

Race and Poetry: Integrating the Experimental

3:00 p.m.

**Discussion/ Race & Poetry:
Integrating the Experimental**

Do experimental poetry communities tend to segregate by race? Are poetries inclined to reflect stylistic familiarity and comfort? Are there poetry "sects" that rely on identity politics for content? Should race relations, as they affect poetry, be discussed separately from class, education, and aesthetics? Who should address such issues and what are the goals once discussion begins? Join a range of New York-based poets to discuss matters at the heart of the poetry community.

Amy King Moderator and Curator



www.amyking.org

Amy King is the author of *I'm the Man Who Loves You* and *Antidotes for an Alibi* (BlazeVOX Books), and, most recently, *Kiss Me With the Mouth of Your Country* (Dusie Press). She is the moderator for the Poetics List and the Women's Poetry Listserv, and teaches English and creative writing at Nassau Community College. She is currently editing an anthology, *The Urban Poetic*, forthcoming from Factory School.

Discussants

Tisa Bryant
(see 1:15 p.m.)

Jennifer Firestone



www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/mentoring/interview_firestone_myles.html

Jennifer Firestone is the co-editor of *Letters To Poets: Conversations About Poetics, Politics, and Community* (Saturnalia Books), forthcoming in October. She is the author of *Holiday* (Shearsman Books), *Waves* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs), and *From Flashes and Snapshot* (Sona Books). Her work has appeared in *HOW2*, *LUNGFULL!*, *Xcp: Streetnotes*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Dusie*, *580 Split*, and *Saint Elizabeth Street*, among others. She is an assistant professor teaching poetry at Eugene Lang College at The New School for Liberal Arts, and lives in Brooklyn with her husband and their infant twins.

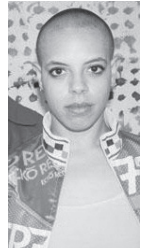
Timothy Liu



www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/114

Timothy Liu has two new books of poetry forthcoming, *Bending the Mind Around the Dream's Blown Fuse* (Talisman House Press) and *Polytheogamy* (Saturnalia Books). He lives in Manhattan.

Mendi Lewis Obadike



www.blacknetart.com

Mendi Lewis Obadike is the author of *Armor and Flesh: Poems* and the libretto for the internet opera *The Sour Thunder*. The Whitney Museum of American Art, Yale University, and The New York African Film Festival and Electronic Arts InterMix, are among the institutions that have commissioned her text-based new media art. She received a Rockefeller New Media Award to develop *TaRonda, Who Wore White Gloves*, an opera which explores black codes of conduct. She developed *Four Electric Ghosts* (an opera based on Amos Tutuola's novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and the video game *Pac-Man*) in Toni Morrison's Atelier at Princeton in the fall of 2005. Mendi lives and works with her husband Keith in the New York-metropolitan area.

Meghan Punschke



www.megpunschke.com

Meghan Punschke is the author of *Stratification* (BlazeVOX Books). She resides in New York City, and has an M.F.A. in poetry from The New School.

She is the curator and host of *Word of Mouth*, a reading series dedicated to poets and fiction/non-fiction writers. She is also the managing editor for the literary journal *Oranges & Sardines*. Her poetry was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2007, and it can be found in *MiPO*, *No Tell Motel*, *Coconut*, *Sawbuck*, and *OCHO*, among others.

Christopher Stackhouse



www.readab.com/cstackhouse.html

Christopher Stackhouse is the author of the poetry collection *Slip* (Corollary Press) and co-author of *Seismosis* (1913 Press), which features a collaboration of Stackhouse's drawings with text by writer/author/professor John Keene. He is a Cave Canem Writers Fellow and a 2005 Fellow in Poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts. He has recently successfully completed studies, granting him an M.F.A. in writing/interdisciplinary studies from Bard College in 2009.

