

MY ANIMAL EYEBALL



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My Animal Eyeball will be published as an internet chapbook by *Eoagh* in 2014. Poems have been published in *Downtown Brooklyn*, *Brooklyn Paramount* and *Bombay Gin*. Poems were written in 2011-2012.

Long News

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108 signed and numbered © 2014

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Cover photo by Michah Saperstein

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All other photos by Barbara Henning were taken from her window on Seventh Street on May 10, 2010.

With *My Animal Eyeball*, there are 18 photo poem pamphlets in this series. I began collaging photos and text in 2003. Working with an ink jet color printer, I made limited editions of 108 each, signed and numbered, and then mailed these pamphlets to poets and friends. Many of the pamphlet-poems have been collected into books, *Cities & Memory*, (Chax Press, 2010) and *A Swift Passage* (Quale Press, 2013).

Found in the Park (2003); *Teacher Training* (2003); *Up North* (2003); *Aerial View* (2003); *My Autobiography* (2004); *Black Grapes* (2005); *7th Street* (2006); *Thirty Miles to Rosebud* (2006); *The Animal I am* (2006); *Little Tesuque* (2006); *Aham Asmi* (2006); *Cities and Memory* (2007); *An Arc Falling into the Bougainvillea* (2007); *Hari Om* (2008); *Twirling, the Spirit Flies Off Like a Falcon* (2009); *The Dinner* (2011); *Twelve Green Rooms* (2011); and *My Animal Eyeball* (2014).



The Eye of the Day

Down the elevator and out the door of 857 Broadway—a downpour. I pull up my hood and swerve my bike home on the slick city streets.

A backpack full of books, computer, groceries on top, everything held together with a bungee cord. Put the red light on top, balance myself on the seat and coast downhill all the way home.

Wrong way, wrong side, cutting off people, dashing through red lights, sailing at an angle across six lanes, zip, out of my way, please, you didn't know I was here? Open your eyes, Mister.

As I coast under the big oak trees, the sound of individual raindrops hitting the pavement.

Soft triangular waves ripple across the East River, but the wind's blowing so hard it feels as if I'm moving backwards

Swerving around the trees and the benches where a few men huddle together under the heavy branches, the walkway covered with layers of wet yellow leaves.

Sometimes my bike and body seem motorized, and the eye of day seems to close faster and faster.

Bundled like a mummy on a bicycle in the winter night. The trees are bare and the city is holiday quiet.

A police man makes a homeless man sit up on the bench. He is holding his stick in the palm of his hand.

Off the subway at dusk, my helmet strapped over my shoulder. A purplish-gray light in the sky and the bolt on the scaffolding's gone and so is my bike.

Two young police men come to take a report. I look in one young face and think about the man who shot the policeman in his face a few days earlier. Take care I say, you are part of the 99. So was the shooter.



To Be Horizontal

I remember sitting on the toilet, so small that I almost fell into the middle.

Twice today I forgot and touched my Brahmin guru's arm.

Do not torture your body, train it and tame it.

Even with the surgeries and hormones, isn't he really still Karen?

Bob's taking intravenous steroids to stop the damage to his optic nerve and the shadow that's slowly moving across his eyes.

Last night after a fast plane to Michigan, I walked past Jean, sound asleep in her chair, the tv blaring and her head falling to the side, white hair puffed out.

Bill K's hands are shaking and some teeth are missing.

As you get older, Jean tells me, your eyes film over and in one office visit they remove it. Protection, perhaps, for the spirit as the body shuts down.

In the bathroom it seems as if I'm standing in line to wash my feet, the days inbetween don't exist.

When I'm preparing for bed, naked before the mirror, I wonder if heartache causes physical damage.

Got my hair cut today, cut off ten inches, ear length. My grandmother looks at me from the shelf. Her hair is in a bun. I close my eyes and lay my head on her bosom.

This morning, I wake up from a deep dream thinking that dying might be something like dreaming except you need a body to dream. Well, you need a body to die, too.

At the Bleecker Street station, a woman was crushed by a moving subway, so I had to take the bus.

In a yoga class, the guy beside me smells like the morning after drinking a case of beer and eating a cow without bathing or brushing his teeth. Ten minutes in, I roll up my mat and make myself scarce.

Rajasic energy is horizontal, dominated by the sun. All of the senses are horizontal. You meditate to become vertical. I like living horizontally.

Tonight my energy zips and zaps from here to there, the mind working its way through what is most current and then those various ways of categorizing thought and memory.

As the body diminishes, we document it—period, comma, apostrophe, exclamation.

I remember you all and now you are gone. Love you all, really I do and I did. xo xo



Talking to Yourself

Not one of the fifteen students finished reading "Benito Cereno".

Four students plagiarized and copied paragraphs from internet documents into their essays.

We don't want so much reading. It's a lit course, I say. To get a class going, I first must make them love me.

We're not interested in nature, the student says, and that's why we didn't read Thoreau.

Even though the assignment was to read only ten pages from Frederick Douglass, and I said there would be a quiz, the students still didn't do the reading.

