

EDITOR Christian Peet
PROSE EDITORS Eireene Nealand, Julianna Spallholz
POETRY EDITORS Michael Boyko, Lizzie Harris, Jonathan Livingston

Contents	March/April 2005	V3n1
Rebecca Brown	<i>from</i> Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig	1
	Interviewed by Julianna Spallholz	5
Nancy Kiefer	Woman Waiting for Her Lover	a
	Gray	b
	No Hair Girl	c
	Interviewed by Julianna Spallholz	11
Selah Saterstrom	[Work]	15
	Interviewed by Christian Peet	20
Peter Jay Shippy	<i>from</i> Alphaville	26
Mark O'Neil	On the Condition of Our Teeth	28
Dan Machlin	<i>from</i> Dear Body:	29
Dan Chelotti	Staring at a Woodcut Elephant	32
Ada Limón	The Frontier of Never Leaving	33
Contributors	<i>Bio / Notes</i>	34

Cabin

We went to a cabin in the woods. We went for a week. We had looked forward to this because it was time away from work and time alone with no one else around. But also we had not looked forward to it because after the week in the cabin in the woods I would have to leave and go back to where I had come from which might as well have been Mars.

It felt like Mars when I got home. It felt unnatural to be in such a different place from the cabin in the woods to this place where I lived with all that I lived with that I didn't want to even more after the cabin.

However the place where we had gone in the woods was not a place where one could stay. It would have turned into a pumpkin at midnight, a frog in the light of the day, the old witch's house with the big fat boiling oven she threw the children into. She would have thrown us into it then eaten us or part of us and spit out the other parts and the dogs around her house, the curs and the mutts and the mangy things that snarled around outside at her feet the bitches she kicked at and poked with the fire irons would have snapped at whatever remained of us, the gristle and fat and bone, and crunched us in their teeth and sucked the marrow. They would have fought over us and tugged the bits of us between them in their slobbery spitty yellow stinking teeth. Or she would have only partly boiled or broiled or grilled us alive then thrown out the bits of us to them while we were still alive but with blackened stinking parts that the birds swooped down and picked from our eyeballs, meat and skin. Carrion, crows, black winged things with black as if scorched tongues.

* * *

There is all that comes ever after it.

There is carnage pillage sloshing sounds. Shoes bloody squishing from walking in it, brown red cakes beneath your fingernails from digging around in

it. Black and red and dirt and blood around the mouth. Hair like thorns. Grit in the eyes. Smoke dust dirt allover the skin. Filth. Only the mouth, because it can close and can shut it out sometimes, is not all completely stuffed and covered in it. (Some of it also got swallowed. It tastes like metal).

There's something that draws it to it.

* * *

Either that or we would have turned into her, that old witch in the woods, if we had stayed at that cabin which once we thought was so dear and kind and full of love, once, scrabbling and scratching at one another with our claws and teeth, trying to cram and push each other into then pull ourselves in along behind into the red-hot sizzling fireplace the boiling cauldron bones sticking up like gear shifts like knobs and or hissing like cats snarling like curs and spitting and clawing and tearing each other like like— like— like the bitter old broken hags we had turned into.

Gray

It's never light. You're always in the dark, half dark. You can't quite see but can't quite look away. Something's holding your head where it is. You cannot move and something is on your eyelids and you cannot close your eyes. They're dry. They sting. You need to close them. But there's some way they calibrate because just when you think you're about to go blind and then will know that you aren't seeing, only imagining or remembering, there's some kind of moisture, a liquidy thing on your eyeballs so you can see again. It's calibrated. They have a very smart system. It's smarter than you. They know your body very well.

They know your limits more than you.

You can hear the sounds of weeping, shuffling, something blunt. Of something being thrown and something falling. Shuffling. You don't know what. You don't know who. Don't ask.

If they ask, Yes, it could have been your imagination.

If they ask, Yes, it could have been that you had been asleep too long in the dark too long or not asleep for days, hallucinating in some strange starving fearing seeing state.

No, no, you did not see anything. No, you did not hear anything. No, you know nothing, nothing at all.

You have no idea how long it's been. Or if you are remembering or dreaming. What did you tell them you wish that you don't remember?

You try and you try hard to not.

The Future

In the future all of us will know the same.

In the future all of us will have the same.

There will not be disadvantaged ones. There will be none inferior or different. No one will be regarded as suspicious. We will not look at someone else and think Poor Thing, There But For the Grace of We. There will not be any envy in the future. There will no more be cruelty, neither small nor large, neither everyday nor monumental, nor in any way otherwise. There will be no more monuments. We all will treat we all alike. We will not need. There will be plenty of what is needed in the future. There will neither be too much nor not enough. There will be neither shortages nor unfair distribution practices nor skimming off the top. Things will not go to waste and we will not have to feel bad about that. We will not feel bad.

Neither will we get confused nor have to choose nor have to make hard choices. There will be nothing to decide.

We will not have to watch our backs, exercise extra caution, be vigilant, worry or be on any color slash level of alert. We will know all the things that need to be known. We will not know or have to know other things. There will not be unpleasant things.

