of reasons, and in any group of 100 people, a couple are bound to benefit in a positive way — they're ready for something to happen."

What's likely to happen, according to Lee Montgomery, *Tin House* senior editor and doyenne of the summer workshop, "is substantial. There's a lot you can gain by sitting and listening to 10 hours of someone giving you their sensibility. People will gain knowledge about writing. We won't make a writer out of anybody, but we might be able to provide inspiration, or another reader, maybe a relationship with the faculty, though that's less likely." Montgomery recalled her own experiences at the Squaw Valley conference. "You can guide people in areas of language, you can tell them who to read; at Squaw Valley I got a lot of references for books that I hadn't heard about. That's a good thing. That was a door opener."

But her smorgasbord begs the question, why pay *Tin House* \$850 for such rewards? Just how exceptional is that reading list, or sensibility, or "knowledge about writing?" The answer is that pedagogy

isn't what you're paying for. As every piece of *Tin House* publicity will remind you, tuition buys Denis Johnson, Lorrie Moore, Rick Moody, et al., and they don't come cheap. *Tin House* gladly paid the "gobs of dough" Montgomery says Johnson requested for his evening reading, because his presence is a rare commodity. Is he a good teacher? Montgomery, who studied with him at Iowa, says, "No, he's horrible. That's why he's reading [and not leading a workshop]." Walt Curtis might give you far better advice about your writing, but a week-long vacation with Denis Johnson and Lorrie Moore puts you where you want to be: among "real" writers.

Hopeful students sign up for the opportunity in droves, and they don't come away disappointed. Anecdotally, the prevalence of return students at conferences such as Squaw Valley, Breadloaf and Centrum, is well established. (Of course the same can be said of other, more frank lotteries, such as the ones available at grocery store checkouts; you don't need to actually win anything to keep believing you might.) In the case of writing conferences, repeat attendees arrive every year in pretty much the same position as before, happily pursuing the same dreams.

Their contentment isn't delusional. Students don't spend the week waiting for magic; they spend the week living it. The summer workshop enacts a



COLLAGE BY CYNTHIA LAHTI

widely held fantasy of the life awaiting successful writers — no day job, free time spent in thoughtful conversation with well-published geniuses whose razor-sharp critiques and *bon mots* could fill books, cocktails on the grand sweeping lawns of, say, Portland, Oregon: "between the rugged Oregon Coast, miles of wine country, and the snow-capped Cascades..." (The bucolic rhetoric of writing education is the most noxious effluent of this whole economy: "High on a heather-covered hillside awaits Anam Cara..." "Aspen Summer Words has become a model of what a writers' retreat can be — an engaging marriage of method and art..." "Our relaxing, rural environment is the perfect place to escape the rigors of daily life and focus on a creative project..." One notable exception is the Annual Journey Conference, which, after dispensing with the woody descriptions, promises "No workshops or ego-stroking, just networking!" Their frankness came as a great relief to me after reading hundreds of assurances from their competitors, that, to quote, for example, from Squaw Valley's Web site, "these workshops assist serious writers by exploring the art and craft as well as the business of writing." These are writers, for God's sake — surely they can do better.)

With Johnson and the others on board (plus a half-dozen New York editors and agents), *Tin House* just might deliver on its promise to help you "establish new relationships in the writing and publishing

community." But will these relationships ever be as rich as what Samuel Delany found in the porn theaters of Times Square? The question is not idle. "Contact," as Delany describes it — unplanned, unpredictable, intimate — is the real engine in the career-making apparatus enjoyed by writers like Moody and Moore. Networking, on the other hand, "produces more opportunities to network — and that's about all." Students hope the miracle will happen — discovery, a breakthrough, or just the magic of enlightenment — but their chances of such rewards are tiny. The problem is that everyone has signed up for the same scarce thing, a quality of attention that is always in short supply. Which is why none of the people who teach these workshops would ever actually pay to attend one. And few, if any, submit their own work to the kinds of programs they are paid to carry out. You'll find them teaching — and not taking — summer workshops because that's where the real contact occurs. As the train pulls away, Chris isn't taking his place at the big table to discuss Lorrie's new story, he's looking for the bar car. And you should be too.

The question of how education and self-improvement became required window dressing for what seem to be the far more enjoyable activities of drinking and schmoozing with powerful people is best left to other essayists. To their credit, the editors at *Tin House* will bring intelligence, frankness and taste to their pointless replication of this tired, moribund model. They have programmed a great number of socially open forums, such as parties and meals — the kinds of events that form the real core of a writer's education. Their demands on the wonderful faculty they have enlisted are minimal, and it seems everyone involved will be happy to make only the slightest pretense about education so the economic machinery of access and privilege can be allowed to run fruitfully in Portland.

Resources like those *Tin House* commands might better be spent making more permanent, less programmatic mixing grounds for the talented hodge-podge of published and unpublished writers who already fill this city. When Montgomery uses her considerable intelligence and talent to get Denis Johnson into Portland for a few days, why pay Reed College for the lecture hall? Why construct the whole apparatus of a summer workshop, sapping all of Montgomery's time and energy? Get Johnson reading in a cheaper space, and put Helen Schulman's group into the *Tin House* conference room the same day; have Rick Moody show up the next morning, and throw some kind of big party where all of the principals can attend.

Go ahead and charge for contact, but let the whole drama of the paying and the paid transpire without the pious rigamarole of education: \$850 buys you three group meetings; make it a smorgasbord — Helen Schulman all three days or, say, one with Charles D'Ambrosio, one with Chris Offutt, one with Percival Everett. Don't spend money on Reed's imprimatur of higher education when you could place events in cheaper, more publicly traveled spaces like *Tin House's* own headquarters, Disjecta, or the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Wieden + Kennedy. Rather than conjure the allure of isolation and remove, invest in the possibility of urban mixing and surprise. These are all ideas that *Tin House* has no doubt come up with already, so let this be a shout from the sidelines, an encouragement to stride away from old models into a future that has a chance to fly in a city like Portland.

And why not make the *Tin House* conference room meetings permanent, featuring local and visiting writers; or start a lending library that doubles as a public reading venue? It's no porn theater, but this is the sort of space that can function as the crossing point for a rich panorama of talented people. And more parties! "A glib wisdom," Delany writes of Times Square and its habitués, "holds that people like this just don't want relationships. They have 'problems with intimacy.' But the salient fact is: these were relationships..." Intimacy for most of us is a condition that endures, however often repeated, for minutes or for hours. And these all had their many intimate hours." This is the actual social milieu of writers, famous or not, and a condition devoutly to be wished for by those hoping to grow meaningful infrastructures around the pleasures of writing and reading.

Matthew Stadler is a novelist, literary editor for *Nest* magazine and editor and co-founder of Clear Cut Press.



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## re:writing the rules

A USER'S GUIDE TO THE NEW EXPERIMENTAL LITERATURE

by Ashley Edwards

Since the early 1900s, "experimental" writers have inhabited the margins of a vast literary terrain. Weaving in and out of time-honored forms and traditions, early sound artists set poetry to musical scores, Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky conducted their modernist experiments, and in the 1970s the Language Poets lay bare the sober politics of language.

At this point, haven't all the rules been bent at least once? Can we assume the tradition is moribund, now that a bulk of it has been anthologized and absorbed into college classrooms?

Maybe not. In Portland and Seattle, five small organizations, four of which were founded in the last six months to two years, are in steady dialogue over what it means to be an experimental or "linguistically innovative" writer, publisher or reading series curator in the Pacific Northwest.

Both cities are affording ample legroom for writers and organizers who are united, rather than marginalized, by their linguistic transgressions. Valuing practice over theory, the following collectives are creating a new breed of socially engaged experimentation.

### SUBTEXT COLLECTIVE

"We need to hear the language that surrounds from within and from without — not from some comfortable mid-way space." — Jeanne Heuving

For nine years, Subtext has brought to Seattle a monthly reading series of nationally recognized as well as newly emerging innovative writers. Seattle has long been regarded as a pillar of poetry, and

while there are a number of venues in the city for readings, Subtext offers the only series specifically committed to experimental writing. In the early '90s, Jeanne Heuving, Ezra Mark, Nico Vassilakis and others formed a reading group to discuss the Language writing movement. The Subtext Collective evolved out of these discussions in order to bring the word (literally) to the public. While the writing philosophies of collective members and readers vary, most of them believe that the *how* of writing is in continual dialogue with the *what*. Heuving argues that writing truthfully requires that normative narratives and languages need to be challenged, broken up and played with. Subtext has hosted a mélange of writers who share this intrepid approach to language, including a reader of Dadaist sound poems, a poet/clarinetist duo and the performers of a 24-hour "Gertrude Stein-athon." On August 6, it will sponsor two poets/critics, early Subtext collective member and North Carolinian Joseph Donahue, and Chicagoan Peter O'Leary, author of a new book on Robert Duncan.

### SPARE ROOM COLLECTIVE

"Bringing together Portland's various poetry communities, as well as Portland's various experimental communities working in all genres."

Before the Spare Room Collective started its reading series in Portland last January, the city lacked an organized community interested in experimental writing. According to founding member Chris Pioma, no one was meeting to talk, argue or hash out any of the issues and controversies surround-

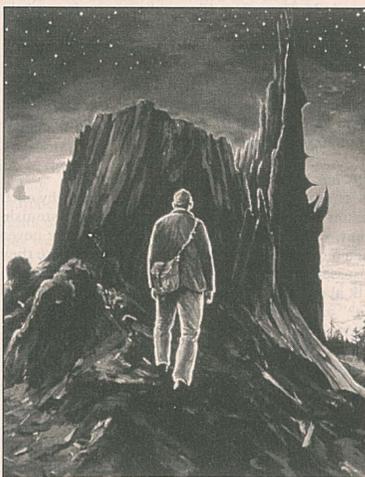
ing avant-garde poetry and poetics. General interest reading series which occasionally feature this work exist, but Pioma asserts that there is a crucial difference between reading experimental work before a general audience and an audience that is knowledgeable of more shrouded, experimental traditions. Much like Subtext in Seattle, Spare Room provides a space for poets who are unabashedly interested in writing that is based on new experiments. The collective has no steady sources of funding, and any money collected at the door is given to the readers. At the moment, Spare Room floats amongst the various galleries that are willing to donate their space for readings. Chris Putnam and Ashley Edwards (the author of this article) will read next on July 10 at Westwind Gallery, 2486 NW Kearney St. Information on upcoming readings can be found at [www.flim.com/spareroom](http://www.flim.com/spareroom) or by calling up Spare Room's "Dial-A-Poem" service, 503-236-0867.

### PINBALL PUBLISHING

"Good writing with a capital G."