When an LIU student was parking her car, a man walked up to her window to ask a question and when she unrolled it, he tried to force his way in. She caught his arm in the window and now she asks me if she can *please* go home.

Kavita sits in my office and weeps and wails so loudly that the floor vibrates. I am trying to figure out what she can do to rewrite her essay when I discover that she doesn't understand even one sentence.

"Barbara, first think, then speak," Edward Hirsh said jokingly to me in grad school.

Sometimes I find myself writing notes on student papers in haphazard word clutters, a line across the binding and then a short column down the right side of the page. No plan, just a mess.

In the classroom, while the students are writing, the windows are black from night and I am missing my mother and feeling as if maybe I have gone a little too far from home.

In dream-LIU-land, I'm putting squares into circles and other tedious tasks.

According to the Department of Ed, teachers are no longer required to teach cursive writing. The pen and ink traces my thought and tongue and then ink spreads in a line over the page—That's miraculous. To lose talking to yourself like this, in a little book with a pen. What an awful idea.

I read the last stack of papers and whew, finally, yes, they did learn how to write an essay.



The Distance Between Us

I put Anna Kavan's *Ice* back on the shelf. Nightmarish violence toward a childlike woman who is accustomed to being abused.

Read Andrew Levy's *Nothing is in Here* and "Cracking Up." Words of absence, boredom and the inessential, the impossible un-particular particulars in their dis-particularity. The views of the subject lean toward: "I'll tell you later."

Reading "Civil Disobedience" while watching a utube of nyc police pepper spray a young woman protesting at Zuccotti Park.

I have profound thoughts during the day, but by midnight, I forget what they are.

Reading Yang Jiyang's book on her life down under, during the Chinese re-education. Humans have the possibility and sometimes the habit of being systematically cruel.

Over three hundred years ago, when Olaudah was a small child, he was snatched from his family. Then he was sold to slavers. I turn over on my other side and listen to the refrigerator hum.

Emerson talks about going deeper than "thinking" into "knowing."

I open a book, read a few lines, walk to the desk, turn the sound up on the tv. An ordinary man slightly overweight, unshaven, mid forties or so—he has his arms around a woman with a gun in her hand. "It's over," he says. "Your mother is gone, put the gun down, Laura." She's weeping and holding the gun between them. Suddenly it goes off and they both slide down to the floor. She's dead and he's bleeding, but alive. Deeply affected by this woman who executes men who have abused women, he now needs to get some sleep. During commercials I read an article about manifest destiny and divine rights and the way we invent rights to justify

whatever our desire might be. Today a two year old was shot in the face and my throat is sore.



Five Minutes Each

Sometimes when I'm sitting at a poetry reading, I start to think about giving up writing until my next life. in the meantime, getting a job at Trader Joes.

James makes me feel dizzy when he looks right into my eyes and goes on and on in a loopy way.

Three aisles up from me this guy keeps stroking the woman next to him, playing her back as if her ribs are a piano.

Take the train to Kim and Vyt's for dinner with Jonas Mekas and his twenty-nine year old son Sebastian. Jonas tells a story about Sebastian when he was a young boy and fell asleep in the pyramids and for hours they couldn't find him.

At KGB's Steve Katz reads his funny memoroid stories. I am in the back, taking cell phone photos of a dark red room with a light above Steve's head, his face a tiny blur.

Sitting in Tompkins Square on a park bench, Cliff wants to scream at me over something I say, but he holds back. I can see it in his body.

If I could only keep up with my own yes-I'll-do-that—almost like a machine—think this, do that. Open the window a crack. It gets warmer as the day goes on.

Went with Martine to see *A Dangerous Method*, about Freud and Jung. Freud was a much deeper thinker than this. And the women in the film are portrayed as mostly sexual partners and mothers, when in fact they were also analysts who helped invent psychoanalysis.

At the poetry project listening to Jesse Seldess—wow he's great—and Hoa Nyugen, too, her out-breath is a sigh, a word, a silence.



At the Grad Center, today, Tim is Trace, and he's wearing a blonde wig and high heels. Ted K was Linda, but now he has a rough beard and he's losing his hair.

On Third Street I bump into Paul Beatty with a bag of laundry on his shoulder. He's as handsome as ever but now a little greyer. I saw him maybe five years ago, and I think it was right here in this same spot, and he was carrying a bag of laundry.

Sun Skeleton reading at Dixon Place. All young people except someone's grandmother, Lewis and me. Walk along Chrystie Street with Lewis and my bike. When he catches the subway to Chelsea, I go into Whole Pay Check to buy every snack whole food junk food item on my list of don't bring this into the apartment.

The first Geraldine Page Poet's Salon at Lee Ann's. We poets schmooze. No money in it, but we do schmooze.

Bobbie's family would sit around and tell stories, stories that everyone had heard many times before. And she's retelling a story now that I've heard several times before. Then I think about my father. He was a story teller, too. In fact everyone in my family was, and all of my gossipy poet friends, too. We all love to talk.



My Animal Eyeball

Greg is in the pool with the boys, throwing them into the water, one after the other. "Me, me!" They laugh and sink to the bottom then swim to the top.