Then we will all leave easily. We will be known from long before and will accept and be made ready.

We will be beautiful.

Rebecca Brown

Interviewed by Julianna Spallholz

JS: You have been extremely active in collaborating with artists who work in disciplines other than writing. I know you've been working on a libretto, which will be performed by the BetterBiscuitDance Company this year. Also this year, your first two-act play *The Toaster* will be performed by the New City Theater in Seattle. The Los Angeles New Short Fiction Series adapted four pieces from your book *The End of Youth* for a performance in 2003. And these are just a few of the collaborative projects you've been involved with. Is *Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig* your first collaboration with a visual artist?

RB: I have written about the work of visual artist friends before, but this project with Nancy has certainly been bigger than any other work I have done with visual artists. The first even vaguely collaborative thing I did with a visual artist was to write some texts and an essay to accompany a show of painting by Randy James that went up at the Nordic Heritage Museum here in Seattle last spring. I had met Randy through our mutual friend, the beloved and late and very much missed Wes Wehr, a guy who was a painter, a writer, a paleontologist, a letter writer, and an all around tremendous human being. The first time I went out with him for coffee when was when I was interviewing him for an newspaper article I was going to write, someone in the coffee shop asked me, "is that your father?" I think because we are both really WASPy looking, light hair and skin and all and both fairly scruffy in the fashion department. Anyway, I was completely and utterly thrilled that someone would associate me with Wes in that way but in some way he became kind of a mentor, or artistic father figure or hero to me. Really inspired me to be open to all sorts of experiences in the arts. He worked in all sorts of disciplines and was always learning, always exploring up through his 70s, and that just really inspired me.

Anyway, I met Randy through Wes and when Randy told me he had a show going up, I said, "Hey, can I write about it?" and he said, "Sure." We didn't know what shape that would take, but I went over to his apartment to look at his

work and I lived with some of his images for a while then wrote a series of prose-poemy type things, a kind of loose narrative about several of his images. Then I also wrote a short essay talking about the collaboration that Andre Breton and Juan Miro did, which I learned about in the City Lights book *Constellations of Miro Breton*, which placed Randy's and my conversation into a kind of context. Randy is great with computers so he made this little booklet of my essay and prose poems and his work and also included some of his photographs and an essay by Wes. Really a project among friends. I liked the process, and Randy gave me one of his prints!

So I thought about who else's work I could engage with in that way. And I thought of Nancy Kiefer, who I had met years ago through friends and whose work I had followed and always found utterly intense. I called Nancy and asked if I could write about her work and kind of the same thing happened. I went and looked at some of her stuff and made a bunch of color Xeroxes and Polaroids of it and lived with it a while and just thought about it and didn't think about it. We talked several times and when I started writing things I read them to her and we talked and had this great ongoing conversation about what we were both up to. We didn't really have a plan, but then we ended up doing this book together. And Nancy has a show going up at Hugo House [in Seattle] for a month where we will do a couple of events around the work.

I have also recently written a text for a catalogue of painting by Barbara Thomas, another painter who lives in Seattle. She has a book called *Storm Watch*. I told Barbara, as it had been clear to Randy and Nancy, that I was not talking about doing a catalogue essay, but some kind of creative text that engaged with the work. Barbara's work pushed me into new territory too.

JS: What was the process of making this book? Did Nancy's images exist prior to your writing? Or did her images and your writing emerge alongside one another?

RB: All of the images in the book existed before the texts. The stuff I wrote came

directly from looking at Nancy's images. There is no way I would have written that stuff without her images. The style of the brush strokes, the daring weirdness of some of the colors, the darkness and humor and intensity I see in them. And of course, Nancy herself is so amazing. Really smart and well read and articulate, so it was great to do this project so we could hang out and get to know each other. She has read and studied lit and is a literate thinker and painter. So there are ways she made it really easy for me. Also, I understand from her that some of her new paintings have been in some kind of dialogue with the texts I wrote for *Woman In Ill-Fitting Wig*. I can't wait to see them.

JS: Moving through this collection of Nancy's images feels almost like moving through an album, a series of very intimate portraits. The images in this group are done in unapologetic close-up of their subjects, and with that intense color and those thick, heavy brush strokes you mentioned. In what ways did these and other qualities of her art feed the creation of the writing?

RB: Intense is right. I really got caught up in these portraits. There was something about these portraits that really lent itself to becoming voiced. I sort of think of my texts, some of them, as monologues. Not so much in the voice of the person in the painting, but a voice telling the story of the person in the painting. And in my work I was led by some of Nancy's expressionism – the way she's got these slashes of "unreal" color in places, the way there looks like there was a kind of violence or breathlessness in some of the application of paint, which I tried to respond to or imitate in my words. I used a lot of broken sentences, run-ons, weird rhythms and repetitions. A lot of colorful abstractions, disturbing juxtapositions, and even some specific references to literary history – like fairy-tale references – the way she quotes from art history. I really wanted to get some of her intensity.

