Documentary Poetry, Popular Protest and Activism:
An International Poetry and Poetics Seminar

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Organizers: Bill Dow (wdow@aup.edu), and Geoff Gilbert (ggilbert@aup.edu)

Abstracts and Speaker Biographies.

Aurélien Bellucci, *A Poetry of the Audience: Street Performances with the Jana Natya Manch*
In the Winter of 2020, the Jana Natya Manch (People’s Theatre Platform), an Indian theater group, created a new kind of performance in response to current events. The Hindu-nationalist government was then implementing a series of discriminatory laws targeting Muslims. The very constitution of India, a “sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic” (*Constitution “Preamble”), was under threat. Instead of a conventional street play, the Jana Natya Manch set up a participatory “game” or “interactive presentation” which brought together random and diverse audiences to act as a united people. This participatory performance, which was entitled *We the People of India*, made present the “people of India” who were paradoxically absent from political discussions on citizenship at the Indian Parliament, that is, discussions on their belonging to and making of the nation. The theater group set up an inclusive experiment to counter exclusionary rules and address democratic deficits. To do so, it subverted the parts of the actor and the spectator and let the latter express itself while the former’s part faded away. The participatory performance was not a representation but an “interactive presentation,” as the performance’s subtitle goes, where the audience was not involved in an “act of imitating” but in an “act of making” which resonates with the original meaning of poetry (*poesia*): they not only turned into actors but also into full-fledged creators. Thus, Indian “people’s theater” (*log natak*) produced a series of performances that lied at the intersection of political theater and popular protests and questioned common assumptions about what makes a “nation” as well as a “democracy.” Many participants were migrant workers from neighboring countries who did not have an Indian citizenship. The Jana Natya Manch’s performances speak to other kinds of political performances that involve audiences into a creation that is at once artistic and political, such as “street-corner plays” in China (*jié tou ju*), German “epic theater” (*episches Theater*), or French “people’s theater” (*théâtre populaire*).

Aurélien Bellucci (abellucci@aup.edu) is a PhD candidate at Harvard University researching political theaters in Europe and Asia and a junior lecturer at the American University of Paris teaching college writing and world drama. Parts of his work have been published in *The Brecht Yearbook* and *New Theatre Quarterly*.

Biswamit Dwibedy (bdwibedy@aup.edu) teaches in the Department of Comparative Literature and English at The American University of Paris. He has also taught creative writing and arts practice at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design, and Technology in Bangalore, India. He is the author of six collections of poetry, published in India and the United States. In 2012 he edited a dossier of Indian poetry in translation from seven different regional languages for *Aufgabe*, a literary journal published by Litmus Press, New York, and in 2015 he was a judge for the Best Translated Book Award conferred by Open Letter Books at the University of Rochester. He is also the founder and editor of Anew Print, a small press that publishes limited-edition chapbooks from writers in India and abroad.

Ryan Clark, *Appositional Writing: The Ethics of Appropriation in Documentary Poetry*
My paper examines the ethics of appropriation-based poetry and outlines what I call "appositional writing," a term to describe ethically-minded works of poetry that make use of appropriative writing methods. As authors—and documentary poets, in particular—increasingly turn to appropriative writing methods and incorporate found language into their work, it is important to examine the various ethical risks involved with the act of appropriation, both in our respective writing communities and in our classrooms or workshop spaces. Drawing upon the work of feminist moral
philosophers such as Annette Baier, Cheshire Calhoun, and Robin S. Dillon, I outline two key risks that may negatively impact an otherwise ethically-minded work of documentary poetry: 1) The Risk of Arrogance in Appropriation; & 2) The Risk of Asymmetrical Power Relations. It is important to frame an analysis of ethical considerations brought on by appropriative writing through the lens of feminist moral philosophy, in particular, given that such philosophers emphasize the roles of relationships and responsibilities, and prefer particularity to hypotheticals and generalizations. In addition to drawing on the more recent work of Mai Der Vang, Susan Briante, and others, my analysis primarily focuses on two model texts, M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* and Raymond McDaniel’s *Saltwater Empire*, both published in 2008. I argue that while Philip took great care and moral consideration in appropriating source texts, McDaniel failed to adequately recognize the potential pitfalls, which caused a great deal of backlash in the poetry community upon his book’s release. By examining both a successful model and an unsuccessful model, I will outline how documentary poets may more responsibly pursue appropriation-based projects by considering potential ethical implications through the lens of feminist moral philosophy.

