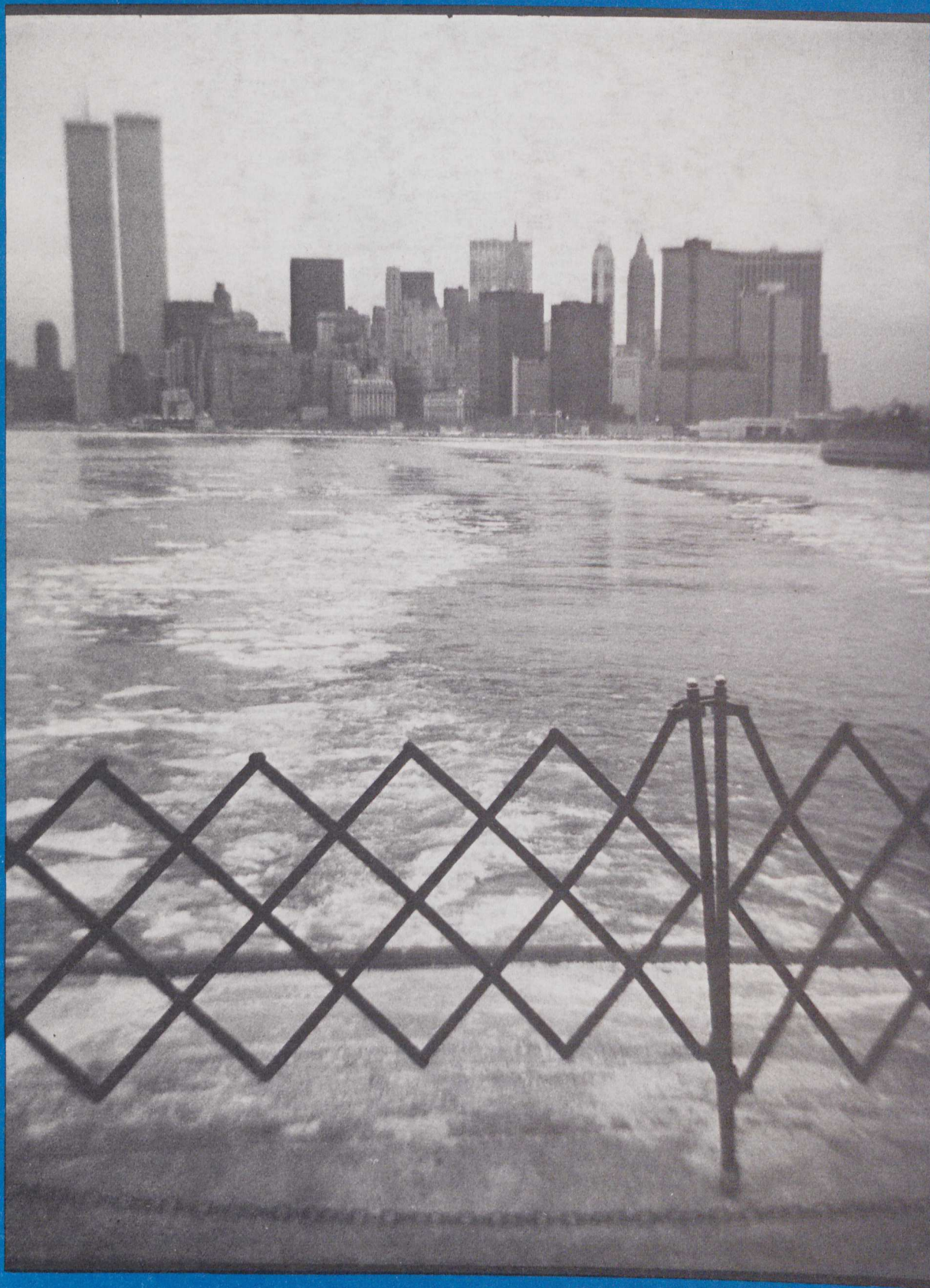


The Downtown Review

Vol. 2 No. 2

Spring 1980

\$3

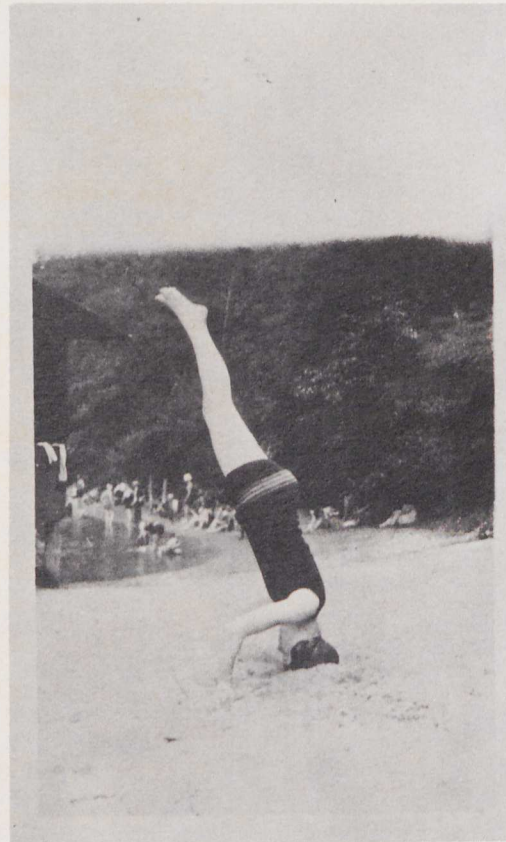


Late Spring, Once Again

As the Ozu film (*Late Spring*) suggests, this is the season for both reflection and anticipation. Each issue of this magazine causes me to reflect upon the season just past and to realize that what we publish here is but a portion of the whole, a mere indication of the range and breadth of activity that continues to make New York the cultural center of this troubled nation. As with each previous issue, so with this one: we are never quite satisfied. There is a lot more work out there to see, and a lot more thinking to be done about that seeing.

But I remain encouraged. This issue continues the policy of the project: a forum has been created. So, anticipation does accompany reflection, anticipation of continued growth through continued discourse. Once again, let me thank all of those who have participated in this project, and let me encourage others to do so.

R4E



In composition I do *not* think second thoughts are best.
Lord Byron

Editor and Publisher: **Raymond Foery**

Editorial Assistance: **Cynthia Hollis**
Tracy Farrell
Joyce Jesionowski
Stephanie Leighton

Associate Editor: **John Pruitt**
Arts Editor: **Scott Cook**

Published by New England New Media
Norwich, Vermont 05055

Subscriptions: \$12/yr., \$20/2 yrs.

Advertising rates on request

All articles © 1980, The Downtown Review Unsolicited manuscripts welcome

Cover: **Carl Martin**

(from "Nine Views of the World Trade Center, February 1979")

Independent/Avant Garde Film Dissemination
and other issues: a critique of two recent texts

The Downtown Review

Volume Two, Number Two
Table of Contents

Spring 1980

- 3 Independent/Avant Garde Film Dissemination
and other issues: a critique of two recent texts **Jonas Mekas**
- film*
- 11 The films of Adele Friedman **Nora Jacobson**
- 13 Harry Smith's *Number 18* **John Pruitt**