JS: There is to me an astounding contrast of movement in so many of the text /image pieces in the book. Nancy's work often seems to embody a sort of weighted stillness, while much of your writing moves with a sometimes almost violent ferocity. For example, in *Cabin*:

It would have turned into a pumpkin at midnight, a frog in the light of the day, the old witch's house with the big fat boiling oven she threw the children into. She would have thrown us into it then eaten us or part of us and spit out the other parts and the dogs around her house, the curs and the mutts and the mangy things that snarled around outside at her feet the bitches she kicked at and poked with the fire irons would have snapped at whatever remained of us, the gristle and fat and bone, and crunched us in their teeth and sucked the marrow. They would have fought over us and tugged the bits of us between them in their slobbery spitty yellow stinking teeth.

How do you feel that movement affects the conversation between the writing and the images?

RB: I do feel like there was a conversation between Nancy's work and mine. Having her work to look at, knowing that her work exists, allowed or invited or taught me to run with some rhythms and concepts that I think I would not have known how to approach if I hadn't had these images. Violent ferocity. Yup.

For example, that *Cabin* story. That is material I have had kicking around in me for years but never knew how to approach it. But when I had her portrait – like an externalized, “other-ized” image of myself/my character – I could approach the material. It was like, because her images were there, my voices had something to hold on to, to grab for. I do hope I have finally exorcised that material. But I am afraid it is still in me. As the poet David McAleavey says, “unrepeatable events inhere in us.” Yup.

JS: The narrative point of view changes from piece to piece in your work, moving from first to second to third person. What was your process of deciding what point of view to employ for each piece?

RB: There was no conscious decision. I just wrote and rewrote everything. But I don't have any set scheme as far as why some are in 1st and some in 3rd. My "process" about that was utterly unconscious.

JS: The dynamic between the text and the images in the book causes me to think a lot about context. I wonder how I would read the writing if it was not in the company of the images, and how I would see the images if they were not in the company of the text. Will you comment about the possible autonomy of the text and of the images in the book versus the possible dependency between the two?

RB: I so much think of these texts as going with Nancy's images that it is hard to think of them separately. Having said that, I have a pal who wants to publish one or two of them in her small mag but can't do images, so probably will just use the text. I also think that having the images is essential for the whole book as a book. I mean, just reading these fifteen pieces would get tedious in a way I don't want, if you read them straight through. Whereas having the images, looking at the images, gives a different part of your brain a chance to engage, gives the reader a different rhythm for absorbing what is being said in both paint and word.

JS: Will you comment on what you believe to be the importance of or implications of artistic collaboration in general?

RB: Jeez. The importance to me is that it gets me to make work I never would make on my own, never could make on my own. In some of these cases it has just been a kind of selfish way for me to indulge in my pleasure in someone's work. What better way to spend time with someone's work than to say, "I need to be this around enough so that it will make me write." Plus, just the company. I mean, when I am working on my own, I don't get to have coffee with someone and talk about what I am up to. But working with Nancy I just had all these great conversations about art and art making. Ditto working with the dancers. I have learned so much and been exposed to really cool thinkers and artists.

And you also can't get away from it. There are some things that one medium can do that the other can't. Like, I will always remember the first time I heard someone sing one of my "songs." The singer for *The Onion Twins* just belted out her voice and I was like, Oh My God, that's beautiful. The way it added a kind of gravitas and passion that I could only ever have imagined. On the most basic level, of course, I am just very aware how few people in this country read literature or attend dance or really look at art. So it's like we have to engage with each other because unless we do, no one will look at our work. And besides, it's all about trying to figure out who we are and how we can live with ourselves with each other. So collaboration is one really direct way of doing that, of asking, How can we converse with each other?

Nancy Kiefer

Interviewed by Julianna Spallholz

JS: Is *Woman in Ill-Fitting Wig* your first collaboration with a writer? How does this particular form of collaboration work for and feel to you?

NK: This is the first one that has resulted in a book. I've played with words and visual images with people over the years, exquisite corpse style, as a way to get our juices going and to swerve over the road with new ideas.

This collaboration with Rebecca has come together through a special set of circumstances that I wouldn't know how to duplicate and certainly hadn't expected. For one thing, the paintings were already finished when Rebecca came up with the idea to write about them. What a dream, eh? And because I knew the evocative kind of work she did, I trusted the process in a way I might not have otherwise. I knew she was going to be original and the writing and images would have their own say. Not to mention she is a really magnanimous person. I didn't remember this until we were about seven months into our project, but there was a time about ten years ago when I was pretty stuck creatively. At the urge of writer Amy Halloran, I went to hear Rebecca read. Her writing images (I hadn't read her work then) were bloody and beautiful and dense, and I related in such a way that I said to myself, "I've got to get back to work." I didn't remember this until I was going through an old journal and saw a sketch I had made of Rebecca reading.

When she read me the first pieces last spring, something clicked; even the first lines had this stripped down feel to them, not exactly minimalist but like someone writing from the gut, from the cellar. I was floored. I forgot that she was writing about something she saw in one of my paintings! She asked me, "Do you know what painting I am writing about?" and I had to say I didn't. And at that point it didn't seem to matter because each of our individual arts had come together and formed this collusion.