Ryan Clark ([ryan.clark@waldorf.edu](mailto:ryan.clark@waldorf.edu)) is a poet who writes much of his work through a unique method of homophonic translation and is particularly interested in how poetry responds to violence and injustice. He is the author of the books *Arizona SB 1070: An Act* (Downstate Legacies, 2021) and *How I Pitched the First Curve* (Lit Fest Press, 2019), and his poetry has appeared in such journals as DIAGRAME, Painted Bride Quarterly, Yemassee, *Interim*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*. He holds an MFA from Naropa University’s Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, as well as a PhD in English Studies from Illinois State University. Most recently serving as Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Waldorf University, he currently resides in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Josh Corson (*Against Erasure: Examining Persona, Race, & Subjectivity in DocuPoetry*), Against Erasure: Examining Persona, Race, & Subjectivity in DocuPoetry

At the heart of Documentary Poetry is an opportunity to re-envision historical practices of erasure. Many contemporary poets have used Documentary Poetry, specifically the persona poem, as a method to counteract such erasure by entering the lives (and bodies) of another person in a specific time and space. Persona, while often an effective and inventive form of “witness,” carries with it social and political implications, especially when used by white poets to speak on issues of race in America. Using the work of Documentary Poets and theorists such as Jill Magi, Joseph Harrington, and Carolyn Forche, this essay examines Kenneth Goldsmith’s “The Body of Michael Brown” and Tony Hoagland’s “The Change” to critique their use of persona as a means of “witness.” By analyzing the use of persona in Goldsmith and Hoagland poems and the responses of the poetry community at large, this essay aims to offer an alternative praxis to “witnessing” racial violence in America.

Josh Corson ([joc145@pitt.edu](mailto:joc145@pitt.edu)) is a literary artist originally from Tampa, Fl. He holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Pittsburgh and currently teaches in the English Department at Hillsborough Community College. Josh has received fellowships from Tin House, Juniper Institute, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and others. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in the Notre Dame Review, Permafrost, Crab Orchard Review, december, The Offing, and others. You can engage with Josh’s work at [joshcorsonmakes.com](http://joshcorsonmakes.com)

Whitney Devos, *Documentary Poetry: An Inter-American Genre*

This paper examines several intertextual vectors between Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Archibald MacLeish, Ernesto Cardenal, and Dorothy Livesay in texts published across the hemispheric Americas from the early 1930s to 1950. This nexus, I argue, gave rise to the style of writing known as “documentary poetry”: that is, texts recognizable by their long-form, non-linear, polyvocal collage of archival materials—and an attention to social, political, national, and economic histories. Though Muriel Rukeyser is, along with Charles Reznikoff, generally considered to be the genre’s exemplar poet, MacLeish’s intertextual engagement with Bernal anticipates *The Book of the Dead* (1938) by six years and, moreover, serves as the occasion, in 1940, for what is likely the earliest reference in English language scholarship to “documentary poetry.” My aim here is not to use MacLeish to usurp
Rukeyser (or Reznikoff) as the originary figure of documentary poetry. (Indeed, it is useful to remember that an engagement with historical documents among those who would become “the modernists” was near ubiquitous following the publication of Stephen St. Vincent Benét’s 1928 John Brown’s Body, a book Rukeyser has cited as inspiration.) Rather, I reconstruct how it came to be MacLeish who traveled north, to the Canadian Livesay, and south to the Sandinista revolutionary who would become the author of Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems (1980). Livesay’s and Cardenal’s engagement with MacLeish during the postwar period helps us rethink the history and periodization of documentary poetry as a twentieth century phenomenon as present in Spanish language literature as it is in English, and as extant throughout the hemisphere as in the United States. In short, documentary poetry is, as the title of my paper claims, an “inter-American genre.”

