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X POETICS

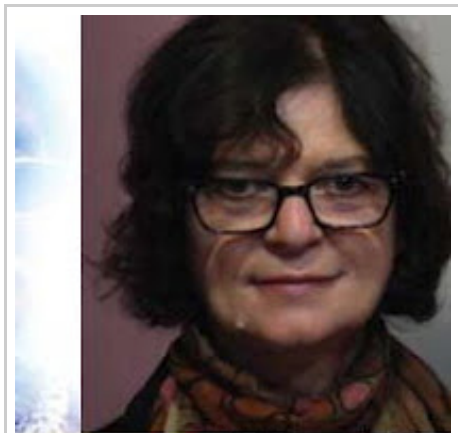
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Carla Harryman, Gino Robair, Jon Raskin at the Outsound New Music Summit 2012

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Carla Harryman, Jon Raskin,
and **Gino Robair**

at the Sonic Poetry event at the
Outsound New Music Summit,
San Francisco
July 18, 2012



Performing Artists

Carla Harryman - poetry
Jon Raskin - saxophone,
electronics
Gino Robair - piano

from The Outsound New Music Summit website

X POETICS

X Poetics is a blog edited by Robin Tremblay-McGaw (San Francisco) with occasional contributions by Kathy Lou Schultz (Memphis), and Jim Brashear (San Francisco). Once upon a time we edited the journal *Lipstick Eleven*.

Jim Brashear and I headed out to the Community Music Center on Capp Street in San Francisco on a Wednesday night to catch Carla Harryman, Gino Robair, and Jon Raskin, and we loved this performance.

Here's what Jim has to say about it:

Even as someone who has worn both hats, I have to admit it: I usually dread collaborations between poets and musicians. There's a long history of it and I'm not a fan.

I remember being fascinated by the idea of it in college and finding a recording of Allen Ginsberg reading along with an acoustic guitar, but I remember better how hot I blushed alone in my dorm room, embarrassed for them and myself, and how hard I laughed at Ginsberg's delivery because I thought he sounded like a character on Sesame Street, and the gently fingered guitar did not help. (And I don't mean to disrespect Ginsberg, but come on, I am not the first person to say this: who was it that compared his voice to Mr. Rogers?)

But a more resonant question started here and returned every single time I encountered a poet/musician hydra: what was the guitar doing there? Forget the *there*: what was it *doing*, what was it *for*? The music seemed to function, to my ears, as an ornamentation of a poem, a sonorous dressing for the text, like Muzak. Why accompany a poem in the first place? Can it not go it alone as a poem? Doesn't it make its own music? I asked these questions at the beginning of graduate school in music when poets were invited in to do collaborations with musicians—I was still wondering which one I was, me with a recent graduate degree in poetry—and the musicians asked me the same questions: Why does music need words to justify it? Doesn't it have its own logic or sense without language? What interaction, then, between different art forms makes the collaboration worth doing? What burden rests on each form to perform in collaboration?

Frankly, the first two acts exhausted my ears. The poets' old-timey misogyny (thirty minutes each of beautiful-womb-disgusting-vagina) made me want to cry out loud for the Lesbian Avengers, even though they're long gone. And then came Carla and relief: her work had been fundamental to me in the 90s while studying experimental writing, and I expected the long, ornate sentences that characterized much of that work to flow over the sounds Raskin and Robair would create.

Instead, Harryman's work consisted of powerful, delicate and wry lines of poetry that she expertly, *musically*, performed. I could see the lines and the line breaks on a page, and it takes a measured reading of the text to do that. How many times have I heard poets read their work as though they're not aware of the music in their own writing, as though they don't even want to be there to perform it? Carla was there and she wanted to be (duh) and I could hear it. (Burden of performance on poets: pick your head up off of and out of the page and fucking speak up. Perform.) Her voice never rushed the words over the music, never indulged in the *braggadocio* that characterizes so much performance of poetry or spoken word. As Pauline Oliveros would say, she was *listening*. I would even say her *voice* listened. She performed as a listener as well as a speaker, not in spite of either, but she also performed as a musician, using her voice as a speech instrument that played words with a particularly musical intention. The musicality of her performance emerged particularly when she read the first sentence, I

believe, from Adorno's "On Music and New Music," over and over, with different emphases on different words, breaking them up into units of breath (see, I like Ginsberg).

But I'm not sure that I would have heard her reading as *music* without the presence of other sounds from other musicians. Whether a reading alone could be music *per se* is not a question I want to ask: this is more an observation that these musicians, these highly skilled musicians, created such a vast world of timbres and textures that, in the midst of hearing Harryman's words and thinking about their musicality, I was already deep inside a musical experience. Calling her words musical was a hilariously moot point. They were already up against Raskin's phrasing, its combination of lyric gestures and gentle percussive strikes that don't immediately resemble a voice but remind me of the voice's breath, the same measures and ticks breathing produces.