JS: Moving through this collection of your images feels almost like moving through an album, a series of very intimate portraits. What is the story behind this series? How do you feel that the story of the images is altered by the story present in Rebecca's writing?

NK: I'd been going to my studio for a couple of weeks, looking for a way to be moved, yet kind of scared to begin. I had a large canvas on the wall, very white and pristine. Seemed too overwhelming. I said some meditative prayers, then proceeded to paint a large head of a baby straight on the canvas with a brush. When I finished, this baby looked at me and I looked back. We had this connection, even though, or probably because, it was a creepy baby, part saint and part adult with compassionate eyes but a rather scheming mouth. I am a narrative painter and often paint faces, but this felt like the face was the story, and I didn't have to add something to it. I was remembering the photographic images of August Sander, Brasaii, Bellocq and how much I love portraits. I decided I would do about a hundred faces, make them small so I would could really play and not feel too precious about them. So I cut up canvas into small rectangles and started painting. I planned on painting every kind of face. If I didn't like them at the end, I'd toss. It took about a year. They were so small you could carry them around like flash cards. Later, a street woman walked by while I was outside my studio on Rainier and proceeded to tell me stories about a few of them. She said, "Hoo, hoo, that one is a mess and I'll tell you why."

I didn't really plan this, but the paintings were open to story. Rebecca's writing filled this openness, this space. And in a way, the words did alter the images for me personally because some of the characters are lonelier than I perceived them, and their desperation goes on longer. I sometimes think I am painting images of people who are scraping bottom, just at the point of waking up, having revelations. But Rebecca's creatures have a longer way on the thorny path. Darker tales.

But enough about personal response: Once the images leave the studio they are free. They are open to interpretation. I think the images in the books are

permanently altered—they are married to the writing and that’s the mystery in art I wouldn’t try to lasso.

JS: There is to me an astounding contrast of movement in so many of the text / image pieces in the book. Your work often seems to embody a sort of weighted stillness, while much of Rebecca’s writing moves with a sometimes almost violent ferocity. How do you feel that movement affects the conversation between the images and the writing?

NK: I do know what you mean about the ferocity and movement of Rebecca’s work. It’s alive! Her writing animated the paintings. And its only something Rebecca can address because she wrote in relationship to the images and not the other way around. Here’s an added thing I never expected to happen: some of the people in the paintings have come alive and I can hear their panting breath as if running through the woods, or tossing and sighing on a mattress with no sheets. Thinking in terms of pure form, that tension between moving and stillness, action and halting is essential stuff—a sort of macabre peek-a-boo. Push and pull, halting, going. Like muscles working.

JS: Rebecca’s text pieces employ varying narrative points of view, moving from first person to second person to third person. Can you comment on the use of point of view in your images? What is your process of deciding how much distance to put between the viewer and the subject of the image?

NK: I don’t know exactly how to answer that, but I will try.

When I first started making images, twenty-five years ago, I was just trying to draw the poetry I wrote, to explain myself to my family. Later, someone told me that I violated the picture plane; that is, my images crept up too close to the edge of the border. I liked that, it represented what I wanted to say. I still do that when I want the image to breathe on you. The image can be remote and intrusive at the same time, by the demeanor, some coolness of color, a blurring, a closed eye. I also like the classical coolness, and I find that sometimes these creatures

hide in their faces, under their features. Who are they? Let's go in and see. I like playing back and forth using color and line. I drew a lot for this series, copying photographs (portraits of Joe Louis, Aretha Franklin, Marilyn Monroe, Ann Sexton, and Walt Whitman), plus sculpture and classical paintings.

JS: The dynamic between the text and the images in the book causes me to think a lot about context. I wonder how I would read the writing if it was not in the company of the images, and how I would see the images if they were not in the company of the text. Will you comment about the possible autonomy of the text and of the images in the book versus the possible dependency between the two?

NK: There's that mystery again. The writing and images have come together in this venue but I think the success of the marriage is that they have their own integrity. I love this kind of question, and I have played with it for years. Can words and images work? Doesn't one cancel out the other? How can they work? It is, for me, like playing on a tightrope. Which one is gonna fall? I've played with this a long time. I'm a big time poetry lover and I read tons of folklore. I did a show under the guidance of curator Greg Bell, using parables and poems, entitled *Story in Search of an Audience*. I took work by Borges, Kafka, Neruda, The Brothers Grimm, and tried to make work that was not illustrative, but rather, resembled something of the essence. Without disrespecting the real work, without intruding, without syrup. Some pieces made it, others did not. And in the end, the question had to be, Who cares? The cheese stands alone. I loved the process and still do. It's all play and surprise to me. Right now I am making some work in relation to Rebecca's writing, particularly the stories in *What Keeps Me Here*. Just want to paint the spirit. No illustration. Tough!

JS: Will you comment on what you believe to be the importance of or implications of artistic collaboration in general?