Whitney Celeste DeVos (wdevos@ucsc.edu) has a PhD from UC Santa Cruz, and has written about, edited, and translated Latin American and Latinx poetry (particularly documentary poetry, ecopoetry, and social movement poetry)

Celia Galey, Jackson Mac Low’s Performance Poetry: a Living Archive
Discussing the performatif dimension of Jackson Mac Low’s poetry from a historical perspective leads to question the distinctions between documental, archival, literary and experimental textuality, situation and context. Literary, newspaper, and science articles, together with personal letters or conversations, are treated as a living archive that he rewrites, both debunking the literary canon and deactivating documental function by undermining informational content and linear structure. Both the I-Ching in the 1950s and A Million Random Digits in the 1980s (primarily used by scientists for nuclear weapons experiments) contributed to randomize the process. These far from arbitrary tools document the changing landscapes of the poet’s spiritual life, American society and politics from the 1950s to the 1980s. The resulting “poems” are scores for performance: rather than containing poetic value, they serve a prospective documental function, encouraging heterotopian, inclusive communities to form hinging on their ephemeral performances. To be authentically Mac Lowian, these polyphonic, an-archie, unrepeatable events should follow specified principles and alter social relations through first-hand experience. Authenticity no longer qualifies the document but, rather, the investigation of past context and possible present and future worlds which occur in an interstice that can be neither documented, captured nor repeated.

Célia Galey (galey.celia@gmail.com) is Associate Professor of American literature at the Université Gustave Eiffel. Her research in performance studies focuses on American poetry and art of the 20th and 21st centuries, addressing the challenges intermedia art and literature present to traditional conservation and curatorial strategies. Her book on the places and non-places of Jackson Mac Low’s performance scores will be published by the Presses du Réel in the coming year.

Jo A. Giardini, Surveillance Autobiography and Dissident Reading
In my paper, I examine two recent books which use documentary strategies to interrogate governmental narratives about self-formation, Mercedes Eng’s Prison Industrial Complex Explodes and Aaron Vidaver’s Counter-Interpellation. I position each work within globalized forms of capitalist statecraft, in the local context of the Marxist-oriented Kootenay School of Writing, and in relation to Juliana Spahr’s work on ‘movement literature’ in Du Bois’s Telegram. In their work, Eng and Vidaver critically engage with what James Scott, in Seeing Like a State, has described as “state projects of legibility and simplification”—techniques of data management and biometric organization which create economically and politically normative appropriations of bildung. Eng presents government documents related to prison management practices, and records from her father’s immigration and incarceration in order to examine how racialization and ascriptions of criminality guide citizenship practices and attendant ideals of national belonging. Vidaver’s book transcribes all available and extant institutional documentation of his life—including adoption files, school evaluations, and hospital records—and thereby provides a multi-perspectival but flattened auto-biographical portrait. Both books detourn lyric ideals of personal confession, and question the degree to which a sense of selfhood or the idea of the ‘personal’ can ever be separated from larger frameworks of subjection.
Using writing on interpellation and encounter by Denise Riley and Franz Fanon, I argue that Eng and Vidaver’s archival practices highlight how a collective ‘we’ is blocked by state documents’ insistence on individualized metrics, but might be reactivated through a poetics of resistant and dissident reading which deliberately re-presents state surveillance (carceral, administrative, educational, etc.) in such a manner as to insist on its historicity and depth—its meaning as necessary dialectical, if apparently surfeit with surface.