- 18 Stan Brakhage: Recent Directions **Robert A. Haller**
- 20 An Ode to Max Linder **Joyce E. Jesionowski**
- 21 Notes on Recent Cinema and the Logic of Style **Tom Brener**
- 24 Ken Jacobs: *The Impossible, Chapters 3, 4, and 5* **Tal Yarden**
- 26 *One Sense of the Seventies* **Raymond Foery**
- video*
- 27 Videotapes by Peter Campus **David English**
- 29 A Self-interview: **Amy Greenfield**
- dance*
- 32 Notes on Dana Reitz **Martha Haslanger**
- 33 Jones and Zane: *Blauvelt Mountain* **Cate Miodini**
- 34 Yoshiko Chuma **Cate Miodini**
- literature*
- 35 *Many Times, But Then* **Carl Little**
- 37 *The Cruise of the Pnyx* **John Pruitt**
- letters*
- 39 **Dr. Bish**



crept among them like smoke in autumn leaves making everything once again pertinent. Uncle Bill was alarmed and Aunt Pris dreamed that night of something genuine. "This is no time for flags," proclaimed their son at breakfast, and so it was not. In the distance they could hear the sound of spokes, as if the old windmill on Main Street had started, after all these years, up.

By virtue of its syntactical quirkiness, the last line recalls the penultimate line of John Berryman's "Dream Song 29": "Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up." In both cases the syntax gives the line and the poem an interesting twist. At times, Lauterbach could exploit her poetic syntax a bit more. As Max Jacob wrote: "I used to collect syntactic formulas: you can never have enough at your disposal."

In Lauterbach's best poems, the reader is often witness to what has already been described as a process of searching for a new, perhaps truer, definition of her life and life in general. Take the concluding lines of "Then Suddenly":

She told me what comes to mind is
"then suddenly," an icon
for which she is never prepared but always knows.
I was trying to get at it, the way
it goes awkwardly forward on the pavement
until it takes hold, draws
out of the drive across the bridge
lights strung ahead in litanies of sudden knowledge.