NK: Hmm...I think it is about tapping into that community of creative life where the play resides. I work with children and watching them at recess is the most revealing thing; the sense of play and interaction is amazing.

The muscles
have been brought to
bone so there is
completion. The
skin is an outer
covering a skein
bloodlessly peeled
are real ones
which look different.

.
.

Some strangled
worms still blind
squirming but eyeless
hung all
seeing through no eye.
Summer jelly heating
rotten flooring.

State Bird of my childhood,
to bright continue.
Ditch milk
figure
pictures in plastic
in pictures.
A figure drawn.
A figure in you.

.
.

With torn track
out heart veins.
Chimedrill in branchlight,
straining to fracture,
snow's light,
still you now
unborn.

Stitch. Ground. Hard, lining. A hand wake: Black dark, rising.
Wore to, to pad- bone, com- curdle come rifling. A sugar a square
a slobber a bare Paper. Riding. Woman says *On* she says, per- you, Once,
and memory, bed- the bed had painted.

Details, took areas, this God. The her not. As His with, to a fingertip.
In herself She stalls. Him. She that a He could sev- be various God's
phase. She with com-copulating guilt. Down, the kneeled in, entered play.
Tight (never, she rules) dry, inside texture con- forced (would rule).
Pre- fast, nauseousness. Mouth apoca- mouthed. Yours. Objects.

- small finds

also write of *dimming*, how it lowers like, subsumes reserve, the one given, the body. When my mind turns to a pure nursing the sound is tremulous -- of eating in the dark [love making/a hill of sea heaving/out tails/killing]. I think of the dying woman who said no she would not like to come *back*. The single way to you, Pleasure.

- to be done with it

A coating, scented, rose a sweat red sill. Hands burn, are
letted. Are scented. Under nails, fried chicken church
dinners. I am just as you, now and then you take this your
body, his. Anatomically correct models based on saints
loved in basements. In the corner, broken.
Many hands many open.

Selah Saterstrom

Interviewed by Christian Peet

CP: I know I'm catching up with you just days before you leave for the MacDowell Colony, and I sincerely appreciate your taking the time to answer these questions. In the interest of time, I've pared them to a couple topics central to this issue of *Tarpaulin Sky*: seeing and the body, in relation to form and content.

SS: Thanks for the opportunity to consider these questions. Within many of them, there are other, bigger questions I don't have answers for. In those moments, I've tried to consider the ideas of the questions themselves, to celebrate the complexity that can be a part of writing, as I've sometimes experienced it.

CP: The first time I heard you read, you became my new favorite "poet." It was almost a year later when I saw *The Pink Institution*. The cover identifies it as "a novel." In looking at the forms of the individual pieces, especially those of the first and final sections, I might not classify them as fiction. Are they prose / pieces / poems? Cross-genre? Trans-genre? Or do these genre classifications break down at the level of the individual piece?

Looking at your new work, I'm wondering if there is a larger narrative. Are these new works pieces of a novel or some other extended fiction?

SS: These pieces are part of a larger, book length narrative. I would identify that "narrative" as a collection of images that have intersected and conjoined through time in such a way that feels right – inexhaustible, non negotiable. I am interested in the articulations that erupt as a result of these images being in relation. This is a process I would call "narrative." Like a weed growing between two concrete blocks of an interstate overpass. Despite smog and lack of nourishment, certain conditions are present so that a manifestation arises from the space between the edges of those blocks. I feel narrative as inevitable, evolutionary, like interstate weeds. Where there are things and conditions, there is narrative.

The trick is breaking the images until they yield the most poignant set of articulations...then arranging those articulations into a larger pattern that feels honest, is not exclusive, and has a poignance that deserves visibility [enter self doubt]. The trick of waiting, seeing, risking, failing.

Is this work fiction? Trans-genre? I don't know. I recently went through a period in which I was so hung up on what genre I was writing in that it became debilitating. During this time the election was going on and I dealt with it by reading loser's points of view through history. I started to read Japanese accounts of Hiroshima, which re-triggered years of previous Holocaust readings.

After atrocities, forms emerge, often called avant-garde forms. Looking at avant-garde as a literal translation, these forms may be "forward looking" but they feel more to me like forms of present moment witness. How does one speak after a violence that literally reconfigures the cellular structure of things, that, in its erasure, records the shadow of what is no longer present? Out of necessity forms arise to speak a language that must also speak these losses and transfigurations.

Thinking about these things, I realized it would be more productive and better for me to switch from the question: "what genre am I writing in?" to: "how can I be a more pure filter through which language can pattern the mystery of my concerns?" At this point I've chosen a sense of urgency over a sense of knowing.

CP: Regardless of its genre, the content of *The Pink Institution* assumes a variety of forms: extensive white space and justified text; "tableaus" with [text smears]; short, linked fictions collected as Childhood Objects, Maidenhood Objects, Motherhood Objects; and the more familiar 1-2 page prose passages complete with paragraphs and titles. In looking at your recent work, I see new forms. What are they? Are these forms organic? Received? How important is form to you? Is form a way of seeing, or the thing seen?