Although antique letterpresses and a 19th-century paper cutter fill its sizable facility in Portland's Southeast Clinton Street neighborhood, Pinball Publishing takes a comparatively progressive approach to the art of publishing. Laura Brian and Austin Whipple, who attended high school together in southern Oregon, erected Pinball in December 2001, and the pair recently printed the fourth edition of *eye-rhyme*, a journal of multicultural experimental poetry and short fiction. Each issue of *eye-rhyme* is a collection of diffuse interpretations of what "experimental" writing is and can be on the page. Printed on wheat-colored heavy stock bound by metal rivets, *eye-rhyme* exemplifies Pinball's organic, minimalist aesthetic and overall mission of neatly integrating experimental content and design. Released "randomly throughout the year,"

EXPERIMENTAL / continued on page 8



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# Everything Is Estranged

EXHUMING RICHARD BRAUTIGAN'S LITERATURE OF DESPAIR

by Charles D'Ambrosio

When Richard Brautigan shot himself in Bolinas in 1984, his life was given a loosely emblematic look that had very little to say about the literary value of his books. By then his obituary had been stalking him for some time: He was the broken and alcoholic hippie, the cultural figure of somewhat transient interest, the writer whose reputation rested on the drugged sensibilities of his contemporaries. It was as if the era itself had created a vogue for Brautigan no different than paisley shirts or Frye boots; he was treated as an embarrassing fashion. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is a peculiar sort of shame. People who read Brautigan typically pick him up in high school or college, at a time when the lyrics to rock songs are still compelling, and a similar sensibility — youthful, I suppose — has always energized a reading of, for example, *Trout Fishing in America*. I don't really understand why this should be so, but both enthusiasms are hard to sustain past the age of thirty. We shoot our heroes and enjoy peripeteia as a spectacle akin to sport and perhaps harshly disavowing the past protects us from the disappointment of our outsized hopes — who knows, really, but shifts in taste don't fully account for the phenomenon. At any rate, nearly everything urgent and alive becomes doo-wop down the road, at least in this country's pop culture, and along the way a somewhat self-hating irony lays waste not only to the work but to the desires it once carried. It's like we die into adulthood.

"Always at the end of the worlds someone is dead," Brautigan wrote in "The World War I Los Angeles Airplane," hitting the dark note of fear that haunts all his writing. But the obituaries for Richard Brautigan eulogized an era more than a man or his work. It's hard to go on admiring, and as a literary mode the panegyric, drained of praise, is very common today. The Web in particular is full of mock elegies that ridicule and are creepy in the way they so blithely break a fundamental promise, that we will take care of our dead. I suppose they are easy to pull off because the position of superiority is built in: There are the living, and then there are the dead, who are somehow at fault for dying, for letting time take them away. The right tone and rhetorical distance are lazily arrived at and almost second nature for someone raised in media culture — for example: Before he shot himself, Brautigan set the lights in his house to run on timers so that it would appear to the outside world as though he were still alive. One imagines him in those numb last hours plugging in lamps and, in a final fiction, re-creating the habits of the living, trying as he set the dials to remember what those rhythms were like. He was a depressive and something of a recluse and apparently his little gimmick worked. His neighbors left him alone. When he was found, weeks later, the manuscript he'd been editing, his last, penciled in blue, was partly eaten by maggots.

So much for his career.  
Now only the prose remains, the cracked and cloddy prose with its black sad mood and shrug-

ging *whatever* attitude, its pleonasm and curious grammatical lapses, its loopy metaphors that either strike home or fall so wide of the mark they read as an extremely flat deadpan. He read Faulkner all his life, obsessed with a past that would not pass, but the simple and often clunky sound of Brautigan's sentences are musically closer to Hemingway's. Raymond Carver and Richard Brautigan shared the influences of time and place, as well as alcoholic fathers, rootlessness and poverty, and a love of fishing. They were contemporaries, born several years apart, both from the Northwest, and looking at old pictures of the men it would be easy to mistake them for brothers. In writing, the influences they shared show up most noticeably when you set Brautigan's work beside the stories Carver wrote in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Even the title of that collection borrows a crudeness from Brautigan, an inarticulate sloppiness, and the stories themselves, in their short inflected sentences, in their often surreal imagery, in their brevity and density and episodic plotting, in their characterizations and settings and dialogue, suggest a close affinity with *Revenge of the Lawn*, Brautigan's book of stories. Both books are quite voicey, they share a diction and, even more noticeably, I think, the sentences find their sound and rhythm in speech that is, to my ear, regional.

Brautigan never wrote elegant prose. The sentences sound broken, physically broken, as if scrawled by a child with a stub of pencil and jabbed through the paper — they sound just slightly illegible, just slightly as though they hadn't earned a rightful place in the pages of a real book. They aren't fully enunciated. There's a loneliness in the sentences, they feel so untutored, so helpless — all of his work has the mood of a solitary child trying to amuse himself. I remember reading years ago a comment by Wallace Stegner, who claimed that Brautigan was illiterate, at least in the cultural sense. I rather doubt it, but a recurring figure in his work is the writer who should not be writing, the writer whose past is unusable and whose gifts are inadequate. "I'm haunted a little this evening by feelings that have no vocabulary... I've been examining half-scrap of my childhood. They are pieces of distant life that have no form or meaning. They are things that just happened like lint."

By far the best of the stories on this theme is "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," which Carver included in *American Short Story Masterpieces*, an anthology, edited with Tom Jenks, that in some ways marks a high point for the flexible practice of realism in short fiction. In that story, three people are "going in" on the writing of a novel, and the narrator, who lives "in a cardboard-lined shack of his (own) building," has been included in the project because he owns a typewriter. A woman on welfare will do the editing because she's "read a lot of pocketbooks and the *Reader's Digest*." And the novelist is "writing the novel because he wanted to tell a story that had happened to him years before when he was working



ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL GREEN

in the woods."

"You'll type it. I'll edit. He'll write it," the woman says. They'll share the royalties, they agree.

None of the characters are given names, but the region is, acting as a sort of fourth character.

"I was about seventeen," the narrator says, "and made lonely and strange by that Pacific Northwest of so many years ago, that dark rainy land of 1952. I'm thirty-one now and I still can't figure out what I meant by living the way I did in those days."

Really, the antagonist in this story is the region. Brautigan always said he was from the Pacific Northwest, but it was rarely a place on a map. It was something ominous and waiting, a past that would not die off, that followed him everywhere. It was

huge, it was vague. It was a weather, it was a sawmill and a pond and unpaved streets and puddles, it was a "ragged toothache sky" and a sad trailer "with a cemetery-like chimney" and children who sit in gutters like "slum sparrows." There's a sense throughout Brautigan's work that his metaphors and similes are reaching, that they're trying too hard, grasping after an effect in desperation. Often they succeed, but just as often they fail. What interests me is their staunch physicality, the yoking of terms, one abstract, the other concrete, that won't quite yield a just or decorous relation; they're like a landscape that won't give in to writing. Just breezing through some thoughts on the nature of metaphor provides a good way to understand Brautigan. If metaphor

# The Importance of Being Dangerous

THE ORGAN TAKES TEA WITH THE HIGH PRIESTS OF PORTLAND'S DANGEROUS WRITERS GROUP

by Heather Larimer

It takes a village to raise a writer. That is, it takes institutions (to provide sanction and patronage) as well as more accessible communities (to nurture and resuscitate, to listen when no one else is). Everyone knows about Portland's literary institutions — the highly visible Literary Arts Inc., two stellar literary magazines (*Tin House* and *Glimmer Train*) and a decent M.F.A. program (Portland State University). But it's harder to find the resources designed to support working writers, those embroiled in the messy struggle, the daily arduous and lonely task of producing literature.

That doesn't mean they're not here. But while other cities have literary resource centers that stage readings, lectures, instruction and general communion (such as Seattle's Richard Hugo House and San Francisco's 826 Valencia), Portland's many working writers seek this sort of moral sustenance at a kitchen table — not their own, but the varied kitchen tables belonging to the Dangerous Writers.

You may never have heard of Dangerous Writing (I laughed the first time I heard the name — isn't that like Menacing Needlepoint?), but believe me, you've heard of people who've heard of it. Notable alumni with notable books abound, including Laura Zigman (*Animal Husbandry*), Joanna Rose (*Little Miss Strange*) and Chuck Palahniuk (*Fight Club*, *Choke*, *Lullaby*).

The founder and central figure is Tom Spanbauer, author of the mystical Western epic *The Man Who Fell in Love With the Moon* and *In the City of Shy Hunters*. When Spanbauer moved to Portland in the early '90s, he advertised "writing classes with a published writer" and picked up a couple of students. Since those early, intimate classes held in his kitchen, Dangerous Writing has grown into an unlikely cottage industry — although it's a well-kept secret among writers, the brand is valuable enough that it's copyrighted.

The Dangerous Writing approach avoids the terrain most writing groups relish — that of voice and character, of whether a story is "working" for the group. Instead, the group examines pieces of writing on a sentence-by-sentence level, dissecting the language and analyzing its effect. But this close scrutiny doesn't disregard the greater content. The group tries to foster the writer's sense of purpose, encouraging major risk-taking (hence the "danger"). They aim to plumb human experience with visceral, unmediated language — avoiding linguistic crutches and writerly noise such as clichés, adverbs and Latinate diction (Dangerous Writers employs a relatively complex lexicon in service of these ideas — "unpacking," "received text" and "recording angel," for example). A simple landscape description in Spanbauer's *The Man Who Fell in Love With the Moon* exemplifies the sensibility:

The river was always a different color — blue or green or grey. In the spring the river was brown and dark. Sometimes it was black and sometimes so clear that when you put your face down you could see all the rocks in the bottom and the fish and your own face looking.

In its current incarnation, Dangerous Writing offers writing classes, weekend intensive workshops and private lessons, each manned by either Spanbauer himself or a disciple. The introductory workshops, held several times a year, attract the most students (over 1,000 in the last 11 years). Some students continue their work in weekly classes — current enrollment is 35. These 8- to 10-week sessions often retain the same students for many months, even years. The commitment may be daunting, but so is the group's publishing record.

Spanbauer and fellow Dangerous Writing teacher Joanna Rose sat down to tea with *The Organ* to explain the mystery and danger of their "underground, word-of-mouth thing."

**Why has your group been so successful?**

TS: One of the things is, we try to find out why each person is there. What is their sense of astonishment, what bewilders them, what have they never seen on a page that they need to say? What are they obsessed with? We make a safe place for them to talk about this. To ask themselves, "What is sore in me?" and see how important it is to go to that sore place to give the writing depth and gravitas. We have a lexicon of things we look at. We study language like we would poetry, rather than look at the arc of the story. We do that too, but we have a very poetic stance to it. We go to each sentence and we talk about what makes it work, what doesn't work.

JR: By looking at sentences so closely we can really talk about the language and not talk about the content. So people are free to write very personal, dark stuff because no one's going to say, "Well that's the weirdest story I ever heard." It makes people free to be more honest. To speak emotional truth.  
TS: It's not like we say, "Oh, this doesn't work for me." It really pisses me off when that happens. Make that teacher tell you where it doesn't work. Is it the adverbs, the third person? We also try and make things sound spoken rather than written.

**Is it true you make people write in first person?**

TS: Usually. The first assignment is usually a first-person assignment. I have a preference. But I'm being educated recently into a way that third can work. [Some of Joanna's students] have listened to my schtick and said, "Fuck you. I'm writing this in third person in a way that can bring a new insight." I've been kind of dogmatic, but it's nice to be an old

man and see a new way.

JR: Stevan [Allred] and I have one person in each class who is choosing to write in third [person]. If that's what people choose to do, then it's our responsibility to apply what we know about exploring language to what they want to do, as a matter of respect. It's a challenge for us, but also an education.