Jo A. Giardini (jgiardi1@jhu.edu) is a postdoctoral fellow in the Johns Hopkins Society of Fellows in the Humanities, working jointly with the Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Winston Tabb Special Collections Research Center. Their research focuses on twentieth-century poetics, communist and separatist movements, literary genre, and the intersection of political economy, racial capitalism, and the history of sexuality. They received their PhD from Johns Hopkins’ Department of English in 2022, with a dissertation titled Separations: Communalist and Alter-Urban Imaginaries in 1970s American Literature. As a fellow, they will be pursuing research on the closure of Johns Hopkins’ Gender Identity Clinic in the late 1970s, and the importance of this clinic to local and global trans histories.

Andrés Guilló, An Approach to Rap as Documentary Poetry
The dynamics of rap display a deep-rooted interconnection between notions of individuality and collectivity. This may be observed, for instance, in the complex representation of subjectivities within song texts in which the “I” behind a speaking voice may stand for individual and collective identities simultaneously. Through this individual speaking voice, rap artists often merge representations of their personal experiences with collective experiences of the communities to which they belong and that may very well have been witnessed by them or other members of their community. In this last sense, literary critics could easily be tempted to categorize certain raps as samples of documentary literature, if one considers the delineation of this specific genre provided in Clas Zilliacus’s “Radical Naturalism: First-Person Documentary Literature” (1979). The questioning of “[t]he individual hero [who] is dethroned in favor of a collective protagonist” (Zilliacus, 1979:102) and especially the development of the genre proposed by soviet writer Sergey Tretyakov, who favored an active author “who does not merely observe and inform but also takes part” (Zilliacus, 1979:108) in the action which s/he describes, acquire significant relevance in relation to the genre of rap. In fact, rap artists at times seem to take on the role of neighborhood reporters, who tell stories about events that develop in African American ghettos which would otherwise remain unheard. As notorious rap artist Eazy-E put it: “we’re underground reporters, we tell about […] the streets and everything that goes on […] around in Compton, our area” (1991). The aim of this talk is to perform a textual analysis of rap songs, in order to identify them as samples of documentary poetry. These will be argued to function as voices from the margins that report on a truth that was largely ignored in North American society for a good part of the 20th century.

Andrés Guilló (a.gseuthe@gmail.com) currently holds an associate professor position at the Universidad Antonio de Nebrija in Madrid, and he is also a PhD candidate at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). Being close to finishing his doctorate on the liminal nature of African American rap, his research interests mainly focus on African American literature and folklore, and on liminality studies. He has participated in numerous conferences presenting papers on these and other subjects, and, as a member of the Limen Research group (UAM), he has founded and co-organized four editions of the Postgraduate Seminar on Liminality Studies.

Amir Hussain, Poetic Pasts in Muriel Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead”
First published in 1938, Muriel Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead” has not ceased to arouse critical and literary attention and debate. The documentary poem sequence merges language Rukeyser found in the archives surrounding the Gauley Tunnel Tragedy of 1930-1935, which took place in West Virginia and is recognized as the worst industrial disaster in United States history, with lyrical language one traditionally expects from poetry. The poem is cited and recognized as a crucial example of documentary poetry and poetics, such as John Lowney and Mark Nowak have recognized.
Moreover, scholars such as Michael Thurston, Walter Kalaidjian, Tim Dayton, and Sarah Ehlers have done work focusing on the documentary poem’s relevance for modernist, Marxist, and poststructural criticism. In this paper, I argue that Rukeyser’s documentary poem introduces and grapples with an underacknowledged problem in the leftist narrative of emancipation: not as Lenin put it, “What is to be done?” but rather “What is to be done with the past?” The paper situates some of the key critical debates surrounding the poem, beginning with avant-garde poet and Marxist John Wheelwright’s 1938 review of the poem in the *Parisian Review*. As I read it, Rukeyser’s poem is not one of a narrative of “emancipation” (Wheelwright) which “moves toward a transnationalist vision of socialist redemption” (Lowney). Counter-intuitively, the poem and its documentary poetics troubles emancipatory narratives, asking readers, critics, and poets to confront not so much a possible future as the continued presence of the past. Indeed, for Rukeyser, it is the distinct work of the “life of poetry” to revive such forgotten yet persistent histories like that of the Gauley Tunnel Tragedy. As she remarks in *The Life of Poetry*, “There is also, in any history, the buried, the wasted, and the lost” and that for these aspects of history “there is and has been a great submergence,” but it is a submergence which poetry in particular can help to remember.