SS: There can be suffering and wisdom that comes with arriving at a form, whether that form is achieved through an excavation process or by imposing artifice. In both methods, one can feel - not how do I get to the end of this book - but how do I get to the end of a sentence...and that is humbling. I believe all forms can contain elements of the organic and the received because necessity is

always present. What feels more important than the formal method are the intentions flickering behind the veil of all the written gestures. These intentions have to do with being a better filter. Or as Grace Paley put it (I was recently told): getting all the lies out.

I've been thinking about the space of the page as an installation space, the text as installation. Some of the pieces express this more visually than others. But even when form is not working in this overtly visual way, every line, be it a recognizable sentence or not, is broken intentionally as I write. I experience form both as a way of seeing and the thing seen because it is simultaneously process and artifact.

CP: ["The muscles"] and ["State Bird"] look like stains on the page: two ink blots separated by two vertical dots hanging in white space.

The muscles		Some strangled
have been brought to		worms still blind
bone so there is		squirming but eyeless
completion. The	.	hung all
skin is an outer	.	seeing through no eye.
covering a skein		Summer jelly heating
bloodlessly peeled		rotten flooring.
are real ones		
which look different.		

CP: These ink blots could be ink or blood. A paint brush might have dripped these on the floor. Closer inspections reveal muscle, bone, a sense of "completion." The skin is the image made flesh, an "outer/covering," but even the label "image" has been "bloodlessly peeled," revealing "real ones/which look different." Not paint drops, but bits of meat. My instinct is to turn away: instead, I see worms.

What do you see? How does visual art inform these texts? What is your relationship to image? What do you see as the reader's relationship to text as image, as content? Does it relate to the function of the above form? To the two dots separating the texts?

Is this ekphrastic writing, or is this an act of witnessing?

SS: Maybe the best way to respond is to talk about how the pieces in this form came about on a personal level. For me these pieces were about bodily violence and what remains after the violence: the traces. I was thinking about rape kits at the time. I see this piece as words functioning as textures smeared onto glass plates for further examination and/or as a record of a bodily event. They've been in storage. So they also embody memory. Physical memory smears.

There is something perfect about how a smear looks because a smear never looks "wrong." One doesn't apply that kind of aesthetic judgment to smears. They are what they are. I cast these word textures in a wabi-sabi or im/perfect form. 'Perfect' in the Eastern and/or etymological sense as in, "knowing when to release/enter into the process of decay." Ikebano, the Japanese art of flower arranging, greatly influenced the aesthetic of wabi-sabi. Flower arranging began as a temple practice, then became a path to enlightenment, when, after a storm, instead of composting some flowers that had been ripped from the earth, a monk made an arrangement of them. He felt the flowers were worthy of appreciation and consideration because they were so perfect: they did not resist or judge where they were in the spectrum of experience, they did not resist or judge death. In the West we throw out the vase of flowers when they start to die, but this is precisely when they are perfect because they are in accordance with their nature. I sought a form that resonated with the nature of smears because it was important that these pieces feel like smears.

The colon between the word-smears is about juxtaposition. A kind of visual cue that narrative is at work...two things bumped up next to one another will yield some other thing. But in this case, that this kind of narrative can happen at all is important to the meaning of the piece. We wouldn't be looking at these smears and the subsequent narratives they birth had not something else happened that caused the smears to be collected in the first place. To stay with the example of

rape and the rape kit, this might lead to the question: why does rape happen? No cultural exegesis can adequately generate an answer that addresses the complexity of that kind of trauma.

Smears on glass plates may give logistical information (like DNA, like names), but they cannot give back what was taken (the violation they refer to). So juxtaposition allows you to position ethical considerations into the work. How can a singular proof of identity simultaneously exist beside/also be evidence of shattered identity?...and what does this tell us about the nature of justice? Form things – like line breaks, indentation choices, and juxtapositions – can presence these concerns in an immediate way so that the words don't have to explain or contemplate, but can exist as feeling, as presence.

CP: These images are immediate, stripped bare, raw on the page. However, despite the viscera, the work makes a point of stating that images of muscles are not “real ones/which look different.”

How do you negotiate the space between the image of a thing and the thing itself? How important is “real” flesh, is the body, to your work?

SS: I guess my response would be a continuation of the above - working with form and content so that, in union, they embody/become the thing rather than describe the thing. I've found when I do this, it is because of a need to speak about/from the body in the body's idiom. Words functioning, not in a utilitarian sense, but in a sensational one – rooted in the senses - textures. So that it is felt in the mouth or stomach first, rather than in the thinking mind. Maybe this is a desire for direct communication that begins on the nervous system. I believe in the immediacy of the body, in what the body knows.

CP: I once heard you say—and I may be paraphrasing incorrectly—that revision is a process of learning to see more clearly. Would you explain this?

Also, what is the importance of negative space, of what is not seen in your work? In *The Pink Institution*, God took the form of an eraser. Is revision an act of God?