TS: Third person is for me like Flaubert. He tells you about how the village looks, the people, the society. Then you meet Madame Bovary, you drop into her head. Then you come back out, drop into the beautiful lieutenant. Then the good doctor. Since everything is outside, looking inside, then in order to go into it, to get inside, it's all explanation. It sets up a false dichotomy. Just the idea of omniscience to me is absurd. But first person, what I'm in love with, is that the world looks how it does because the person describing it is who she is. That's beautiful to me.

**That's funny. It makes sense hearing you talk about it, but it seems kind of antiworkshop, antimainstream writing education. When I started writing, I was so afraid of being sentimental, writing "women's stories," that I dealt with it by always sticking in third person, with very little feeling, very restrained. I thought that approach was authentic and writerly, that whatever was going on with me was somehow at odds with being literary. Especially in grad school — all the guy writers into the major "Guy Writers": Carver, Hemingway, etc.**

TS: I really see that sentimentality is the next frontier. Not to be sentimental, but to go to the place where there's all this feeling without going overboard to sentimentality. Not to be afraid of feelings — the typical thing with "guy writing" would be, whenever there's a confrontation, to go and describe the birds in the sky...

So much of what we do is dwell. We just stay there, in the place that's sore. We as writers and teachers do it. Our students know that so much of their job is to dwell in the unknowing of a deep place that has a lot of fear and anger and shit in it. Fiction is the lie that tells the truth truer. By learning the things in our lexicon, we can stay away from sentimentality and go to particular kinds of things that are very real.

JR: But the scary or dark place isn't always a bad place where something awful happens. It can be a denial of love. A place that is so beautiful, it's scary. Sentimentality is a big red flag that says, "Dwell in this place. Find out why it's so important to you." Whether it's a moment of great beauty or a moment of great pain, it still needs to be explored in honest language, unsentimental language.

TS: To speak clearly what's in your heart, that's the whole thrust of this. To investigate what's in the heart and then to learn how to speak it clearly so

that someone else can hear. There's a lot of people who don't want to hear, who find this uncomfortable. Most people really. Most of the writing programs, that's what you have, those kind of people. They don't have a clue. It becomes a dance really. A dance of "What is it that I can't say, how can I say it?" When I was at Columbia, I was still struggling to figure out who I was and what my voice was. I was trying on hats. "If I put this hat on will they listen to me? If I put that hat on will they listen to me?"

Gordon Lish was a great teacher, and I met another student there, Peter Christopher. Those two men had more effect on my writing than anyone. A lot of the way I, or we, look at the sentences, the basics, I learned from Lish.

**Given that this method is really specific and intense, how do you find a way to have people participate that's safe? Wouldn't it bum you out to have someone participate who wasn't really on board?**

TS: We can really tell right off.  
JR: It happens. The way the follow-up classes work is that everyone brings work and copies for everyone. And they read it, and we talk about it in these terms they learned in the workshop. If people are closed down, that very first step of sharing their pages, reading out loud in front of people really stops them. They just don't last. You really have to be willing to lay your neck on the chopping block. There are also people who only want to talk about themselves and their problems. But because we're looking at sentences and everyone's bringing in dangerous work, it doesn't happen very often. It becomes this compulsive thing, turning over sentences and looking at how this works. The focus on the page subverts that egotism or fear.

TS: There are also people who are so afraid that they're trembling; they break down weeping. But everyone just sits there and keeps the heart space open and they get through it.

JR: You never say, it's OK, don't cry. We just quietly wait until they're finished and someone shoves the kleenex toward that end of the table and they catch their breath. And then we go back to the pages. We have people who get to tears over a piece of fiction. It didn't even happen. It's so personally powerful and they understand what they're doing to the point of being overwhelmed by their own emotion. That's amazing when that happens.

We also encourage people to use an emotional truth and lend it to a fiction[al] situation. So around the table we don't say, "when you did this"; we say, "the narrator." We try not to commit what Stevan calls the autobiographical fallacy. Very seldom does the conversation happen: Did this really occur? It's not part of working with the language. That makes them feel safer, too. They're trying to get the emotion on the page through the language. They're allowed to do that without anyone saying, "What do you mean, you fucked your mother?" But your question, how do you make a safe space, part of the answer is, it's not safe. It's dangerous. You walk in the room, and you know there are going to be a lot of emotional truths laid out on the table. It's dangerous.

is meant to evoke new meanings — meanings not predetermined either by language or experience — then Brautigan's frequent attempts and failures are a stab at liberation in an already decided world. If metaphor depends on an eye for resemblances, then Brautigan's failures become fearful, a fear that nothing he knows resembles anything in the outside world, that everything is estranged and forever and obdurately strange. If metaphor is a transaction between words and things, then in Brautigan the deal is often torn up, the transaction called off.

Sometimes it seems as if his metaphors are trying to renew perception in a world that's overbearingly familiar. This is why his metaphors are so often either sly or ham-fisted, either timid or rudely "pounding at the gates of American literature." The place — as something physical, concrete — is resistant to new hopes. One of the terms in a typical Brautigan metaphor is always out of order; the human substance doesn't connect with the inhuman material. The closest I can come to understanding this is that somehow time is removed from the idea of place so that everything is eternally the same. The place doesn't change in either historical or seasonal time and gathers an oppressive weight because of it, always present, always an obstacle. The failed metaphors become a sign for this stern and inflexible relation. That people live in the region — unable to connect with it — is the real curiosity, the strange and baffling thing, and I think it's fair to say of Brautigan and his work that the place, this haunting Pacific Northwest, is like a father, and the broken little sentences are a spurned child afraid to speak up. Many of his characters never grow up; time is taken away from them, just as it is removed from the landscape. In "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," the woman is "so fragile and firmly indebted... that she often looked like a child twelve years old." Even the narrator is still seventeen, still slogging through the same wet streets, still living in the shack, unable to move forward in time — he can't figure it out. It's as if the land takes hold of the characters and won't let go. And if metaphor is partly meant to resist paraphrase and reduction, pitting itself against the death of language, then Brautigan's failures make sense. I would say they are the soul of his writing, its chief draw. Failure is where his writing lives.

His life and work had so little to do with the sixties — rarely do his sentences say that. The hippie California he moved to and became famous in was an outlandish trope for the future and a new society, but Brautigan was a solitary and his sentences were broken from the beginning and never found the sort of healing expansion Carver eventually arrived at. Carver's sentences discovered generosity and grew longer late in his career; Brautigan's didn't. One of the truths about suicide is that it's hardly ever about the future. It's the past the suicide can't face, and although political disgrace appears to be the exception, the one instance where suicide seems to be about the future, even in *Oedipus Rex*. Jocaasta can't face her past once it's come to light. Brautigan never really left the Pacific Northwest, and all his sentences ever needed for completion was a death.

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**Does that ever give you a feeling of dread?**

JR: Every time.  
TS: Every time as a teacher. It doesn't get easier.  
JR: You can tell. People come in quietly and we get started quietly. There's no rah-rah.

Stevan and I open our workshops with a piece of poetry. Sometimes people don't want to talk about the poem. And you have to let that silence be uncomfortable and in the middle of the table for a minute. Let that pain be part of the workshop. But still avoid it being therapy. It's a real dance. It's not therapy, it's language, it's art.

**Do you have students who stay forever, or do you send them off into the world?**

JR: A few people just stay. There are long-term and short-term [students]. There's no end point. People come and go.  
TS: They finish one book and leave and then decide, "I'm back."

**"I need a hit."**

TS: Yeah, that's really what it is, too. They come to the space and then it's like, "OK! I got it!"  
JR: There's also the dynamic of the table. There's other people working on stuff you're really interested in, or how they talk about other people's work. Sometimes you need to hear how a specific person talks about language; it feeds you.

**Sounds kind of egalitarian.**

TS: The teachers, as soon as they walk in the room, they redistribute the authority. I'm not the man, she's not the woman. I've done some things, I've got three books behind me, but you know, I'm sitting here looking at a sentence right now that's really fucking me up. I have no idea what to do. That's the way it's always gonna be. If you're a good artist, you're always going to be in a place where you don't know. It's where you should be.

What happens after a while is the class starts teaching itself. Someone will come in with something and you'll hear from another person, "That's emotional hiding. You're hiding by using this abstract language. What does that really mean, that she 'sobbed silently'?" There's a Zen saying that we've learned to describe a glass of water so well we don't need to drink it. Sobbing silently — it's an idea, not an image. We try to take the idea and, what we call, "put it on the body," taking it out of the abstract.

**Really, that's what sentimentality is, not the intense emotion, but that sort of abstract language about it. JR: It's overblown, you can't see it anymore. It loses its power, it's just an idea. Peter Christopher said sentimentality is giving something more than its due. More than God would give it. You just make it "this body did this and this body did this" and the reader can locate the pain in the middle. Dangerous writing places a demand on the reader. Which is another reason it's not the way a lot of people write. A lot of workshops are about writing marketable fiction. This isn't that kind. You look at the**

## ... and Long Walks on the Beach

NINE POETS TALK ABOUT WEST COAST WRITING

by Alicia Cohen

### What is West Coast (or Northwest) writing?

**DODIE BELLAMY:** West Coast writing is writing that exists outside the mainstream moneyed writing systems of the East Coast, and for that it's often marginalized. Within that marginalized state a tremendous freedom exists, so West Coast writing is often more radical or innovative than the mainstream, both in form and in content... It's not that no writer on the West Coast makes a lot of money, but dealing with the power centers of money and sophistication can be very conservative-making... I moved out here for what I perceived was freedom, and I found it... I love being an extension of San Francisco's rich literary history, particularly the mysticism and community-centered Spicer circle.

**RAE ARMANTROUT:** I can only say what West Coast writing has been for me. I came of age as a poet in San Francisco amidst the group of young writers who came to be known as "language poets." I think being in San Francisco helped us in two ways. San Francisco had a long-established tradition of small press publishing and gallery/bookstore/coffeehouse readings and it was far enough from the East Coast trade presses and Ivy League schools for us to be free of their influences. These circumstances helped us take ourselves seriously — too seriously some might say.

**MICHAEL DAVIDSON:** There is no stylistic, thematic or social specificity that I can see joining all Western writers, although I respect attempts by Robinson Jeffers, William Everson, Gary Snyder and others to find a more atavistic or archetypal source in the Western landscape. That landscape has been exploited in ways almost too painful to mention, but this fact might explain the profound concern for environmental politics, landscape preservation and sustainable resources among many writers here.

**JONATHAN SKINNER:** It seems to me West Coast and Northwest are two very different questions. West Coast embraces the whole magnificent tradition of "Pacific Rim" poetics which now ranges from the "Taco Stand" poets of San Diego/Tijuana, not to mention the gravitational force of the San Francisco State University Archive for New Poetry, up through the genteel if expansively minded Messerli L.A. "salon" (Tim Davis once said, "I got no time for those West Coast poets; they take up too much space"), Santa Cruz and Stanford and Mills College where poets teach and are taught, and of course the Bay Area scene — which I don't know enough about to parse, though I'd venture that certainly it's affected by the Renaissance legacy, and where Kevin Killian and Dodie Bellamy are, I'd imagine, like the King and Queen of poetics. Certainly Kevin's unabashed, and very intellectual, sensuality and Dodie's luscious urbanescapes (where you can practically taste the salt on the wind) flesh out for me the sense of "West Coast writing" as extensible in focus. My first association for Northwest Coast writing has got to be the obvious case of Gary Snyder (and that tradition of poets of the peaks and ridges). Which is to say how little I know. The interestingly implicated Vancouver scene — where landscape and urbus, politics and prosody,

are wrought together with great sophistication, and where the plastic and word arts seem to enjoy a real degree of collaboration — largely defines my sense of current Northwest writing. Peter Culley's work, for instance, excites me a great deal.