On the other hand, Gino Robair's could coax the same qualities while running a piano string through other piano strings, with no breath involved. The longer I listened, the less I thought about the voice, even though a voice was speaking the whole time. I imagined it all as a glorious exercise in improvisation, but was surprised to find out later that Raskin had scored everything, a testament to Raskin's abilities as a composer. And yet the event was not "just" music; there was always that element of language that, as sonorous as it was, always communicated because the words were discernible and could thus carry out their means of signification. (Burden of performance on musicians: the voice is almost always the quietest instrument in the room, so get out of its way, we have to be able to hear it enough to understand it. I'm looking at you, guitar people. I'm a singer, I don't take this lightly.)

--Jim Brashear

One of the pieces Carla, Jon, and Gino performed included a section of Carla's documenta13 lecture which she will give on September 12, 2012 in Berlin. Here's a description of it:

Occupying Theodor W. Adorno's "On Music and New Music": A Re-Performance

Carla Harryman retranslates Adorno's essay as a verbal score for speaking voice and piano improvisation. In collaboration with composer Jon Raskin and pianist Magda Mayas, Harryman performs the lecture freely, tuned to the sounds of twenty-first century, but also recalling those of the twentieth. The re-performance constructs a quiet yet enlivening surface, creating a "noise" informed by cultural and gender difference as well the passing of time and

the present historical moment. "I do this," Harryman writes, "not by constructing an antagonism, but rather by embracing the significance of the lecture/essay as a form and as conversation, one that I have entered and occupied at a singular moment."

To hear Carla and Jon at Documenta13, [click here](#).

Here's a [great interview with Gino Robair](#) about his method of improvisation and the instruments he plays.

To read Christine Hume's essay "Carla Harryman's *Baby*: Listening In, Around, Through, and Out," [click here to go to HOW2](#).

From Carla Harryman's "Orgasms" in *Adorno's Noise*. Essay Press, 2008.

tis tissue robbing pope sucking spear splash oops bore eye fro
eye hire harrow guarded leer trap fire slurry badge adage craze

speak speak speak engineer linger rotund dusty ust ust uh

hoe oat toe below spire rain stamen stick rat earth reeves heavy slob
oh sorrow mow

spot smear spot squashed stadium clinging pillar out hear a-rear
basting let low lyric violet storm

loaned honey nothing doing behind gravy train evil fell to slow en-
trance gained a billow in the random rain

....

Everyone now began to tear at Adorno. An orgasm is an elegy. I can't explain this rationally. It's site-specific emotion lodged in a small barking noise—an escape hatch in the negative dialectic.

This is what he might have desired during student protest in 1969. The emotion that corresponds to the practice of oppression is contempt. If I had been among the students in Frankfurt, would I have opened up my leather jacket and showed him my breasts in a parodic manner, in solidarity with a leaflet that proclaimed "Adorno as an institution is dead?"

Direct socialization is structurally determined by the patriarchal or Oedipal family, so the gender politics of parody is hopeless if you want meaningful social change. In this story however the people live and Adorno dies. Yet I am convinced that I would have refused to think of Adorno or any individual as an institution and instead would have removed myself from the scene and posed as "the small time expert," a sexless menial. In my rejection

ABOUT US

Kathy Lou Schultz

Jim Brashear

Robin Tremblay-McGaw

of revolt, I would have underscored my subject position as a mirror of the fragile component of the social sexual contract. Adorno was attracted to, in fact relied upon, mimesis. Did I desire him even after he forgave me for faking the orgasm? But how do I know that I wouldn't have been instead liberated from this inclination to withdraw, to pose, and to think at a remove? What if I had become activated—I can well imagine this. Even as I write, I can feel some odd source or space that's as much physical sensation as idea located inside—it's probably in everybody's brain—wanting activation.

With a flick of the switch aggression exposes erotic drives to blindness. On the other side of this blindness is an orgasm in the public void.

An orgasm is an elegy in which there is no consolation. Machines, like orgasms, are inconsolable things (177-181).