Amir Hussain (Huss0200@umn.edu) is an independent writer with interests primarily in comparative and transnational approaches to poetry, Oscar Wilde studies, as well as questions of poetry’s historicity and translatability. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Emory University, where his dissertation presented a comparative poetic history of Oscar Wilde’s imprisonment and the influence of his final poem begun in Reading prison. He comes to his research with his own literary and transnational background, holding an MFA in Creative Writing and having participated in foreign exchange fellowships in Germany.

Shiv Kotecha, *Documentary, Fakery, Reality—On Cecilia Gentili, Trisha Low and Steven Zulanski*

This paper reads the various documentary gestures of three books to query how poetic license and the performance of realism may engage municipal and/or transnational conversations regarding political resistance and visibility, specifically in regard to race, gender, and sex. In her epistolary memoir *Fallas*, NYC-based trans activist Cecilia Gentili pens 8 letters to people from her hometown of Gálvez, Argentina, including her mother and best friend/daughter of her rapist. “I know I am challenging the fake reality where you all live at peace,” she writes, “[This] isn’t a book about my behavior. It is about unmasking the behavior of all those around me.” I look to Gentili’s retooling of transcription, oral testimony, and drag and the case *Fallas* makes for “fake realities” in the wake of recent debates on trans visibility. I will read the Asian-American poet Trisha Low’s book-length essay *Socialist Realism* for the ways that it questions the reader’s limits of understanding race, as well as that of political and aesthetic commitments, via the “personal essay” following the logic of performance and what Low has herself referred to as an operation of “self drag.” Namely, I will identify how Low’s text presents an argument about literal vs. literary modes of reading, i.e., what’s real vs. what’s *realism*. My last example will be Steven Zulanski’s *Bribery*, a book-length dramatic monologue whose speaker confesses to committing hundreds of New York City’s unsolved crimes. Appropriating his examples from public NYPD archives, the speaker “commits” theft, home invasion, murder, sexual assault, only to be interrupted by the anxieties and neuroses (of speaking to friends; loving one’s partner; paying rent) that plague the poet behind them. I’ll use the transgressions and obscenities that a book like *Bribery* formalizes in verse to think through the moral contradictions made possible by using documentary as storytelling.

Shiv Kotecha (shivkotecha@gmail.com) is a writer, critic, curator, and editor from New York NY.

Abigail Lang, « notre tradition “objectiviste” », or How the Document Can Extend Poetry. (*Gleize, Quintane, Leibovici*)

In a short introduction to Frank Leibovici’s *Portraits Chinois* (2006), a poetic document composed of texts found on the websites of political groups and international news agencies, Jean-Marie Gleize writes that this gesture prolongs “our ‘objectivist’ tradition.” My primary aim will be to unpack this expression by briefly retracing the reception of the Objectivist poets in France and delineating the
interpretations and uses made of Reznikoff’s *Testimony* which have come to generate a local tradition. The first-person plural (*our* ‘objectivist’ tradition) may be taken to refer, among others, to a community of writers, scholars and artists that Gleize federated at the Centre d’études poétique at the ENS Lyon where he taught (1999-2009) and in the pages of the formally experimental and politically radical magazine *Ninoques* (1990-) for which Nathalie Quintane has long been an editor. Indeed, Gleize, Quintane and Leibovici are among the foremost representatives of that community, and they can be viewed as offering different answers to shared circumstances. Considering the uses Gleize, Quintane and Leibovici make of documents in their writing I will seek to characterize their positions on poetics and politics and to place these within a larger historical and international context.