**JULIANA SPAHR:** Here in Hawaii the terms "East" and "West" are often complained about. Hawaii is only "West" if you are in the United States. Or if you see it as part of the United States. And some say "East-West" leaves out the center, the Pacific basin. I couldn't begin to answer what is West Coast writing, except to say that it is many and endless things.

**KEVIN KILLIAN:** In the 1960s in San Francisco the poets Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser adopted the idea of the "Pacific Nation" (Blaser edited a magazine with that title), based on the perception that because the coastline and the cities are all the same all the way up the border, we should dissolve our differences into a common free-for-all. The transcendentalism of the idea, loony as it may be, continues to appeal to me as a way of beginning to talk about "West Coast writing."

**JOSEPH BRADSHAW:** Northwest writing is writing written in Washington, Idaho or the Mississippi of the West. Or the Mississippi of the South.

**JEANNE HEUVING:** I have never thought of myself as a Northwest writer, although I do think of myself as West Coast. That is because... the kind of images that inhere around Northwest writing — namely of remote and austere beauty — does not motivate my writing... Part of living in Seattle now is finding out what kind of place it is in conjunction with other artists and writers who are asking the same question... Increased interest in local phenomena makes this question not one of establishing a local identity but of exploring the coordinates or space of one's existence. I think it is an important question that needs to be answered in expansive ways about Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. As for what is West Coast or Northwest writing, I would hazard an initial articulation that it is more iconoclastic than East Coast writing, but this is meant as a guess, a perturbation for further discussion, rather than an iron-clad statement.

**JEFF SARGENT:** It is my belief that geographic isolation creates (greatly influences?) culture, i.e. perhaps people drink so much coffee here because of the long, moderately cool rainy season? A century ago (not that long ago) to move to the (North)West one would call you a pioneer (he steps to a different drummer, Kerouac at the fire lookout carrying a bucket of snow). Today the frontier is still here in regards to the (North)West being the nation's hotbed for computer technologies. To address that "geographic division" as "place" and the pioneering spirit involved, that is (North)West writing.

### Who is a Northwest writer you care about?

**DODIE BELLAMY:** I adore Vancouver's Lissa Wolsak, who marries experimental poetry with spiritual urgency and emotional depth. I'm tired of the bloodless mental masturbation of so much

The Organ asked poets from the West Coast to tell us what, if anything, might be distinctive about writing from this edge of the world...

**RAE ARMANTROUT** (San Diego) has published eight books of poetry including *Necromance* (Sun and Moon), *Made To Seem* (Sun and Moon), *The Pretext* (Green Integer) and *Veil: New and Selected Poems* (Wesleyan). Her papers are held by Stanford University Archives. She teaches writing at the University of California, San Diego.

**DODIE BELLAMY** (San Francisco) is the author of *Feminine Hijinx* (Hanuman), *Real: The Letters of Mina Harker and Sam D'Allesandro* (Talisman House), *The Letters of Mina Harker* (Hard Press) and *Cunt Ups* (Tender Buttons). She teaches creative writing at Antioch University Los Angeles and San Francisco State University.

**JOSEPH BRADSHAW** (Portland) is co-editor of *FO\_A\_RM* magazine as well as a latent cellist.

**MICHAEL DAVIDSON** (San Diego) is the author of *The Prose of Fact* (The Figures), *The Landing of Rochambeau* (Burning Deck), *The San Francisco Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press), *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (University of California Press), and *The Arcades* (O Books). He teaches at the University of California, San Diego.

**JEANNE HEUVING** (Seattle) is the author of *Offering* (BCC Press) and has published in *Common Knowledge*, *Talisman* and *Clear Cut*. Her critical work on modernist and contemporary innovative women writers includes the book *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender in the*

*Art of Marianne Moore* and the recently published article, "A Dialogue About Love [...] in the Western World" / Tracking Leslie Scalapino." She teaches at the University of Washington and is a member of the Subtext Collective.

**KEVIN KILLIAN** (San Francisco) is a novelist, poet, art writer, biographer and critic. He has written 30 plays for the San Francisco Poets Theater. He is the author of *Shy, Bedrooms Have Windows, Little Men, Arctic Summer, Argento Series* and *I Cry Like a Baby*. He and Dodie Bellamy have co-edited 107 issues of the literary/art zine *Mirage #4/Period[ical]*.

**JEFF SARGENT** (Portland) is originally from Akron, Ohio. He has been published in a variety of mediums ranging from *Poetica* online to plywood. He is currently working on a book about the Ochoco Mountains of Central Oregon.

**JONATHAN SKINNER** (New Mexico) edits *ecopoetics* in Buffalo, N.Y., and is currently completing his dissertation on ecology and poetry for the English Department at SUNY-Buffalo. His chapbooks include *Political Cactus Poems* (Periplum Editions) and *Little Dictionary of Sounds* (RedDLines).

**JULIANA SPAHR** (Hawaii) currently lives in Honolulu. Her books include *Fuck You-Aloha-I Love You* (Wesleyan), *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (University of Alabama) and *Response* (Sun and Moon). She co-edits the journal *Chain* with Jena Osman.

experimental poetry. I'm awed by the way Lissa's work responds to and quotes from her wide readings of poetry and philosophy, but it's always there to further human connections, to approach some sort of ever-elusive core meaning.

**RAE ARMANTROUT:** I very much admire Lisa Robertson of Vancouver. Her latest book, *The Weather*, makes its own weather.

**MICHAEL DAVIDSON:** A Northwest writer whom I much admire now is Sherman Alexie. Not only does he live in and write about the Northwest — particularly the axis from Seattle to northern Idaho — he interprets the historic tensions between Native peoples and white settlers better than any recent Western writer I can think of. He places those tensions in a postmodern, technological, urban context, while listening to the steady, if fading, drums of an earlier, vital West.

**JULIANA SPAHR:** Rebecca Brown. She thinks she is a fiction writer but she really is a poet. Very weird little short stories of obsession. Rebecca is also amazingly attentive to community, a great listener of other people's work. Cynthia Kimball. I care about her because we had great discussions in Buffalo and then she moved back to the Northwest.

**KEVIN KILLIAN:** Lawrence Ytzhak Braithwaite of Victoria, B.C., a genius on the order of James Joyce

egg extracted from Moll; he then inserted this preembryonic web of tissue back into her uterus. He had also taken breast milk, cultured to perfection inside a rhesus monkey, and developed this in Moll's chest to be ready for the emerging child.

I felt fierce and betrayed. Moll did not have the presence of mind for this decision. I pointed out that if he had looked hard at her medical history, he could've seen that she's just recovered from mental instability, from an addiction problem.

He replied that Moll seemed competent to him — and that only a relative could make any decisions by proxy.

It later occurred to me, on the drive home, to interpret his gestures in a new way. The way he stroked his cheek and smiled with his eyes curbed to one side, how he drawled Moll's name with paternal confidence — it was possible he had

we needed to talk, but I didn't stop driving. We parked at a motel on the outskirts of another city. Inside, the motel's rectangular box heater was on and blowing air through the iron slats on its top. Moll put her legs against the heater and let the hot air blast up her skirt, her hair's stray tangles whipping against her face. I wanted to drop to my knees and place my hands on her thighs, but at any instant she became too fragile. She then lay down on the bed, and her body froze like a fossil.

Moll explained to me as I cried beside her that it was a very sterile thing. You can't get more impersonal than having someone stick a needle into you, she claimed.

I knew better. That kind of relationship is all in code, and code becomes intimate when no outsider can dissolve its mutual contract. She hadn't meant to hurt me. Only the doctor's offer was too compelling. Moll liked things boiled to essentials, two-dimensional maps she could trace with her finger. She wanted to believe in a single, nourishing solution to the world's problems, one that is white and creamy.

I watched the slats of light from the cars' headlights passing by the window, crawling over her. They were like the pulse of a horizon that won't stay still. I wondered then, how far into critical history will my beautiful Moll travel?

That evening we took a stroll, and a balloonist passing over us dropped down and asked to give me and Moll a ride. We accepted. Up in the sky, I pretended we were all moths hitching rides in the wind to pollinate our anger over the world. The balloonist held onto the string that thread up through the balloon and into the gas chamber, his arm red and sinewy. His eyes must have seen much farther than ours, and the balloon was like a portent of Moll's distended stomach, growing large with the doctor's deceit.

The next day, Moll began to lactate. Her stomach was no bigger, but I put my lips on her and tasted the milk coming out. I would drain her of this poison before the baby ever began to emerge. I would see if my bones grew larger and my cerebral cortex sprouted new, complex grooves. We could never return. Moll and I would see what it's like to be a truly symbiotic feeding machine. Maybe she would flow indefinitely, with an Edenic surplus.

I was enlisting her because she was enfeebled and gorgeous and I wanted to hook tubes from her to me. I wanted us to function as one body. Torn in half like a clam, then set together again.

Morgan Currie writes and makes films in Portland.

## FICTION

### Lactate Machine

by Morgan Currie

I went to the hospital for a hysterectomy and was there a whole day and night before I noticed Moll walking down the hallway with her hair falling over her slumped, slender shoulders. I invited Moll into my hospital room, and we were able to make each other smile, in shy exchanges, and hold each other's hands. Moll was so still and uncommunicative that she reminded me of a mollusk. I could throw a net of ideas around her and daydream. On her mouth I could place any word. I asked her to come home with me, and in the car she watched the racing sky balloons float overhead. If Moll stuck her head out the window, tiny hands waved back.

When I met her she was unemployed, but she soon made a small salary by participating in a clinical protocol studying the amounts of toxins in women's breast milk. She took a series of tests that checked her body for organochlorines, or toxins from city air that invade the blood like microscopic missiles.

One night when Moll was undressing I noticed that her breasts had faint pricks in a small area, as if a spider had left footprints there. I asked what had caused this, and she explained to me proudly that soon she will generate milk for a new trial formula, milk that will glow like a halo and endow the world with disease resistance.

I was concerned — at the beginning she had told me there would only be tests and giving blood. So I asked her, Why haven't you told me this, Moll? How do they make you lactate?

I had to endure Moll's methods of silence. A slab of light from the window fell on her forehead as she asked me to visit Dr. Dispenseri, who oversaw the protocol, myself and put to him whatever questions I had.

Moll pulled the sheets up, readying herself for bed. But I felt stricken. I went the next day to see Dr. Dispenseri and to ask him, What was the point of using my girlfriend as a lactating machine? As a breast machine, a milk valve, a baby-formula mechanism?

He wanted a baby formula that would simulate human milk but would be purified of any chemical bioaccumulation. The treatment would pump a child so full of macrophages that the child's growth would accelerate at fifty percent, making it adult-sized by age seven. He wanted super-babies. To anybody's face he claimed the formula would

improve worldwide nutrition. Behind all cocky subterfuge, he desired to patent my girlfriend, my only love.

