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ates a sense of loss. There is a delightful slip-page that serves to illustrate how words can haunt us as well as each other: “rupture is / rapture,” “violet light, violent / night,” and another clue, “no one word settles / me.” Nor does the sight of flags, those infamous signs, flying out train windows, and a tattoo only recovers a scar. Cole Swenson notes that in this work “every naming becomes a complex failure of communication,” but Grinnell handles the human condition of suffering with an uncommon emotional intelligence and grace. As the same sentence is “accelerated to silence” her role is “to still go on, enumerating / things.”

Stacy Szymaszek is the author of Emptied of All Ships.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER VIGILANCE Beyond Baroque / 2005

Benjamin Hollander has lived and worked in San Francisco for the past twenty-eight years and he’s been everything a poet should be—trying to get out, trying to let the outside in, keeping his own counsel.

The mind sees the mind sees the mind watching the stars and pretty soon a wall rises up with a sign on it that says, *Do Something*. And that’s what writing poetry is, really, performing in front of the wall.

Hollander has the stuff to do it—he knows about things—history, politics, science, sports, art, gossip—and is always ready when the poem arrives to let it rearrange as it sees fit. This is important. He also believes in truth, which is difficult and generally unfashionable in any age.

Readers are conditioned to recognize poems by how they look on the page, but how it looks has nothing at all to do with the presence or absence of poetry, the only measure of what is or isn’t a poem. The real poem is a measure of the substance called poetry in a set of words that try to say what can’t be said. Sometimes the content, the poetry, is so fugitive as to be just the haunting of a demanding ghost that breathes on its own in a corner.

Vigilance breathes that way. It consists of two poems, *Onome* and *Levinas and the Police*. Each considers, among myriad shifting rela-

tionships, the endless voice of power to which non-communication is essential.

The voices of the powerless get lost in the fugue states of the vocabularies that have been inflicted on them. The weak come to understand that not only are they invisible to power, they can’t be heard either through the rituals of prompt and response that go nowhere, finally, and leave them twisting on lines, like fish.

Hollander is working this ground pretty much by himself, and he gives himself up to the voices admirably and painfully. It’s really quite terrifying. It’s the poem of the poem’s opposite—the poem requires you to be able to say whatever it needs you to say, but the discourses of power require that you say what you’re expected to say.

There’s been a strain of high bloodlessness running through American poetry—as if *communication is impossible*, were a real answer to a real question. Fortunately, the real question rises immediately—*if it’s impossible, how come it happens all the time?* Despair is only fashionable to those who haven’t felt it, and evasion is not the work of poetry—evasion is the work of the state. Never ask a question if you don’t know the answer, the prosecutor says.

In a movie the hood makes the guy laugh then says “What am I? Funny? Do I amuse you?” and the game is crystal clear, for an instant.

In the playground the kid is five years older than you and he says, *Hey kid, nice bike*, and the words you use to answer will be disjointed because he knows all they mean is fear. You’re thinking they mean, *give me a little time and maybe I can change things and get away. He knows that too*, because power imposes the form of the call and response.

This is history—the child standing helpless and frightened in the middle of the endless, leaden, false dialogue that will bring him eventually to what he fears most. When the words are empty, nothing happens.

So impossible communication is the fondest hope of the state, and jargon is the currency of the bureaucracy. Watch the movies called *noir* in which brutality belongs half to the underworld and half to the powers that be. They’re dreams of the industrial revolution

and World War II and the sudden shrieks of the loved ones who don’t know you anymore. And they’re true, and the kids who saw them first, unwillingly, won’t forget easily. They’re the real March of Time newsreels, and if the camera lingers on a pair of bronzed baby shoes you can feel reasonably certain that the baby’s father will be beaten to death with them, inevitably, so that all the words exchanged are as nothing.

Vigilance, on the other hand, is more complex so the voices have flashes of light. Above all they jump and flicker, so that sometimes we can hear the outside coming in ambiguously, and the possibility of grace.

and to me it was said in the world design

there is a sign for every occasion

and this one happened to be on you

for all the thrownness of being there is in being

this one.

And despite the focus on our anguish and avoidance and the final helplessness and invisibility of the suffering *other*, the poems are open for poetry to snake through them on its own.

their bones get hummed in them.

Vigilance is the real thing, and there’s nothing higher you can say about a book of poetry.

Take a look too at Hollander’s *The Book of Who Are Was*, an investigation of family, the Holocaust, Celan, identity, and the endless hallways and apartments words make. Or his *Rituals of Truce and the Other Israeli*, a cold and passionate look at the traps of history and language in the Middle East—the endlessly dictated and evasive conversation around and through a mound of corpses.

Larry Kearney was born in Brooklyn, moved to San Francisco in 1964, and has written a number of books.

GLORIA FRYM SOLUTION SIMULACRA United Artists Books /2006

Gloria Frym’s new book of poems *Solution Simulacra* is a wowl, a scream and a stamping of the foot at the U.S. government and its stupid citizens. Murder, mayhem, destruction and we go on shopping and

believing our myths about freedom (“I don’t understand why I can’t buy a burka in the surplus store. Did Milan or Paris get hold of them?”).