**Abigail Lang** (Abigail.lang@wanadoo.fr) is Associate Professor of North American literature and translation at Université Paris Cité. She is the author of *La Conversation transatlantique* (Les presses du réel, 2021), an account of the exchanges between French and US poets after 1968, and the co-editor of several scholarly volumes including *Archives sonores de la poésie* (Les presses du réel, 2019) and *Modernist Legacies. Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry* (Palgrave, 2015). With Vincent Broqua and Olivier Brossard, she is a co-organizer of the *Poets & Critics* program and of the *Double Change* bilingual poetry series. With Michel Murat and Céline Pardo, she runs the *Archives sonores de poésie* project which promotes scholarly attention to poetry in performance by assembling an online archive of poetry recordings in French. A translator of anglophone poetry into French, she is the author of two books with Thalia Field, *A Prank of Georges* (Essay Press, 2010) and *Leave to Remain. Legends of Janus* (Dalkey Archive, 2020), which was recently adapted as an audio production by sound designer Ben Williams (2022).

**Franck Leibovici, des œuvres-outils**

« utiliser un rembrandt comme planche à repasser pour une chemise froissée est probablement la pire idée et pour le rembrandt, et pour la chemise. utiliser un dispositif d’écriture poétique pour traverser 35000 pages de procès sera peut-être plus félice. à quelles conditions, sous quelles contraintes, pour quelles finalités et pour quels publics ? telles seront les questions que nous poserons ». 


**Marie Lienard-Yeterian, Reginald Dwayne Betts’s Felon: The Shahid (Witness) speaks of rivers beyond**

In keeping with the originality and artistic/creative side of the conference topic and format, the presentation would unfold in a two-fold manner. One the one hand, I would examine the different poetic and rhetorical strategies used by Reginald Dwayne Bett in his collection of poems *Felon* about life in and after prison. For example, I would deal with the use of aporia and ellipsis as illustrated in the redacted texts of the collection. I would also address his use of Arabic poetic form ghazal (which relates to the Arabic word for “thread”) as Betts also adopted the Arabic name Shahid (witness) in prison. On the other hand, I would respond to Betts’s work with some short poems of my own, as a way to testify to the performative and transformative effect of a work the documentary side of which aims to impact our perception of race and the Other/otherness. The reference to Langston Hughes in my title alludes to the prophetic side of Betts’s vision which might signal a new renaissance for African-American poetry.
Marie Lienard-Yeterian (Marie.LIENARD-YETERIAN@UNIV-cotedazur.fr) is Full Professor of American literature and cinema at Université Côte d’Azur in Nice since 2012. Former Assistant Professor at École Polytechnique (Paris, France) and Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, USA). Visiting professorships at UNIL and EPFL (Lausanne, Switzerland). She has written articles and books on the gothic and grotesque modes, and on the representation of the American South on Screen, and a full-length study of William Faulkner’s work with Hollywood titled Faulkner et le cinéma. Her recent publications include fiction under her pen name Thomas Thérèse: Ombres et murmures (short stories) and Autopsy of a War (a pandemic novel). She has published a bilingual piece titled Bordercrossing/Traversées in E-REA (Aix-Marseille University, special issue on creative writing, Fall 2022). She presented a creative nonfiction essay titled “Dispatch from Nice: Life in the Time of Corona” at the International Symposium on Pandemic and Life-Writing organized by Texas Tech University in April 2023. She is currently working on book combining texts and photographs submitted to Actes Sud.