He was a handsome man-boy, his eyes and mouth bunched around a small nose. I asked him to explain his protocol to me, as far as Moll was concerned.

His eyes narrowed on my own as he spoke. According to him, there are 350 man-made contaminants that have been found in the breast milk of mothers. All his clinic desired to do is preserve the good stuff, like the amino acids and antibodies and

fatty acids, and then add more nutrients to keep infants from any susceptibility to diseases. This is the aim of his work, he emphasized — to guarantee a healthier future for this planet.

He went on to explain that under a microscope he had used a glass needle to push sperm into an



ILLUSTRATION BY SCAMPER FRANKLIN

used his own sperm. It turned my tongue sour and rattled my temples. He was as entranced with her as I was — and who wouldn't be? Her body burned light patterns in my mind that I couldn't erase if I tried.

I told her that evening to get in the car, that

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# It's That Time Again

GET BRIEFED ON 30.7% OF THE 2003 OREGON BIENNIAL ARTISTS

by Sophie Ragsdale

A local teacher left me with a final piece of advice before I left for college on the East Coast: "Get yourself an axe and chop down a tree." This advice was not to be taken literally; rather, it was a reminder that, as an Oregonian venturing beyond Oregon's borders, I might be viewed as a descendant of a line of lumberjacks. The anecdote illustrates the still common belief that, despite modern technologies, Oregonians remain isolated in their own historic time and place. But judged by the 26 artists selected for this year's Oregon Biennial, which opened June 28 and will be on view through September 7, that view is clearly mistaken.

The Oregon Biennial was launched by the

Portland Art Museum in 1911 and attempts to showcase the best that Oregon artists have to offer while giving a glimpse into the preoccupations of the museum's curatorial leadership and what it sees as the most noteworthy artistic currents of the time. For younger artists it brings a sort of instant legitimacy, while for established artists, such as 52-year-old painter G. Lewis Clevenger, it's a testament to sustained artistic achievement (this is his third biennial appearance). Of course, it all depends on who you ask. Controversy — concerning who got picked, how the show hangs together and whether or not the by-application-only selection process is outdated — is one of the biennial's main ingredi-

ents and biggest pleasures, like fireworks on the Fourth of July.

This year's biennial marks the second for PAM's chief curator and curator of modern contemporary art, Bruce Guenther, who came to Portland in 2000 after high-ranking curatorial stints at the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach, Calif., Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Seattle Art Museum. His 2001 biennial had adherents and detractors, the latter criticizing it as a higgledy-piggledy selection that belied an over-reliance on slides and maybe a lack of interest. How and whether his score card will change this time remains to be seen.

What's known for sure is that Guenther reviewed 3,600 slides from over 900 artists, an increase from two years ago. His final selection included 13 male and 13 female artists, most of whom are painters, though six are photographers (an unusually large showing) and three are sculptors. Notably, visitors will find no film, video, sound or multidisciplinary

work, nor any representation of artist collaboratives, fields of practice that have a strong presence on the Portland scene and elsewhere, including last year's Whitney Biennial. But unlike Whitney curator Larry Rinder's anthropological, trend-spotting approach, Guenther makes the more purist claim of simply rewarding outstanding conceptual rigor in whatever form it takes — in his words, choosing works that "are conceptualized within the larger construct of art history and what constitutes, for example, a painting."

To his mind, that awareness is evident in artists as divergent as 24-year-old Taravat Talepasand, who uses the languages of fine art and pop culture to paint social phenomena at the intersection of fashion and gender politics; and 52-year-old James Lavadour, a titan of paint who uses the Eastern Oregon landscape as a stage for its performance.

These painters, sculptors and photographers are no mere craftsmen tinkering in their log cabins, but artists who are at once regional and contemporary,

thinkers and feelers at a certain moment in human history. According to Guenther, "We live in an age of global connectedness. We can access history laterally and dimensionally — from every which way. We can go down into prehistory and across to current Japan. We stand at the nexus point and become our own filters." Of course, the final filter is you, taking in their work this summer from within the cool brick walls of the Portland Art Museum.

**Editor's note:** Due to space and time constraints, *The Organ* could not interview all 26 biennial artists. The other artists are David Andersen, Carla Bengtson, Chas Bowie, Liz Cheney, Julia Grieve, Erinn Kennedy, Richard Martinez, Erik Palmer, Scott Patt, Angela Haseltine Pozzi, Craig Pozzi, Jan Reaves, Michelle Ross, Amy Ruppel, Mike Shea, Scott Sonniksen, Adam Sorensen, Nathan Sutton and Annika Wojick.

Sophie Ragsdale writes for *The Organ* and lives in Portland. Leah Bobal assisted with research on this feature.



ANN KENDELLEN, TELEPHONE BOOK

## Ann Kendall

**AGE:** 49  
**BIRTHPLACE:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
**EDUCATION:** B.A. University of Colorado, 1977  
**NUMBER OF YEARS IN OREGON:** 17  
**GALLERY:** Blue Sky

**DESCRIPTION OF ART:** Black-and-white photographs of desolate urban spaces.

**EMOTIONAL KEYWORDS:** "Only the shadow knows."  
**QUOTE FROM ARTIST'S STATEMENT:** "I walk out the door with no agenda. It's about what I find, and being open to finding it. These images represent my wanderings through Portland — my discoveries of a momentary relationship of light, surface, and life."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "Memories. Anticipation."

**WORDS TO LIVE BY, OR WORDS YOU LIKE:** "Keep looking — what's out there is always changing."

**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "Community is a theme. I'm working with a number of artists on the Portland Grid Project [in which a group of photographers divided the city into a grid and have photographed it square by square for nearly eight years].

As a result of our collaboration, the project is a kind of conversation between local artists. While Portland is the immediate subject, we each bring to the project our own histories and biases, drawing, at times, from other places and ideas."

**INSPIRATIONS:** "Wandering around, seeing and observing, is artistically stimulating."



CYNTHIA M. STAR, GABBY

**AGE:** 33  
**BIRTHPLACE:** East Lansing, Michigan  
**EDUCATION:** B.F.A. Maryhurst University, 1995  
**NUMBER OF YEARS IN OREGON:** 12  
**GALLERY:** Not represented

**DESCRIPTION OF ART:** Domestic animal subjects are painted with electric colors — pinks, blues and greens — to capture the essence of naïve sensitivity.

**EMOTIONAL KEYWORDS:** Bad dog!

**QUOTE FROM ARTIST'S STATEMENT:** "These three paintings are from a series of seven in which 'Gabby' plays the audience to Peewee and Tyco's antics (the boys in 'Boys Will Be Boys'). Gabby, with a string draped over her head and a desire to please and pose, puts her in a somewhat compromised situation. Her bewilderment at her lost sense of dignity, while the boys happily abandon theirs, makes her the square to their triangle — the wallflower at their party. Boys will be boys."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "Hamsters."

**WORDS TO LIVE BY, OR WORDS YOU LIKE:** "Keep on keeping on."

**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "I started painting in my early 20s because of writer's block. As a result, I began to tell stories through painting. Each painted shape or color adds to the story, which is an obsession that gets pretty ridiculous. It takes me forever to finish a painting because I ask myself, 'Does this red splotch feel right?'"



JAMES BOULTON, SPARK GAP TRANSMISSION

## James Boulton

**AGE:** 27  
**BIRTHPLACE:** Gallup, New Mexico  
**EDUCATION:** B.F.A. University of New Mexico, 1999  
**NUMBER OF YEARS IN OREGON:** 3  
**GALLERY:** Pulliam-Deffenbaugh

**DESCRIPTION OF ART:** Energetic abstracts painted in high keys.

**EMOTIONAL KEYWORDS:** Rudacious (coined by *The Oregonian's* D.K. Row).

**QUOTE FROM ARTIST'S STATEMENT:** "My work is intended to evoke an appreciation of excess, fecundity, breadth and kitsch. It's intentionally kind of silly and uncomposed."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "Everything. When no one is looking I'm constantly grinning from ear to ear."

**WORDS TO LIVE BY, OR WORDS YOU LIKE:** "Don't ask us to pretend / 'cos we're not all there. Oh don't pretend / 'cos I don't care. I don't believe illusions / 'cos too much is real. So stop your cheap comment / 'cos we know what we feel." — Sex Pistols, "Pretty Vacant."

**ON SHOWING IN THE BIENNIAL:** "[It's] tricky because the work on display represents only one moment of your development. One hopes people will accept your work as it continues to grow and change."

**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "In my paintings, there is a tension between controlled formal elements and a desire for chance processes to inform content. This tension invests the work with an evocative dynamism and is precarious because the two methods threaten to negate each other."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "A good song on the radio, cute kids, sexy people, a really fantastic painting — lots of things."

**WORDS TO LIVE BY, OR WORDS YOU LIKE:** "Life is what you make of it."

**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "I don't have any themes that 'haunt' my work, but I do have themes in my work. One issue that I run up against is the degree to which I want my pieces to be representative of the human body. I want them to be more open-ended and ambiguous, not so easily identified as representing a specific body part, or for that matter anything specific at all."

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## James Lavadour

**AGE:** 52  
**BIRTHPLACE:** Pendleton, Oregon  
**EDUCATION:** Honorary doctorate degree in humane letters from Eastern Oregon University  
**NUMBER OF YEARS IN OREGON:** 52  
**GALLERY:** PDX

**DESCRIPTION OF ART:** Abstract paintings inspired by Eastern Oregon landscapes.

**EMOTIONAL KEYWORDS:** Paint happens.

**QUOTE FROM ARTIST'S STATEMENT:** "For me, paintings do not really mean anything. They are extraordinary events of nature."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "My dog's unbridled enthusiasm in doing the same thing every day — of taking the same walk up the stream and toward the cottonwood trees."

**WORDS TO LIVE BY, OR WORDS YOU LIKE:** "Space is the place." — Sun Ra

**ON SHOWING IN THE BIENNIAL:** "The emergent problem is that there are more artists than opportunities to talk about or display art. The scarcity of art venues and forums makes the biennial all the more competitive and controversial, which is good. It's good to be challenged, to talk and to think."

**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "First and foremost, I like what paint does, and landscapes provide a way for me to organize events of paint on a canvas. Recently, I've been thinking about the initial flow of paint. What happens when you take a wet brush to canvas and then pick it up in order for the paint to drip, swirl and dry? It is an organic phenomenon that happens right there on the canvas. It is an event."

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**HAUNTING THEMES, OBSESSIVE FORMAL PROBLEMS:** "First and foremost, I like what paint does, and landscapes provide a way for me to organize events of paint on a canvas. Recently, I've been thinking about the initial flow of paint. What happens when you take a wet brush to canvas and then pick it up in order for the paint to drip, swirl and dry? It is an organic phenomenon that happens right there on the canvas. It is an event."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "My dog's unbridled enthusiasm in doing the same thing every day — of taking the same walk up the stream and toward the cottonwood trees."

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**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "My dog's unbridled enthusiasm in doing the same thing every day — of taking the same walk up the stream and toward the cottonwood trees."

"I think about my paintings in relation to pop culture, flower beds and contemporary art around the world as well as art in Oregon."