SS: Ha hahaaaa...hell yes sometimes it feels like revision is an act of God because it feels like it would take an act of God to make a piece work. But seriously, in terms of revision as a phenomena that is act of God...I don't know. Because genocide, for example, is a form of revision. In turn this revision can lead to re-revisioned forms to speak about the experience itself. The process of remembering, also revision. Pollution: a process of planetary revision. Life, death, nature: revision. And so on. It could be that revision is a non negotiable character in the existential drama. This doesn't disinvite God into the scenario, but it doesn't place God as The Force causing the scenario. It's a big subject...does God exist outside one's own accountability?

We invoke revision in good and terrible ways, but it is a mode of surviving. Acquiring language as a child is a kind of revision process – one revises a semiotic understanding of self and world and the “I” is born, subject placement established. One is less likely to be eaten by wolves if one can distinguish one's self from the wolves. Being food doesn't have to imply your connections are rooted in dichotomy (you v/s wolves). It just suggests ways those connections might be expressed.

In terms of my own writing process, editing/revision is a space where I have encountered something I personally consider holy, but really it is very ordinary. It feels holy because it's rare. Again, Grace Paley's idea of getting the lies out comes to mind. When I'm at a place with a piece and I'm able to, if only for a moment, live with my own contradictions without somehow medicating myself, that can feel like grace.

from Alphaville

36

Larval karmahatmas
jot in Hindi.

Ganesh favors
elephantine delicacies—

Cheetos, Bonkers.
An ascending bindi

clarifies daybreak, each
face greets Holi.

In Jonesboro,
kindling longhorns

make no onerous promos.
Quixotic ranchers

spit Tabasco,
urging Vishnu, “Waken.”

42

A beach—
Caribou Dunes—

each face
generates

hindsight.
I just keep

longing.
Muskie

nuzzle off
platform

quays.
Rib-caged sterns

turn
unaccountably violet.

On the Condition of our Teeth

Because our teeth were falling out, actually collapsing in, onto our tongues, our syntax was severely limited. Forming hard consonants all but impossible, we spoke only in vowels and I had come to be known as *Oooo*. You were *Aaaaa*. In the midst of all these hardships, we met among the strafed walls, the bare I-beams and charred plaster of an abandoned building, wandering the floors for signs of who might have lived there before. But what we found we couldn't really name, or rather couldn't say. We could really only *say* what we could hold in our hands. To express any other idea we were forced to fall back on infantile postures and gestures such that it distinctly felt we were collectively crowding a brief paragraph, a parenthesis, in the opening pages of a biography. We came to a forgotten bathroom with rust stained toilet and crude peach enameled sink basin into which our teeth clattered as we guffawed and snorted through toileting scenarios and scatological pantomimes that arose spontaneously from the dense crowding-together and inadvertent but somehow sexually suggestive collision of bodies in the dim and gutted cubicle of a room. Somehow, though, it all stopped. It was the mirror -- we stood transfixed. We pressed our heads together and opened our mouths to watch our teeth slide inward upon our palates into two neat, symmetrical rows like saw blades.

from Dear Body:

Dear Body:

Whether my mind to my knee or a chest as hollow as a creek bed, these are the questions I am always asking, trying to mutter an answer to. If there was one popular tree on my property, it was the dream tree. Arms spread out in full growth, no shading here. But what do I know—I was a city boy raised in the sky. Now I am wandering into the eternal justification some call lethargy.

This body, he said (as if this specific body had a house, a housing). No, we were not just pleasant beings gazing into the sun, slightly tired and not yet hungry, having eaten lunch much too late.

And who is this “we” anyway—I was alone—tabulating the pros and cons of my history, sitting beside the ache in one’s arrogance meets devastation—this non-man, a rupture.

In the beginning, the land tore itself apart in volcanic ebulliences and simultaneously collapsed inward into tectonic concavity.

It was I who was being carried—a saint in a glass box, lord of Liberty Island, rabbi of abandoned parks.

I did not try to curry favor with the locals, though they tied me to the grammar with their hammers.

Insignificance, a pre-populated field whose minor chord inspired complaints about lost wages.

It was as if, here I was in you, my body, waging devastation on a foreign body—deformed bodies of state.

Dear Body:

We tried to type the pattern out. Each of the letters so perfectly repeating that I stored them on separate index cards—

As if to tell time through lack of ego—as if an envelope to be discovered later after death—a kiss in a movie.

I was never a professional.

I would tell you I'm a writer but always unwrite houses.

I too have been there to the ship addressing topics.

How specifically I unheard this story you would look sad in:

on May 2nd remember—the rainy day, the day of shadowman—

I was going to save you part of a brioche but you were late and I ate it all myself and you never knew it existed.

I undressed for the millionth time and you didn't laugh but instead we examined each other as separate entities.

“Hell” you said, “I’m done with writing I want to hold your life in.”

Dear Body:

There was a time when I would suggest an expurgation—but you would not be open to an expurgation—

There was a fleeting feeling of confusion in my text—but when you came around again you wrote a lengthy text in your own right.