These lines present a splendid marriage of closely-watched language with a relaxed but gradually heightened thought process. The unfolding of the lines is enticing: we, too, end up "trying to get at it," borne along into the final vision of the bridge lights.

A similar but more direct confrontation with language occurs in the final poem of *Many Times, But Then*, "Gardenia":

There is "corduroy" and there is "long brown hair"
and they could be the beginning.
After all it helps,
if you describe, to make the tactile real.
Then there is the precinct of "crave,"
how it goes down and stays down
like an anchor to longing
and the pulleys on which the pail ascends
chafes against the mildew and the rock.
If I give you "crave"
will you trade
water running in the sink
where I placed the gardenia?

As in "Then Suddenly," a certain word or phrase takes on the importance of an icon in the speaker's

life. Words can not only make the tactile real, they can also, perhaps, be traded, as if one might exchange the word "crave" with all its suggestion of longing and frustration for the lovely image of water reviving or sustaining the flower in the sink. "Gardenia" is well-placed for it returns us to the initial longing found in "Poem," though ending the poem (and book) with a direct question implies the possibility of something beyond, a solution perhaps, to the longing itself.

Other poems in this volume are not so well-positioned: some of the best appear in the last third of the book: "Last Night It Rained," "Romance," "East River Barge," "Many Times, But Then," and "The Green Scarf." These poems also happen to be some of Lauterbach's most recent, and so merit a more focal placement in the book. Instead, we must wade through a long early work, "Chalk." Content-wise, it is self-indulgent in the privacy of its address and imagery, while technically it doesn't hold a candle to Lauterbach's more mature work. It is for the most part poetic shorthand: "Days lengthen into twilight Magrittes," for example, is a singularly unevocative line. But "Chalk" (like "Words To Assuage" and "Chappaqua Reverie") does provide an interesting contrast to the newer work, for it too is an attempt at definition.

Lauterbach began and ended her reading at the Museum of Modern Art with poems written and/or published since the appearance last year of *Many Times, But Then*. At first hearing, the initial group of lyrics she read seem to be further explorations of some of the themes found in her book, several of them among the best she's written (perhaps because they are, as the poet herself noted, a bit less abstract than those in *Many Times, But Then*). On the other hand, the poem she chose to end on, part of a longer sequence of poems begun this past Fall and still in progress, is in many ways a departure for Lauterbach, a departure with the promise of something new and exciting.

Ann Lauterbach has a very good sense of her own work: the poems she read from *Many Times, But Then* are some of her finest, well-chosen and well-read. One of these was "Last Night It Rained," whose final lines manage to sum up many of the characteristics of her poetry:

The month had changed overnight: now
the season would not let go, the air stubborn and clear
and cold, like an invitation to definition.
But some things had become impossible. It was
impossible
to waltz or to sew on buttons. We could, however,
move out of the house into a tent
with a very old doll, and nobody would stare, or wave
so long.

Carl Little

The Cruise of the Pnyx

by Robert Kelly
Station Hill Press, 1979

There are those who accuse the poet, Robert Kelly, of being arcane, but I have never found him so, even though I can't pretend to his wide erudition. Despite the fact that his work is steeped in history and myth, unlike some of his contemporaries in the post-Pound/Olson era, one never feels that Kelly relies on texts to carry him along. Shunning the guise of merely collating someone else's material, he never fails to find his own voice. In fact, in certain respects he reveals great intuitions as a writer. Kelly's work has intellect but doesn't strain for intelligence; the enjoyment of words always comes first. I trust that in the current literary atmosphere of over-cooked cerebration, it is still a compliment to say that one actually enjoys a particular writer's work. Other commentators more qualified than I (for example, Paul Blackburn, Guy Davenport) have pointed out the power of Kelly's sensuous textures and subtly counterpointing rhythms, the nearly hallucinatory flow of his imagery.

Between longer collections of lyric, Kelly has been regularly publishing shorter works whose deceptive slightness may allow them to be overlooked. There is no reason why this should be. *The Cruise of the Pnyx*, for instance, is an original comic narrative which makes for good reading. As in *Cities* and parts of *The Loom*, Kelly here reveals a highly-developed sense of humor, a penchant for gentle self-mockery. I use the qualification "gentle" only because it would be wrong to imply that Kelly moves into burlesque, into cold exercises in parody. His comic poetry is never far from the poetry which lacks a humorous tone. The emotional center is the same; we are only seeing another side of the coin. Almost as if to underscore this very point, Kelly begins *Cruise of the Pnyx* with one of his frequent verse prefaces, which, as he once implied, are about as theoretical as he would like to be:

Every experience
is an earth
you give one.
Every morning
leaves spaces
to begin—
this is
Form, . . .