— James Boulton

"It's like traveling — I get into the paint and start painting away. Time passes, and all of a sudden I step back, as if out of a recently stopped car, to look at where I've been. I never know when I start where I will go, or what the painting will look like. I have an idea, colors and shapes, but that's it. Then the colors change, shapes shift and sooner or later they arrive at their destined place."

— G. Lewis Clevenger

"Right now I am obsessed with the rumor of a 30-foot earthworm that supposedly lives in Oregon. Ever since I heard of this rumored worm, I've had the impulse to draw it on multiple blank walls, preferably downtown."

— Cynthia M. Star

"It is currently difficult to distinguish between media and government, government and media, etc. Art allows us to see through the cracks of such grand illusions. It is a tool for punching a hole in political paradigms and other structures of standardization."

— James Lavadour

resolved, and the forms and color begin to settle into their destined positions."

**WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING?** "I love poetry — when I read a well-written, well-constructed poem, it gives me a nice feeling; it makes me smile."



Dear Stu-Art,

There is a plethora of books regarding advice for artists on "How to Get Hung," etc. As an [art] dealer of 10 years who started as a junior high school social studies teacher and haunted bookstores for years looking for any advice on selling interesting contemporary art or effective gallery design, I've seen almost nothing in print about real and practical advice for dealers.

This is due undoubtedly to the fact that the

book market for this type of information is exceedingly tiny, and the little-discussed fact that many successful dealers "started on third base." (Dad owned the block, Mom inherited a bunch of third-rate but valuable Kandinskys, Uncle Frank left a bundle, blah blah blah.)

As a dealer who started on first base with a bunt (cake?) and one talented artist (my wife), I'm curious about your "Top Ten Mistakes" as a dealer and your "Top Ten Tips for Staying Solvent" in an avaricious art world.

Expectantly,  
Mark Woolley  
Mark Woolley Gallery

Dear Mark,

You are right, there is little in print, except *The Art Dealers* by Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones. It was written in the '80s and has interviews with dealers including Leo Castelli, Holly Solomon, Mary Boone and Ronald Feldman. While it is lively reading, it

does not help much with questions like, "How do you project confidence when you're worried about the phone bill?" or "What is a reasonable discount to give a museum or a top collector?" and "How do you calm down an artist after a horrible review?" Instead, they offer stories of family legacies, conversions from collector to dealer and epiphanies with art objects. Trusting your instincts and enjoying the process are key issues.

It's true, when you start on third base it certainly is a lot easier to reach home plate. Like you, I did not open my gallery with deep pockets, and after a few months my partner and I were out of money. I sold my own art collection (including Warhol soup can prints, Tapiés etchings and a wicked Henry Darger drawing that I would kill to have back). We stayed open on sheer optimism, frugal spending, the occasional big sale of gallery artists (between \$10-50k), some secondary market deals and consistent small commissions. After four years we closed.

I truly don't think we made 10 mistakes. We picked artists we believed in and talked about them constantly. We asked questions and examined every aspect of the galleries we admired (their

track lighting, announcements, press releases, gallery layout, red dot protocol), and we stole their ideas when applicable. We organized shows that critics loved and wrote about in *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*. We had a lot of fun.

Our big problems were:

1. Not enough capital to guarantee a few years' worth of breathing room during which to build the collector base.
2. Not being on a well-trafficked street with other galleries.
3. Not representing enough young artists who offer that "get-in-at-the-beginning" excitement.

Some tips for staying solvent would include:

1. Marry for money, often.
2. Keep strange hours.
3. Speak German.
4. Hire sexy help.

You live and learn.  
Keep up the good work, Mark.  
Stuart



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## REVIEWS

### eRacism William Pope.L Portland Institute for Contemporary Art May 7-July 26, 2003

Dress like a cowboy and hold a whip, plunge a cross in urine, plaster your breasts with chocolate or see Jesus between your mother's legs. In the 1980s, it was easy to get a senator to rescind your funding.

In today's political climate, with an M.B.A. in the White House promoting a new bottom line of citizen-as-customer satisfaction, is anyone offended?

Some argue that the culture wars have exhausted their partisan battles. The well-known NEA 4 (Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller and John Fleck) 1998 Supreme Court case that confronted the language of Section 954(d)(1) of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 was the last significant challenge to the National Endowment of the Arts. That year, the NEA reinstated those four artists' funding, previously revoked, but the courts waved aside the question of whether the government should dismiss projects on the basis of content. Years later, the once-contested criteria for NEA grant review are still on the books, in the same vague language seemingly lifted from a Cub Scout Arrow of Light ceremony: "artistic excellence and artistic merit" and "standards of decency and respect."

But last year, then NEA chairman Robert S. Martin's rejection of an expected \$42,000 grant for William Pope.L's *eRacism* retrospective prompted suspicion of a reactionary doubling-back to an earlier era of scapegoating identity-based art, just as Operation Iraqi Freedom reenacted the CNN explosions of Operation Desert Storm.

The rejection leaves William Pope.L on the defensive. Pope.L is a public artist who challenges ideologies of race, of the slave and the master, of the good, the bad and the ugly—through video-documented performances, text-based drawings and mixed-media installations. So how does he respond to the legal standards of his overlords? To answer that question, it may serve to return to Antonin Scalia's formidably snide concurring opinion on the NEA 4 case. Despite George W.'s repeated forgetting of Scalia's first name (Anthony? Antonio?), the President says he is committed to nominating more "good, conservative judges" like Antonin, possibly as soon as later this year. Beware. It is hard to imagine a more spurious legal argument for the elimination of politically charged public art than Scalia's extra-judicial rant, a classic of conservative fiscal jurisprudence. Agreeing with the decision of the court, Scalia asserted that the First Amendment "has no application to funding." "Avant-garde artistes . . . remain entirely free to épater les bourgeois; they are merely deprived of the additional satisfaction of having the bourgeoisie taxed to pay for it," he said.

NEA prodigal son William Pope.L's best work represents the confrontation of the African-American male body with Law, as voiced above by Justice Scalia. So, does Pope.L succeed in shocking the mostly white bourgeoisie out of its Supreme Court-sanctioned ignorance? On the simplest level, he does. With rotting food. Hold your noses, advertising representatives and restaurant owners of the Pearl District: the most memorable presentational element at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art is the rank pantry smell of tainted mayonnaise, meat and peanut butter. It is a rankness more nauseating with each day of summer's approach—comparable to the sudden smell of burning flesh wafting through the magnolias, or a Beaverton sixth-grader puking up her McDonald's Happy Meal at the Oregon Zoo. This is rotten food as the wasted, festering corpse of a racist and consumptive society. Materially reminiscent of the exacting cooking demonstrations of Paul McCarthy, each food-construction in the *eRacism* retrospective, including a decomposing U.S. hot dog map-in-reverse and racks of putrid Hellman's, arrives like a noxious special delivery from Mr. Rogers' mailman, Mr. McFeeley: it may smell bad, but Mr. McFeeley is too nice to turn away.

The meatiest works in *eRacism* are not the installations, but the performance videos, however hackneyed some of their metaphors. A professor of theater and rhetoric, Pope.L's art of the disfavored black subject-as-object yields performance as a pedagogical hammer, explicitly acknowledging the African-American canon.

The highlights of the videos are the "crawls," in which Pope.L drags his body from one arbitrary point to another alongside urban traffic flows, most famously from the Statue of Liberty, through Manhattan, to the Bronx, in "The Great White Way." These performances are humorous mediations of some foundational texts on race—critical intervention encouraged. A singular moment in "Crawl Tompkins" (aka "How Much Is That Nigger in the Window") even dares to raise the specter of the great novelist and essayist Ralph Ellison. Pope.L, in white-collared drag, slides through the Lower East Side in July on his elbows and knees, holding up a flowerpot. A bystander, an exasperated black writer, accosts the artist for "showing black people

like this," then compares the crawl to *Invisible Man*. Compliment or insult, it's hard to tell. Nevertheless, looking up from the Seventh Street asphalt, the self-proclaimed "friendliest black artist in America" nods in encouragement at the heckler, offering to converse with him later.

Pope.L's crawls are gimped-out, mock-heroic updates of escapes to "free territory": both those represented in media, like Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweetback* running from the cops to the music of Earth, Wind & Fire, and those contained within historical narratives, like Dred Scott's attempted severance from his dead master. Other performances go beyond the crawls in mimicking the imagery of oppression. The talcum powder a loin-clothed Pope.L douses on himself by a swampy Southern river is, simply, Franz Fanon's colonial white-masking of black skin. Two slaves creep slowly through a field of cotton, labor-time abstracted, in one cryptographic video borrowed from D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*.

Plundering a film once targeted by W.E.B. duBois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for its "loathsome misrepresentations of colored people" and celebrated by President Woodrow Wilson as "history writ with lightning," is nothing new in African-American narrative semiotics. But the casual



indifference of Pope.L's jokey historical pastiche satisfies those hungry for unresolved endings and antagonizes neo-cons searching in vain for fresh identity politics and minority image awards in the Aunt Jemima cookie jar. Progress, that old-time religion, is an unforgiving tape loop. — *Bryan O'Keefe*

Bryan O'Keefe is a writer based in Portland.

### THE CLEAR CUT FUTURE Clear Cut Press, 2003 \$13.95, paperback

With the release in August of *The Clear Cut Future*, Clear Cut Press commences their 2003/2004 series of books. The eight works in the series will reflect the press's mission of publishing books that envision a creative civic consciousness concerned with the future of the city and its inhabitants.

Anchored by the superb work of Vancouver, B.C.'s the Office for Soft Architecture and featuring compositions from over two dozen authors, *The Clear Cut Future* defines itself as a kind of a tangible performance of study. The reader engages in the varied collection of essays, poems and prose as they conceptualize the space of the private in the public, finding it at once wanting and full of promise.

The works ask engaging questions. How do buildings drift in and out of utility? What does this mean for those living in this posed, genuine, sponsored moment? Hopeful answers are found throughout: in a hotel room with no lock, in the shape of a golf club, in the epic of building a deck. Urban dissolution and renewal are seen to be each as perishable as wood, each as similarly full of life.

The subjects examined are wide-ranging: the play of personality and capitalism at Enron, the mythology of a chair, canning salmon. Together, the pieces describe a distinct vision, a highway future, the plywood in the pine and the pine in the plywood. This vision recasts the abundant first-person narratives, highlighting what the city may be saying about itself through the work of its populace. Thus, the boundaries between the personal narrative, the epic poem and the research document are softened, sometimes dissolved, allowing a freer exchange of ideas between creative literature and the civic.

Finely crafted lines are frequent. In Sam Lohmann's poem "Versions" we find "dead tomorrow's / delicate bird-body, / silent and unsteady." In Jordana Rosenberg's "That's Verboten, Kitten." "She was a tent of skin," and "dense, charmless smells radiated from her upward progress." In the Office for Soft Architecture's "Doubt and the History of

Scaffolding": "The scaffold is a pause, an inflection of passage. It accommodates us in shivering." While there are a few weak moments, the weaknesses typically result from the failure to sustain and build on strong achievements. For example, in Grant Cogswell's poem "Pacific Bell," the dream city of "Sealth" is posited. Achingly utopian, Sealth is a city built in harmony with the nature it inhabits. Yet, once brought forth, the image is never mentioned again and the remainder of the poem feels empty in the silence. Despite such minor defects, *The Clear Cut Future* is a challenging, gratifying read that should whet appetites for Clear Cut's future offerings.