I'm pushing the boys in a double Cadillac stroller. They look up at the trees as I call out—maple, sycamore, oak, elm.

I slide open the back door and they run into the yard, their little boy bodies naked in Hurricane Irene. Round and round in circles they run, the wind exploding the trees. They leap and yelp, twigs with bunches of leaves scatter over the yard and streets. Here and there an overturned tree. In my hand, I hold a leaf with a meticulous design, veins branching into the flat green, either a Balm of Gilead or a poplar. On the news, a fifty year old man rescues a child in a body of water with fallen wires. The man is electrocuted, and the child is in the hospital with bad burns.

When I take Jean's garbage out to the curb I see a young man two doors down walking back and forth in front of his house with a swaddled infant. Every window in the house is lit up. I ask Jean if they have a new baby. Hard to tell, she says. She usually keeps her doors locked and the blinds closed so there's no temptation on the nautical mile.

Luke sits at complete attention through the highs and lows, the loud and noisy *Lion King*. When it's loud, he holds his fingers in his ears. Mostly, he is mesmerized, sitting straight up, steadily popping popcorn into his mouth. I keep whispering to him about what is going on. When the mother lion cries about her lost husband and son, I am teary. He gasps now and then, but no tears. Like a Shakespeare play, the brother steals the crown away from the son. Then back home, his little brother Lolo is awake, and we three go to the park. Lolo stands on a stump in the park, saying to himself, as children race around him—"I'm tall, I'm tall." Then he sees a little girl, his size and he says to himself in a whisper, "She's tiny."



On my cell phone, I call up *West Side Story*, Richard Beymer's body and Jimmy Bryant singing "Maria, I'll never stop saying Maria." I'm singing along and the boys start dancing and singing with me. Luke sings with a high five-year-old voice, "I once kissed a girl named Maria." Then they both whisper, "Maria, Maria, Maria."

Luke wants to get a pillow from upstairs. He tells me, "Stand up here on the stairs Gramma." Then he races into the dark room and back with the pillow.

The weather is warm and spring like. As I pull the boys back home in the wagon, the earth rolls over, facing away from the light and we are left with its absence.

Every time I angle across Houston, I think of Ted Berrigan's daughter, Kate hit by a motorcycle and killed. Today I ask Bobbie if she had three or four children because she has only mentioned three and somewhere I read that she had four. She starts weeping. Leslie, she was killed when she was eight years old. I'm so sorry, I say to Bobbie. Later Lewis tells me that Leslie was playing in a sand bank and there was an avalanche. Children are not supposed to die like that.

I wake up this morning in the middle of a dream. Linnee is a little girl again and she's running around the room, crying. She stops in front of me and says, "I want someone to comfort me like Dad did." I take her in my lap and hold her. What a deep ache it is to lose each other over the death divide.

I cut out animals from old National Geographic magazines, making a booklet with a silly story inside. Tapirs, bongos, gorillas and red ants. Life is full of animals. While writing this sentence in my notebook, my eyelids start to drop and then my animal eyeballs roll back into wherever the mind goes when it goes.



The River Grows Wider

In the security line at the airport, a woman is talking into her cell phone: "Ok, I'm at the airport. Tell mother she can start praying now."

On Metro North I doze off while the Hudson River grows wider and wider. At first I can see my reflection in the window and the river is moving with some wind and then as we get further north, the water is placid.

Last night, I dreamt I was in the house of my childhood with my father and mother. They were preparing to leave. My father handed me the key to the house. "It's yours now," he said. "I don't want it," I replied. "Well you can try to sell it, he said." Then I was struck with despair. "I don't want to live here."

The water in the teakettle is boiling while a power grab by Telecom is reaching out to close the web.

Should we disjoint displace undo or document?

November 17th. Union Square is flooded with police and here and there a clutter of two or three occupy wall street folks. The police commissioner calls them "degenerates" What a degenerate he'll be when he doesn't have a job and he's sleeping in a park.

Not a good idea to listen to too much of the rhetoric of catastrophe. OK, keep out-sourcing and giving corporations super human rights, and yes, we are finished.

Out on the Detroit River in that little row boat with Griffin, jumping into the filthy water with a life saver on. You can get sucked in there, he said, from the underwater whirlpools. On the shore a row of men with fishing poles. At dusk across the river in Windsor, the lights were twinkling. When it started raining, we

rowed back to shore, got into our old black 57 Plymouth with it's big wing-like fenders and roared home.

No one is adoring your body parts tonight, I write in an email. Even though we ended like a car crash, I miss you in my life.

We stand and stare just past each other, half a body in one eye and half of another in the other. In this way, we evaluate each other while appearing disinterested.

A mini skirt, smeared red lipstick, reddish tinted wispy hair, levis, shoes like mine, about my age, talking with a man whose head is grey and hanging downward a few inches away from the MOMA bag in his lap. Suddenly she smiles at him, and she looks like a young flirtatious girl and he probably knew her back then, too.

The cars are splashing through the puddles, accelerating. We inhale every thirty seconds as another one goes by. Now a truck revs up. Soon the strike will be over.