Mathias Svalina



www.mathiassvalina.blogspot.com

Mathias Svalina is a co-editor of *Octopus* magazine and *Octopus Books*. He is the author of the chapbooks *Why I Am White* (Kitchen Press), *Creation Myths* (New Michigan Press), and *The Viral Lease* (Small Anchor Press). He is the co-author of the collaboratively written chapbooks *Or Else What*, *Asked the Flame* (SC Press) with Paula Cisewski, and *When We Broke the Microscope* (Small Fires Press) and *Chugwater* (Transmission Press), which were both written with Julia Cohen. His first book, *Destruction Myth*, is forthcoming from Cleveland State University Press next year.

Opening Thoughts, Discussion Excerpts

Amy King, Moderator and Curator:

As an editor, reading series curator, and reader of "experimental" or "avant" poetries, I find it regularly disconcerting that the writers, readers, and poets in these groupings, generally speaking, are predominantly white.

Do poets segregate solely by a difference in aesthetics?

How do we go about integrating poetry audiences, who we publish, and the writers we read? Is integration a feasible concept? Is there a way to create a collective avant-garde that is inclusive while allowing poets to maintain variations and differences?

DISCUSSANTS

Sueyeun Juliette Lee:

I'm not particularly distressed by separate communities for writing, because I think a lot of what dictates a writing community is project oriented, and I think that because of the various historically informed social positions we all inhabit, those projects are necessarily going to be different in their goals and shape. ... So, in my mind, the problem is less one of integration than it is of cross-community interest and support. And also, of some self-reflexivity. What am I ultimately, maybe even unknowingly, promoting? This is one area

where both minority and experimental poetries have a leg up on mainstream poetries.

Jennifer Firestone:

Regarding experimental poetry and race, when I asked a poet friend of mine about this, she blurted out "white people feel excluded from the experimental scene so it would make

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—Mathias Svalina

sense if people of color did." Perhaps we could benefit from critically examining the word "experimental" and who gets included in/excluded from this label. Having been immersed in San Francisco's Langpo-influenced experimental communities, I've seen that in theory this experimentalism opens doors to reading and writing, yet sometimes in practice such resistance and challenge of "the narrative" can wash away/erase identities, histories, and

yes, "stories," about and from various peoples.

Meghan Punschke:

Self-segregation is an interesting concept that I'd like to further address ... I would like to think that this is the real crux of it, but we all know that especially in the poetry community we are sort of left out in the wind until someone scoops us up. Then, your name and writing style are suddenly grouped with "the like" thus creating a new faction! This process is left to the hands of the critics it seems ... who's left out and who's allowed into the clique of the day. So, I wonder if Jennifer's question regarding who is included in experimental poetry leads to a necessary evaluation of their criteria for categorization. If the critics are responsible for how the world at large perceives and/or identifies specific types of poets, do they have a larger responsibility to blur racial lines?

Christopher Stackhouse:

Race and poetry is a rather broad subject, as the so-called races are many, mixed, and variable depending on who is asked exactly what race is. Ostensibly race as a subject nearly always collapses into the fundamental dichotomy of black and white/ dark and light. I am not particularly

sure that it is fair to discuss race, specifically, so much outside of that paradigm. ...

For me, the matter of how art, how creativity, is treated is a matter of being either for culture or against culture. Where a community, an institution, a nation stands in that regard says a great deal. If we are for culture it is difficult to diminish the creativity and developed cultural sensibilities of any others; we are against culture if we cannot appreciate the value of creativity in the works of others even when it may offend our own sensibilities. There is an incredible amount to be learned from that which we consider foreign or as some might call "other."

Mathias Svalina:

Art connects disparate ideas in new ways—it should consistently engage difference and otherness in search of innovative understandings of experience. In this respect I think the integration of race that needs to occur in so-called experimental poetry is an integration of race-focused content and experimental methodology, not one of simply multiculturalism. Much of 20th century poetic engagement with difference by white poets fails to place oneself as an other—the white poet looks out without de-centering the self. This will always render an ideology of objectification.

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