A partial list of the forthcoming books from this season includes Howard W. Robertson's *Ode to Certain Interstates and Other Poems*, the Office for Soft Architecture's *Site Reports and Manifestoes*, Robert Glick's short-story collection *Denny Smith*, a volume of new and collected essays by Charles D'Ambrosio and Stacey Levine's novel *Frances Johnson*.

A one-year subscription to Clear Cut Press, eight full-length books, is \$65; subscription details can be found at [www.clearcutpress.com](http://www.clearcutpress.com). *The Clear Cut Future* will be released to subscribers and available through Clear Cut's Web site on August 20. It will be in bookstores by Labor Day. — *Michael Knapp*

Michael Knapp is a writer and musician working in Portland.

### WHAT FAROCKI TAUGHT A Film by Jill Godmilow Four Wall Cinema Collective April 18-19, 2003

In our culture of rabid jingoism, Jill Godmilow's *What Farocki Taught* is a fresh appeal to critical thought. Like many cinematic visionaries, however, she has a regrettably small audience in the United States—no more than 15 people turned out on April 18 and 19 for Four Wall Cinema's Portland premiere of *What Farocki Taught*, Godmilow's frame-by-frame replica of German filmmaker Harun Farocki's 1969 agitprop documentary *Inextinguishable Fire*. Godmilow was present at the screening to discuss her work, which eschews the prevailing dogmas of the documentary genre: the filmmaker as witness, the authority of first-person testimony, the "pornography" of the spectacle, and cinematic nationalism. Her ideal audience is one comprised of individuals reflecting critically on their own labor practices—this is, in short, what Farocki taught.

*Inextinguishable Fire* was never released in the U.S. Godmilow's guiding motivation for making this film was, by her own account, to spread Farocki's gospel of liberation and critical style to an American audience, conceived as a "gesture of distribution and pedagogy, as a provocation and a teaching tool." Godmilow saw *Inextinguishable Fire* in 1991 at a retrospective of Farocki's work in Rotterdam. The film depicts the development of napalm by Dow Chemical Corporation during the Vietnam War. But there are no interviews with Dow employees, no indictments of Dow CEOs, no exposé of the inner workings of the chemical plants, no images of Vietnamese children with napalm clinging to their skin. Instead, the film uses actors to simulate how everyone at Dow worked on a "building block" in the development of napalm without knowledge of the end result. No one was making a better napalm; rather, napalm was the aggregate of their labor.

Godmilow shot *What Farocki Taught* at the University of Notre Dame, where she teaches film. She meticulously re-created the generic, austere setting of *Fire*, then superimposed parts of Farocki's black-and-white footage over her own color footage, invoking a ghostlike trace of the original. She also re-created Farocki's indirect demonstrations of the weapon on insects, plants and lab animals, a strategy that she calls "underrepresentation." Her strategy, Brechtian in its incision, is to resist transparency, to refuse the false mimesis of the real. By evading realist dogmas altogether, she proposes, one can explore the "structure" of reality as opposed to the mere "surface" of reality.

How useful is this approach to the politics of documentary? It depends on whether one is documenting the present or documenting the past. The token images of newsreel from Vietnam—the young girl with napalm burns on her back fleeing from the inferno of her village, the execution of a Vietcong POW in the streets of Saigon—were in fact necessary to capture the brutality of that war and galvanize American political inertia. For Godmilow, Harun Farocki's most enduring lesson is that when this cinema vérité replicates itself in an endless, voyeuristic cycle, especially when it becomes a device of historical repentance, we must expose the political systems that enlist these images in their service. The cinema of Vietnam, it seems, has become a genre of tragedy in itself: It seeks to purge the American conscience of past wrongs through catharsis, allowing its audience to participate vicariously in the trauma of war within the safe confines of the theater. It reinforces illusions of innocence among its viewers. Let us shed a tear for the tragedy of Vietnam, we say. Let us pray it will never happen again.

An important question remains: Aside from her campaign to distribute Farocki by way of her own remake, why create a frame-by-frame replica of an old agitprop film that was responding to problems of its own very specific milieu? The relationship between the two recalls Borges' fictional story about Pierre Menard, a contemporary writer who authored a novel that is a verbatim replica of *Don Quixote*. The vastly different contexts in which Cervantes' and Menard's novels are received and consumed ensure that they are, paradoxically, entirely different novels. Godmilow's remake of *Inextinguishable Fire* is in conversation with all that has transpired within our industries of horror since 1969. *What Farocki Taught*, by replicating a Vietnam-era agitprop film, exposes the instrumentalized, systematic production of horror in the present day. The Vietnam War is long past, but our military-industrial complex is more resilient than ever. — *Brannon Ingram*

Brannon Ingram recently graduated from Reed College. He aspires to leave the U.S. but promises to come back and visit once in a while.

### LUNATIC Poems by Crystal Williams Michigan State University Press, 2002 \$18.95, paperback

*Lunatic* is a *cri de coeur* in multiple voices. It explores how who we are has to do with families, with love, with stories we can imagine as ours, with places we can and cannot call home, and with history, in particular the history of race in America. While Williams' first book, *Kin*, was also about identity and history, *Lunatic* takes these concerns in new and rich directions.

The words "I am," connected to both self-definition and survival, echo throughout this volume, tracing, often with humor, the ways personal and public histories—or the myths thereof—form us or allow us to form ourselves. The first section of *Lunatic* includes poems to Rosa Parks; a poem on the 1919 Chicago Race Riots; and a poem about working at the interestingly named "Friendly's" as a waitress. The speaker of these poems constantly places and re-places herself, as seen from outside and inside, in history and through inner dialogues.

In three sections, Williams moves from history (although history is never abandoned in the voices and diction of these poems) to more personal poems about finding herself displaced in a strange, white place (Portland), suddenly orphaned. A final section, one long poem entitled "The Story Goes," asks "How could a story be so wrong, so long in its telling?" The poem thus gathers up Williams' thinking about family rifts and connections and, ultimately, about truth-telling in a world where truth is not singular or stable.

Questions about how to know the truth, or to say it feelingly, resonate in all the poems, along with the difficulty of truth-telling, especially for and about the contemporary chameleon self. There is a litany of truths, then. From beginning to end, the poems tell us: "I, the adopted daughter—Black / father dead, white mother thriving—am . . . left / . . . with only rumors"; "I am guilty"; "I am alone"; "I am jealous"; "I am not here"; "I am / a mishmash of bleak & garbled omens"; "I am only here for a spell"; "I am addicted . . . to hope"; "this is how I am, / I am still & I am waiting."

These self-assertions (or assertions of *selves*) form the backbone of *Lunatic*; the title ultimately comes to seem a self-judgment by someone who refuses to give up on herself or on her hope of being connected with others. The funny, bittersweet pangs to hope that gather toward the end of *Lunatic* yield some wonderful moments, as in the poem "To Do," on the desire for love, which ends with the speaker's dialogue with her heart:

What will I tell her, that sweet, weeping girl,  
how would that conversation go?  
*I told you so. I know. I told you so. I know.*

*Lunatic* is also savvy in how it tries on and casts off, without disclaiming, the way languages make selves—the languages not only of class and race and gender, but of communities that mix postures, "codes" not so easily decoded—as in the following pastiche of astrology (resisted), jazz (sung), self-help (redefined) and the factual (recontextualized):

& I in a rowdy off-key sass.  
I was born in 1970 at 8:49 am & by no fault of my own am  
a cusp-born libra a leo  
rising burnubra any language I can. I am  
from Here.

(*"In Search of an American Language [or, After Being Accused of 'Coding']"*)

"Here," in these poems, is an American language, a bricolage out of which a genuinely moving voice emerges. — *Lisa M. Steinman*

Lisa M. Steinman is the co-editor of *Hubbub*. Her newest book of poetry, *Carslaw's Sequences*, has just been published by the University of Tampa Press.

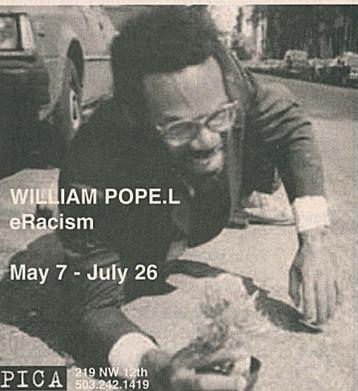
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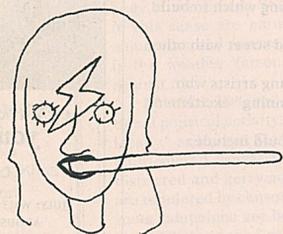
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NEW FRIEND, a friendship-based community project, opening at the Modern Zoo, office hours tuesday nights 6:30-10 p.m. runs june 14-august 31. for more info or to make an appointment e-mail [hifrom\\_newfriend@hotmail.com](mailto:hifrom_newfriend@hotmail.com)

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make do



"Bigger Than J"  
Jeannine Haynes, 2003

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River, riven : crow, companion

A poem by Cynthia Kimball

In riverside towns  
things are loose  
and keep moving

no moorings here  
or there are  
and they tug

downstream

Train passengers see our

back porches our brave things  
kept for later the brown  
ends of streets bicycles corn stubble

The house and I  
are ears are nothing

for hearing her return

flat surfaces waver  
unseen before her

approaching  
inevitable out of the clear sun  
Fall coming on crows' voices

make this room  
daylight a cat looking out

not by choice

Alight to the edges

outside wind  
the wait emerging as walls

She tacks merges  
across my path

Now downriver with such omens  
Would we change direction?

Restless leant over  
by a private doom  
ice on an old trestle  
indirect receding

River cannot  
have a name names  
rattle in the under-  
current

obsolete as gills in air

River has made me  
its secrets: there are none  
self reduces to bone and  
extras

absolute in plain view

Receptive as a pond  
sumac drowning at the root  
Listening for something else  
I heard "winking" and "shattered"

Cynthia Kimball teaches at Portland Community College, following many years of graduate school at SUNY-Buffalo, where she worked in the Poetry Collection.

EXPERIMENTAL / continued from page 3

it also reflects its publishers' laid-back, congenial personalities. As a not-for-profit organization, Pinball does a lot with a little. The print shop stays on its feet by offering commercial design services to local businesses and artists, and the publications pay for themselves. In December 2002, Pinball released its first book, *Copia*, by the emerging South Korean poet Casey Kwang, who now lives and works in Ashland, Ore., and is the youngest writer ever to be nominated for an Oregon Book Award.

FO\_A\_RM MAGAZINE

"Community begins with sympathy of understanding and interpretation. We plan FO\_A\_RM (and each piece within) to act as a vessel which can help to facilitate this understanding, or more precisely, these understandings."