Frym opens the book with an overture, looking back on the present as many historians will surely see it: Afghanistan occupied, the US terrorizing it’s own citizens and others, the whole world fracturing into a state of hostility, violence and suicidal activity. It doesn’t have to be like this. She invokes Emerson: “A rush of thoughts is the only conceivable prosperity that can come to us.” Frym uses all of her poetic tools, repetition, rap, word play, concrete manipulations of the alphabet and symbols in an active, engaged response to daily news, reports, overheard conversations, hammering away at those words, fracturing the glib lies and excuses.

Homer’s rosy fingered dawn appears when heroes return from having ransacked far off places. But here there are no heroes. “Dawn seemed as though it would never arrive.... One’s empire [is] choking. One doesn’t believe one’s president who attends church, his slightly perfumed wife by his side, his daughters stoned out on downers. He read the bible in Cliff’s Notes. Forgot the past about gluttony as a sin” (23). She imagines punishing the politicians for catapulting us into a disastrous future.

And we’re standing there like a bunch of dummies. Frym ruminates, “Why should dawn want to face the day, considering its quiet, fragile light? Dawn can’t save one civilization from unraveling, or another from erasing words for a living.” This is a classic Frym move, a spiritual understanding that segues immediately into a political observation. I stand back watching the sun rise and then set again, as humans do what humans are doing. But while I stand here on my porch, shop for groceries, read the newspapers, groups of people are working in think tanks to come up with ways of maneuvering and manipulating the public. “A government goes after an enemy it installed itself” (38). “Frustrated with one’s adversary? Annihilate him. Otherwise one will remain impotent, and that will disturb one’s sleep” (42).

You can put your finger into this book, begin anywhere and experience a type of revelation, the work so witty it might make you laugh, but it’s that kind of laugh that in the next second, hey you’re shaking your head with your tongue stuck in your mouth. “I is mad at I’s country” (68). Yes. Yes.

Day-by-day, poem-by-poem, Frym cracks apart the way we talk and the lies we hear. In the title poem, “Solution Simulacra”, she elaborates on a recipe for empire building.

First, suck all the money out of the house to fashion the haute couture weapons. . . . Color in the sections of the world one would like to have. . . . Demand that first adversary hand over his arms and the arms of all his doubles, and send them Fed Ex. When they arrive, thank him, and demand he do the same with his head and the heads of all his doubles and theirs. When they arrive, have these parts well-photographed in color and printed on the front page of The New York Times and every other medium will follow suit. Eliminate the text. No one wants to read seventeen pages about reasons. Reading is treason in a simulated solution. (42)

Solution Simulacra is cathartic, as well as an exposé. This book should be required reading in as many college and high school lit and poetry classes as possible. Then there might be a chance that some folks might actually start to read the world and the word as the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire advocated, their thoughts and dialogue rushing in between Gloria Frym’s sharp analytic thought twisting poems.

Maybe then dawn could come sooner with a lot less grief.

Barbara Henning is the author of several books of poetry and two novels, the latest, You, Me and the Insects (Spuyten Duyvil).

PETER LAMBORN WILSON GOTHICK INSTITUTIONS Xexoxial Editions / 2005

Gothick Institutions is unlike any book I have ever held. [But I mostly read Agatha Christie, the *New York Post*, and old *Thor* comics.] According to a Chinese tale, Lao Tzu (the Taoist master) was escaping the Imperial City, when a guard commanded: “Before you leave, first summarize your teachings!” The resulting book is the *Tao Te Ching* (awkwardly translated as “The Way of Life”), possibly the first self-help manual. *Gothick Institutions* has a similar air – as if Peter Lamborn Wilson were fleeing Brooklyn on camelback, only to be ordered by a gatekeeper of the Williamsburg Bridge to first indite his wisdom. For example:

Knowledge of mountains as source of pain
but dreamy (an anesthetic revelation)
as real estate itself.

Gothick Institutions is a book, mostly in verse, confiding ways to reach the Fairy realms. It is a compendium of esoteric knowledge. Or maybe a hoax? (Or maybe the true esoteric path *posing* as a hoax?)

One theme is the link between botany and hallucination. Many human souls awaken by ingesting plants – especially flowers:

Incense – the trembling butler in a trance
serves cakes & tea – like mist between the hills



VANITAS

The second issue of Vanitas includes poetry by **Anne Waldman, Bill Berkson, Brendan Lorber, Duncan McNaughton, Ed Sanders, Elaine Equi, Jack Collom, Jeni Olin, Jerome Sala, Joanne Kyger, Laura Moriarty, Lewis MacAdams, Lewis Warsh, Maureen Owen, Norma Cole, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Prageeta Sharma, Ron Silliman, Stephanie Young, Tom Clark**, and the first chapter of **Richard Hell's** memoir. The featured visual artist for the issue is **Kiki Smith**, who did original work for the cover and a seven page color insert.

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