K. Bellamy Mitchell, Unsettling Racialized Regimes of Documentation in Divya Victor’s Curb

This paper examines the formal interventions that several contemporary poets use to examine, by rewriting, the racialized policing of displacement and migration at the level of the bureaucratic strictures of nation-state as well as the interpersonal violence of everyday nationalist encounter. I focus on Divya Victor’s Kith and Curb as part of a larger archive of contemporary poetry—including the work of Solmaz Sharif, Bhanu Kapil—which manipulates the nationalistic enunciations, rituals, and paperwork that occur on (and create) geopolitical and social borders and seams of affiliation and exclusion—margins with deadly consequences for those who migrate across them. Victor’s Curb reckons with the absurdity of the bureaucracies of immigration, the sacrifices that migrants must make in order to become legible to the nation state, what can be lost in that translation onto and into paper, and the ways racialized bodies made so legible are then often misread with deadly consequences. Victor reads the legal proceedings and news coverage of murders of South Asians in public spaces in the United States, alongside DMS coordinates, soundscapes, textures of pavement, metal, and the grass of suburban lawns. She plays with the marks of language and varied pronunciation that are often over-read and shaded into place and race: the dot and the line emerging as bindi, target, and locus of slur, as well as diacritical mark and borderline. Victor by inhabiting the layers of relationship, recognition, and complicity that purport to “naturalize” this deadly quotidian. Victor, and the other poets discussed, use the tactics familiar to documentary poetics in order to open deadly and differential contours of navigating public space, and to illuminate, an accounting of colonial myth of the United States of America that is in Victor’s words, “responsible for the force of feeling and action” that serves to justify murder.

Bellamy Mitchell (bellamy@uchicago.edu) is a PhD Candidate at the University of Chicago in the Committee on Social Thought and the Department of English Language and Literature, where they are a Fellow in the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality. They research the poetics and politics of apologies and apologetic forms (confessions, acknowledgments, and monuments) in 20th and 21st Century American and Canadian literatures. Their creative and critical writing has been published in Gulf Coast, Prodigal, and the Chicago Review.

Mark Nowak, Slo-mo Doc-Po: Writing the Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol

Nowak will premiere excerpts from his new abecedarian documentary poem on the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States capitol. In addition to reading these new prose poems, he will discuss a wide range of archival materials (including digital sources like Trump’s Twitter archive, screenshots from media “live cams” on the day of the insurrection, Google maps, webpages from government archives, etc.) used in his documentary practice. Nowak will also address inherent dangers in neoliberal documentary praxis by offering a brief critique of Errol Morris’s American Dharma, a documentary film about former Trump’s chief strategist and former Breitbart News executive chairman Steve Bannon.
Mark Nowak's (mnowak@me.com) books include Shut Up Shut Down, Coal Mountain Elementary, and Social Poetics, all from Coffee House Press. He recently edited Coronavirus Haiku (Kenning Editions, 2021), guest-edited the “Why We Write” issue of Michigan Quarterly Review (Fall 2021), and wrote an introduction to Celeste Tisdale’s When the Smoke Cleared: Attica Prison Poems and Journal (Duke University Press, 2022). A native of Buffalo, Nowak is the founding director of the Worker Writers School (https://www.workerwriters.org).

Sophie Rashmuhl, Amy Uyematsu: ‘A Yellow Power Advocate Turned Poet’ ‘determin[ed] to create beauty / in defiance of barbed wire jails’

Amy Uyematsu first became known for her essay “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America” in 1969, and her co-editing of Roots, the first Asian American reader put together for the new UCLA Asian American Studies Center, where she worked from 1969 to 1974. From the very beginning and simultaneously with her militant prose, she wrote poetry as a means of protest and activism. Poetry and activism were two sides of the same coin to her, even if she had to stop her political organizing strictly speaking after she became a single working mother. More recently, she has taken up again political activism after Donald Trump became president, “attending rallies and marches, and joining in on activities that are trying to help families being detained at our southern border”. In “Pandemic Postscript: Or Are We Too Visible Again,” she denounces the recent outbursts of racist violence against Asian Americans during the Covid-19 crisis. Throughout, as she told us, “what has remained consistent” over the last 50 years in her work - six books of poetry - “is [her] raising political issues through poetry,” either on the page or in her readings, in which she “make[s] a point to include political poems in [her] selection.” My presentation will endeavor to show how her activism and poetry have been intricately interwoven from the beginning and how both have evolved. One way Uyematsu’s poetic work has been militant is through her commitment to document and denounce injustice wherever it is, starting with the historical landmark trauma of the Japanese internment camps during WWII. In the same way, her poems protest against racism and sexism, which she tracks even within her own community. As she addresses the silence of her grandparents and parents, and through them of some of the Japanese immigrants to the US and their children, about their traumatic experience in the camps and after, her poetry enables her to voice and share what it has meant to be part of that community and yet cut off from her roots. We will explore the way she has documented her community from the inside, or spoken from “within the Veil,” as W.E.B. Du Bois so aptly put it in The Souls of Black Folk. As a child of the sixties, Black Power, and the Movement, she will “say it loud” though, determined to testify and document the history of her community as well as her story, asserting confidently the various facets of her intersectional identity as Yellow Power activist, sansei, Asian American, mother, woman.