I never had faith that this letter-writing campaign would undermine our intimacy—

Instead I would buy pieces of land near “forever-wild” forests in the hope that I would never again need to experience “closeness.”

Not that is to say closeness itself but rather the concept of “closeness,” as when Juliette died and there was this unhealthy silence.

A hush fell over our tomb and expressed outward over the meadow and gray buildings.

Staring at a Woodcut Elephant

I've always felt that when you cut into a tree, the newly bared wood should be warm, that, in winter, it should steam the way a kettle slowly disappears into the snow.

I guess I should mention the city.

A whole group of men I know like to sit around and talk about their pasts. I am supposed to hold myself back. As a matter of fact, I hate finishing anything, this I why I love them. When it comes down to it, the people I like the most are the people who got up early one morning for no particular reason and caught a deer sniffing around their outdoor toy train setup.

Yet, as I walk from the bank across the street to the town hall where I work, let's say, as a clerk, I do believe the dead are around. Just around. By not mentioning them: when we approach a meter with a handful of quarters, ready to pay, and find that someone has overpaid an hour, a small exclamation escapes us, a little mumble unheard by our fellow pedestrian. And this is how we feed the dead.

The Frontier of Never Leaving

If the wound you cover is made of sheet metal
and iron gates left over from the junkyard of
of Forever Worried, and the school of Always Broken,
here, I have saved you a seat. If you have hidden your
outlawed books in your mattress and your outlawed
thoughts in your hands, here, I will give you refuge.
This is what I heard underneath it all, underneath and in the
beginning but now let's move to Canada. I hear it's nice and
they don't kill each other as often. I can even forgive them for speaking
French. Really, not all of them speak French. But would I miss it?
If I move to Canada, and there's no war in the Spring
I won't miss Iowa, that's for certain, but it's the only thing.
The fields keep growing longer like a veil between us,
the mountains like sutures on the map, and yet they are
ours, the way mustard can be ours off the highway
and windmills in the deserts and roads, even roads. Barbed
wire between us, fences between us. The roadrunner has
run into the river and Misters, you do not care. Another puzzle
piece of my American map has unfolded. I am the only
thing that fits together here, in this frontier of Never Leaving.
Today, I am going to play the record of the revolution,
everybody is going to sing along and the more we turn it up,
the less the flag will wave over you and the more it will
become a swallowtail and migrate to our houses, the little ones
in the back, the ones with the lights in the window. Look!
You can see them now, opening their doors in the fog.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Brown is the author of ten books of prose published both in the US and abroad including **The End of Youth** and **Excerpts From A Family Medical Dictionary**. She has also recently written the libretto for a dance opera, *The Onion Twins*, in collaboration with BetterBiscuitDanceCompany and a play, *The Toaster*. She teaches at Goddard College and elsewhere.

Dan Chelotti is currently pursuing his MFA at UMASS-Amherst. He has worked as an Assistant Managing Editor at Verse Press for the past three years. He lives in Easthampton, MA.

Nancy Kiefer is a painter whose work has been exhibited at the university of Puget Sound's Kittredge Gallery, the Tacoma Art Museum, The Children's Museum, Pratt Fine Arts, Security Pacific Gallery, and the Museum of Fine Art at Washington State University. She shows her work at Gallery 110 in Seattle. She currently teaches at University Child Development School.

Ada Limón is originally from Sonoma, California. She received her MFA in Creative Writing-Poetry from New York University. A two-time Pushcart Nominee and a 2001-2002 fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, she's received a grant for Poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts and won the Chicago Literary Award. Her work appears in numerous magazines. She lives and breathes in Brooklyn, New York where she co-curates Pete's Big Salmon Reading Series (www.petesbigsalmon.com) and is nearly happy most of the time.

Dan Machlin is the author of **6X7 poems** (Ugly Duckling Presse 2005), **This Side Facing You** (Heart Hammer), and **In Rem** (@ Press). His work has recently appeared in *Fence*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Cy Press*, *Antennae*, *Crayon* and **The Portable Boog Reader**. He has also collaborated on a full length Audio-CD with cellist/singer Serena Jost (Immanent Audio) and contributed companion text to several visual art exhibitions in New York City and Germany. He is the founder and editor of Futurepoem books and a current curator at The Segue reading series at The Bowery Poetry Club in New York City.

Mark O'Neil lives with his family just outside of Saratoga Springs, NY. His work has appeared in *5_Trope*, *3rdBed*, *Ducky Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, *Eyeshot.net*, *Parenthetical Note* and *The Journal of Modern Post*.

Selah Saterstrom's work has appeared in *Harness*, *3rd Bed*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, and in other independent publications. Her novel, **The Pink Institution** [Coffee House Press, 2004], is a finalist for *The Believer* Book Award. She teaches Text/Image and curates the Holden Gallery Reading Series at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina.

Peter Jay Shippy is the author of **Theives' Latin** (University of Iowa Press). His new work will appear in *American Poetry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and *Verse*, among others. Other sections from the *Alphaville* suite can found online in *42Opus*, *eratio* and *Word For/Word*. He teaches at Emerson College in Boston.