ROBIN'S WORK ONLINE AND ELSEWHERE

"Class, Gender, Genre"--HOW2

"Community--it's the goo all over the place" Small Press Traffic Aggression Conference--Sound Files

"Contestatory Writing Practices in the San Francisco Bay Area in the Seventies--New Sentence, New Narrative" NPF Seventies Conference

"Hive or the Dark Body of Friendship--A Response to The Grand Piano

"Narrative Transfiguration" in Biting the Error

"What's More Crude Than a Curl? The Photography of Kris Komater

About Reading

from Spill--Narrativity Issue #3

from The Melmoth Letters--Digital Artifact Magazine

from The Melmoth Letters--Project Feature at Little Red Leaves 5

gENDERess at Markszone

making mARKs--a+bend chapbook

My work with the Trauma Foundation

Robin at Penn Sound

JIM'S WORK ONLINE & ELSEWHERE

Pedro's Napoleon Complex & Zeeu--at Marjorie Wood Gallery

KATHY LOU'S WORK ONLINE AND ELSEWHERE

Participant bios from **The Outsound New Music Summit 2012**

Carla Harryman is an American poet, essayist, and playwright often associated with the Language poets. She teaches Creative Writing at Eastern Michigan University and serves on the MFA faculty of the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College. Born in Orange, California, Harryman studied at the University of California, Santa Barbara and San Francisco State University. In 1979, she co-founded the San Francisco Poets Theater, which staged numerous experimental plays, including her *Third Man* and other plays. Harryman has received grants and awards from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Fund for Poetry, Opera America Next Stage Grant (with composer Erling Wold), Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the NEA Consortium Playwrights Commission, among others. Harryman's work is known for genre-disrupting poetry, performance and prose. In addition to her work and her interdisciplinary collaborations, she has written numerous experimental essays and writings about contemporary innovative women's writing and experimental language-centered performance and co-edited a book devoted to the work of Kathy Acker.

"As radical as the writing, the music is brilliantly arranged, and interacts with the texts in a variety of dynamic ways. Each track is a world of its own, and moves forward with a focus and direction unprecedented in music/poetry collaborations." - Tzadik.com

Highlights of Rova founding member **Jon Raskin's** early career include his '70s participation in new music ensembles directed by John Adams (San Francisco Conservatory of Music) and Dr. Barney Childs (University of Redlands). Before Rova, Raskin served as music director of the Tumbleweed Dance Company (1974-77), was a founding member of the Blue Dolphin Alternative Music Space and participated in the creation of the Farm- an art project that included a city farm, a community garden, Ecology Center, Dance and Theater companies and organized the creation of a city park. Highlights as a member of Rova include composing a collaborative work for SF Taiko Dojo/Rova, working with Howard Martin on the installation work Occupancy, composing music for Mr. Bungle/Rova, organizing the 30 year Anniversary Concert of John Coltrane's Ascension, performing the music of Miles Davis at the Fillmore with Yo Miles!, the Glass Head project with Inkboat and the ongoing Electric Ascension project. Raskin has received numerous grants and commissions to work on a variety of creative projects: NEA composer grant for Poison Hotel, a theater production by Soon 3 (1988); Reader's Digest/Meet the Composer (1992 & 2000); Berkeley Symphony commission (1995) and Headland Center for the Arts Residency 2009.

Other groups are The Jon Raskin Quartet featuring Liz Albee on trumpet John Shiurba on bass and Gino Robair, a duo with Kanoko Nishi on Koto and a trio with Matthew Goodheart and Vladimir Tarasov.

Gino Robair has performed and recorded with Tom Waits, Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, Nina Hagen, Terry Riley, Lou Harrison, John Butcher, Derek Bailey, Peter Kowald, Otomo Yoshihide, and the ROVA Saxophone Quartet. He is one of the "25 innovative percussionists" included in the book Percussion Profiles (SoundWorld, 2001), as well as a founding member of the Splatter Trio and Pink Mountain. His opera, I, Norton, based on the life of Norton I, Emperor of the United States, has been performed throughout North America and Europe.

Artists websites

jonraskin.net

ginorobair.com

[carla-harryman](http://carla-harryman.com)

"On Myung Mi Kim" and excerpt from "Genealogy" in Efforts and Affections: Women Poets on Mentorship (U of Iowa Press)

Some Vague Wife (Atelos Press)

Genealogy (a+bend press)

"Proceed Queerly: The Sentence As Compositional Unit" in Biting the Error (Coach House Press)

"Small Press, Big Wor(l)ds: African American Poetry From Publication to Archive" in Rainbow Darkness: An Anthology of African American Poetry (U of Miami Press)

"Rock and a Hard Place: Erica Hunt and the Poetics of African-American Postmodernity" in HOW2

"Talking Trash, Talking Class: What's a Working Class Poetic and How Would I Find One?" in HOW2

from Some Vague Wife--Narrativity Issue #2

from The Sonneteer--Shampoo Seven

"That New Exile": A Sonnet After "The Wife's Lament" for Emily Steiner

Sound Files at PennSound

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POSTED BY ROBIN TREMBLAY-MCGAW AT 8:43 PM



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