The narrative that follows is fantastical, even dreamlike, but not, as the rear cover asserts, "enigmatic." Nevertheless, any attempt to pull out the storyline is a hopeless reduction of the whole. But perhaps it will serve a purpose as a rough guide.

The first-person narrator is a bishop caught between a celibate clerical career and an intense sexual yearning. The aimless wandering of the ocean liner, *Hill of Pnyx*, is the setting for most of the story, reflects the Bishop's ineffective grappling with his dilemma. He floats back and forth in a private purgatory. Most of the comedy stems from the Bishop's energetic verbosity. Like Browning's nameless bishop in "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," Kelly's narrator reveals a talent for eloquently describing the allure of something he is by profession supposed to deny:

The jogging one recurred.
Lilith in Pumas, her body vague in cotton
sweatpants, vinyl raincaps, what a lonely
dismal way to use her thighs.
I raised my thoughts to high refusals.
I could control my sex by not knowing her name.
Desire specifies.

The Bishop despises one of his fellow passengers, August Schwefel, a devil/procurer, who continually tempts the Bishop in the direction of the sensual life. When asked what his religion might be, Schwefel replies:

"The small words of language, particles,
pronouns, affixes, lewd infixes, huzzahs,
conjunctions. These are the sexual parts,
the flowers of language & I love them.
They make language work, begin to move
the dreaded stasis of noun & verb."

Apparently Schwefel is at no loss for words either, but the real joke is that this satanic, "tubby figure," resembles the author himself.

Since the Bishop's flow of words never halts, when the liner suddenly blows up, he is interrupted in mid-sentence. In an hilarious though poignant close, we discover the survivors as prisoners in a revolutionary republic, though the term "counter-revolutionary" would apply just as well, for the surrounding political order seems innocuous, nothing more than a meaningless bantering about of slogans. The local god is "Camazotz, the Death Bat," who kills his victims, the prisoners, with a sharpened stake. We get all this information from the nervous radio broadcast of the Bishop, who dishes out the official news, the party line, but tells us what he is really thinking and feeling when his guards aren't looking. He mentions a sexual encounter with his wife on the beach, an effervescent moment amidst the dull routine of the

prison. The Bishop has found himself at last. It is the outside world which has gone mad, which now drifts arbitrarily. The Bishop's broadcast ends in typical Kelly fashion, with wordplay, puns on "news" and "stakes" as the prose gives way to a final lyric moment:

But there's a war out there. What is the war?
What are the stakes?

Sharpened
to pierce
what breast
with what news?
Here
is the news.
Be new.
The natural wood
sharpened
by conscious skill
heated hard
in a fire of will
drilled
now into
my lazy heart.

As a postscript, Kelly produces an effective argument for the innovative typographical form of the work. For example, along with the prose portions of the text, set within the two recognizable uniform margins, and the lyric portions, set with a uniform left margin and a so-called "rag-right," there is a form neither wholly poetry nor prose set with a rag-left and a uniform right margin. Though I would be the first to agree that the tone of *The Cruise of the Pnyx* hovers between poetry and prose, I am not so sure that this is necessarily reflected in the typographical solution. Something in me hesitates to reduce Kelly to such an obvious technical quirk. But this is not to deny Kelly's assertion that computerized composing machines may allow writers to control how their words fall on the page with greater precision and variation.

I don't recommend that any reader coming to Kelly for the first time begin with *The Cruise of the Pnyx*. One would do better to start with a fine collection of lyric, *The Mill of Particulars* being one of the best in print. Only from there would a reader get a good grip on Kelly's delightful comic mode.

John Pruitt



*Your information center
for non-theatrical film:*

Incorporated in 1943 as a national non-profit membership association, EFLA's primary purpose is to stimulate the use of film and other audio-visual materials for educational purposes.

Who belongs to EFLA?

Public Libraries • Colleges and Universities • Schools • Museums • Religious Groups
Community Service Agencies • Distributors • Equipment Manufacturers • Film Teachers
Filmmakers • Writers • and many others

What does EFLA do?

INFORMATION SERVICE • Members may call or write for assistance in locating or using films
EVALUATIONS • critical evaluations of newly released films, published ten times a year
SIGHTLINES • a quarterly magazine
PUBLICATIONS • books and pamphlets to aid in film selection, evaluation, and utilization (complete list available)
LIBRARY • a reference collection of books, periodicals, catalogs
WORKSHOPS • occasional seminars or workshops on topics of concern to members
AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL • EFLA sponsors the major non-theatrical festival in the United States, held annually in New York City.

PLEASE SEND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EFLA:

Name _____
Institution/Company _____
Address _____



Educational Film Library Association
43 WEST 61ST STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10023 / 212-246-4533