FO\_A\_RM is three people — Bethany Wright, Seth Nehil and Joseph Bradshaw — who live in two cities, New York and Portland. The first issue of their magazine explores the multiple disciplines of experimental poetry, sound art and performance art. With impressive idealism, the editors are cultivating not just a magazine, but a community of reader-writers that Wright imagines as "a true utopia — the literal 'no place' where social relations can occur." The volcanic "A" in the title represents the potential for language to continuously "rupture" and then settle into a new form. The first issue of FO\_A\_RM presents writing about "utility" by Robert Kelly, mARK oWens, Giancarlo Toniutti, Jupiter-Larsen and *Organ* poetry editor Alicia Cohen, among others, and you can find it at Reading Frenzy and Powell's. The editors are also planning a "FO\_A\_RM forum" — an experimental writing conference with talks, workshops, readings and performances scheduled for this winter or next spring in either Portland, New York City, or perhaps both. In October, Performance Works Northwest will host "A Festival of Collaborative Poetics," an extension of FO\_A\_RM into real time and flesh. For submissions, orders and information, contact fo\_a\_rm@yahoo.com.

LA PALABRA CAFÉ-PRESS

"a gathering space created in honor of words, language, text, and ideas: their transmission through and in culture..."

Nestled in northeast Portland since April, La Palabra Café-Press is a rustic, not-for-profit art space founded by Krista Arias. In the tradition of the Mexican cultural café or Parisian salon, La Palabra's "Roving Echo" is a weekly philosophy café, a place "of intellect and action" where people can read poetry, letters, short stories and philosophical texts and then engage in constructive, or deconstructive, dialogue. Starting in September, Arias, who received her Ph.D. in philosophy, will be facilitating a year-long series of humanities seminars on "the great books of civilization," from Plato to Heidegger.

But La Palabra also concerns itself with practical arts. Arias is currently laying the groundwork for workshops on writing and self-publishing, experimental book arts and documentary filmmaking. Organizers hope that the space will eventually house a community art studio with bookbinding tools and supplies, a darkroom for black-and-white printing, a silkscreen and letterpress, and facilities for computer design and printing. Arias' own *Cereal Box Review*, published three times a year, is a journal shaped like a cereal box offering "breakfast philosophy." Issue #3 is now available on La Palabra's Web site, www.lapalabra.cafepress.org. On top of all this, a small corner of the space is furnished with old movie theater seating and used for film screenings, and in the parking lot, a graffitied 1964 Aloha trailer is being converted into a café and crêperie. Pay a visit to La Palabra at 4810 NE Garfield St.

Ashley Edwards is a performance poet and a student of English at Reed College.

DANGEROUS WRITING / continued from page 4

bestseller list and it's not writing you want to be compared to.

When you consider that a huge percentage of the book-buying public considers reading a diversion... JR: Most people are pretty lazy readers and they read for entertainment. I love that, that we live in a culture where people read for fun, but there's another kind of reading that can happen. TS: The market doesn't want a language-driven read. We're flying in the face of that. But still, bless our hearts, we get all these books published.

Despite a disregard for what people think they want, you've produced something people want to read. So, what are the tenets of your group? TS: Stephen Spender said that poetry is beautiful for how it lies on the page, but that all of prose, each word, has a little sign on it that says: "Don't look at me. Story this way." As soon as I heard that, I was kind of blown away. I had come to writing as a poet but moved into fiction. Hearing this was an enlightenment. But then I realized I disagreed. I do want my prose to disappear, but I also want it to stop the reader and make them realize they're reading language, that they're involved in poetry.

Anna Deavere Smith, a wonderful performance artist, once said: "Character lies in the destruction of the sentence." So we take these two things, the poetic stance and the idea that the more you burn the language, destroy language, the more you'll create character. These are two pivotal ideas for us. Also to stay away from the abstract, create a picture rather than an idea. And that it's OK to make mistakes.

It seems like you would make mistakes, because what you're talking about — a poetic stance and the destruction of language — is in some ways paradoxical. Or at least potentially so, when you're in the fumbling-around stage.

JR: Also, we really try to keep people connected with their own work. That's why so many people have published books. We teach them how to stay engaged. To be totally immersed. To investigate their own work. It gets expansive. It turns into books. So many people have a book in them and they don't know how to make it come out.

Heather Larimer is a Portland-based writer.

MODERN ZOO / continued from page 1

It was, of course, a full house. Nonetheless, on that day in early June, it looked pretty empty. Only a few weeks into their tenure, Shettler and Suereth were trudging through a blizzard of details. The week before, I'd received a mass e-mail from public relations volunteer Melissa Logan requesting donations of "power strips, extension cords, trash cans (small and large needed), light bulbs (50-watt spotlights preferred), 10 rolls electrical tape, 10 rolls masking tape, 10 rolls duct tape, clip lamps." The all-volunteer staff and revolving corps of helpers had already muscled through most of the big tasks — tearing out dozens of floor-mounted electrical outlets, rigging lights, building an 80-foot wall that would hold the event's centerpiece (an exhibition of multigenerational Northwest abstract painting), getting insurance, doing publicity, talking with neighborhood associations and dispensing concessions for a cantina and beer garden. But there was still much left to do, including getting walkie-talkies, prodding the first round of 21 artists to prep their walls and hang their shows by the deadline, and considering what it meant that one of several large fluorescent lighting fixtures in the main gallery space had plummeted to the floor without warning. Also, the 80-foot wall still needed to be painted, more lights needed rigging and that shelving unit needed to go to make room for more art.

As we made the labyrinthine circuit, Shettler and Suereth ticked off the coming attractions. Here's where Cynthia Star and Natascha Snellman will interview strangers and photograph them. Here's where Courtney Price will fill a pantry with cans of food covered in poetically modified labels. Here's where Tom Blood's poetry will broadcast while he recites it from a dinghy in the river. Here's where Pete McCracken will trap fellow artist David Eckard in a locked room. Here's the stage, where music and dance performances will occur throughout the summer. Here's where Patrick Melroy has started building an indoor patio, assisted by a master stonemason. Here's where Midori Hirose is constructing a hill from carpet remnants. Here's what will be Steve MacDougall's and Chris Rhodes' art lounge, now a jumble of ping-pong tables and chairs.

"You don't ever leave the realm of art when you walk through this space," Suereth explained. "People don't do this very often, and there's a reason. The spectacle is one of the fun parts."

"Come August, I think it will really be like a zoo," Shettler added.

Or perhaps a carnival, where the borders between things are more permeable. At the opening, with the initial tonnage of art installed, it was hard to give your complete attention to any one thing, even large-scale installations like Eckard's ambiguous torture-pleasure devices and Daniel Duford's Leon Golub-ish wall mural and large clay figure referencing America's military disgraces. The best moments were found, not coincidentally, in quieter, enclosed chambers: Ahren Lutz's room of paintings of death row inmates imprinted with the menus of their last dinners and Melody Owen's interlocking rings of hanging hummingbird feeders. The *Northwest Abstraction* show (a project several months in the works before the Zoo fell in PCAC's lap) looked fine, glowing like a jewelry case under good lighting. Consistent with Shettler's hopes, the paintings by young artists like Patrick Puopolo and Ann Marie Nafziger held up against Lucinda Parker,

Judy Cooke and Phil Sylvester, and vice versa. But still, the room felt strangely like an afterthought, without definite scope or argument, and a little lonely away from all the other celebrants.

PCAC's inclusive impulse was taken to a kind of apotheosis in art collaborative Red76's *The Ministry of Small Things*, a network of rooms given over to artists for viewers to watch them making art. "Seemingly inconsequential moments, through the passage of time," their leaflet read, "fill us out and are tied into a neat (sometimes not so neat) bow to form our whole story. What's frustrating is that these moments and pieces pass us by most times without even a hint of acknowledgement on our parts. Similarly, the creation of art — be that book, film, photo, action, etc. — is nothing but the sum of its parts." Inside, it continued: "*The Ministry of Small Things* is a place to put a magnifying glass/microphone on the invisible middle, on all the thoughts, fits and starts, and hair brained [sic] ideas that make up your life."

Much like the *Ministry*, the vision guiding PCAC — to create a "neutral" exhibition and resource center for regional art — is tied to the idea that magnifying the "invisible middle" will advance artistic culture. That seems the antithesis of what's expected from exhibiting institutions, exchanging judgment and moderation (or modulation) for inclusivity and polyphony, and agonism for a "safe space for art." It's hard to predict the ultimate impact of this departure or even to know how to gauge its success. At the Zoo opening, which was surely an extreme instance of PCAC's approach, the overall result was unsatisfying, a loose and bewildering "nothing" of parts, dismally reflecting the messy realm of regular life. It certainly seemed less about advancing culture — placing a template of continuity on it — than about helping it atomize and copulate, a sort of orgy of the species. Is this a bad thing? Aside from leaving everyone feeling a little dirty and used and resulting in some redundancies and throwbacks, I'd argue that it's probably not. In fact, it may be a propitious starting place for a new institution searching for new answers. If Shettler and Suereth have done one thing, they've shown that they're willing to follow adventure without looking back or sweating the details. It seems like the right attitude.

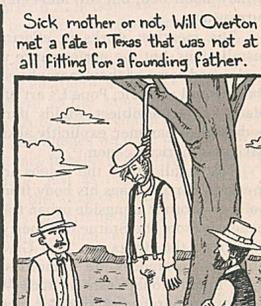
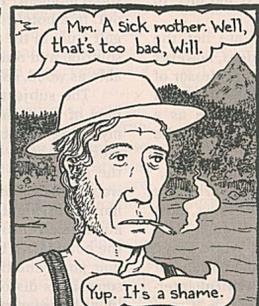
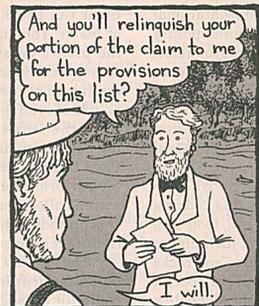
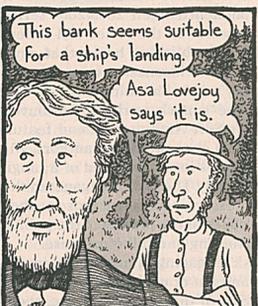
When we reached Hirose's carpet remnants near the end of the tour, we ran into building co-owner David Gold. He explained that they were "all squared away about the wood" and asked whether they'd talked with Unkeles about taking those shelves down. Suereth assured him they had. While Gold explained amiably that 39c was no longer available for the Zoo, as it was needed by a paying tenant, we rounded the corner into the room, where the volunteer had just completed the now superfluous demolition. "No big deal," Suereth said without missing a beat. "It's basically the same thing on the other side."



William Overton, A "City of Roses" Comic  
Founding Father

Researched, written and drawn by Khris Soden

In the Autumn of 1843, William Overton and Asa Lovejoy officially claimed the land that would later become downtown Portland. Although Overton was the first to claim ownership of "The Clearing", as the area was called at the time, it was Lovejoy who possessed the fifty cents that was required for the legal filing fee. Within a year, Overton was looking to sell his half of the land to the business man, Francis Pettigrove. Overton traded his stake in the future city for fifty dollars worth of supplies.



Notes: Very little factual information is known about William Overton: he was initially from Tennessee and may have been related to a prominent family in Memphis; he probably first came to Oregon from Hawaii; and he worked at the mission in The Dalles for a short period before heading toward the Willamette Valley. Stories of his fate are based on anecdotal accounts from people who knew him, but no official record of his life exists after he left Oregon. Overton Street in Northwest's Alphabet District is the city's only recognition of his pioneering role. For questions, comments, complaints and corrections, please e-mail khris@boschs.org.