Sophie Rachmuhl (sophie.rachmuhl@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr) is an Associate Professor of English and American Studies in the English and Applied Modern Languages Departments (LEA) at Université Bordeaux Montaigne. She was Chair of the Applied Modern Languages Department for 10 years until 2022. She has been researching the Los Angeles 20th century poetry scene since the late 1980s, and made a 93 min. documentary on the poetry scene in 1988 entitled Innerscapes: 10 Portraits of L.A. Poets. She has published A Higher Form of Politics: The Rise of a Poetry Scene, Los Angeles, 1950-1990 (Otis ooks/Seismicity Editions and Beyond Baroque Foundation, Los Angeles, California, 2015.) She has also translated and edited African-American Los Angeles poet Kamau Daood (Griot Notes from L.A./Notes d’un griot de L.A., Kamau Daood, 2012) as part of a collaborative translation, with which she is now working on translating Los Angeles Japanese-American poet Amy Uyematsu.

David Reckford, A documentary turn in poems referencing geography: from Langston Hughes's “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” to John Ashbery's “Into The Dusk-Charged Air”

This paper will affirm that John Ashbery’s poem, “Into the Dusk-Charged Air”, from his 1962 book Rivers and Mountains, while seeming to be a kind of report on the current weather conditions affecting the world’s rivers (thus linking timelessness to the now) contains subtle links to Langston Hughes’s 1921 poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”. The Mississippi is an extremely ancient geographical feature, but when Langston Hughes says, “I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans”, he evokes African-American culture, as well as events just two generations earlier and of great currency for his moment of writing. He also opens a door to experiments perpetuating political-romantic poetic usages. By downplaying the overt symbolic dimensions of his remarks on geography, and insistently using the documentary tone, John Ashbery effectively opens the text up to more interpretive possibilities. Like his rivers, John Ashbery’s poem covers more territories and does so in a more whispering mode (compared to Langston Hughes’s high trumpets). The critique and the homage dovetail in the later text. And the convergence could conceivably be accidental. Ashberian poetics, especially such ambiguities of intention, constitute a major source of contemporary innovative poetic practices. As “Into the Dusk-Charged Air” is a list poem, it ties John Ashbery in with the poetry of his tribe, the poets of the New York School. It can be compared to Kenneth Koch’s “The Boiling Water” or “One Train May Hide Another”. It also contributes to setting the stage for list poems containing more explicitly political statements like Bernadette Mayer’s 1987 poem “The Tragic Condition of the Statue of Liberty” or Charles Bernstein’s “Strike” (2011).

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Carlos Soto Román, *Rescuing Carlos Droguett’s lost manuscript: Caceria de mujeres*

Writers write. Whether for pleasure or for commitment. Often out of necessity, because it is unavoidable for them. But there are certain occasions when writers must stop writing. Sometimes to take active part in the events that concern them, some others to give room so different voices can express for themselves. This was the case of Carlos Droguett, a Chilean writer and novelist of outstanding trajectory, who in 1974, a year after the beginning of the vicious Chilean dictatorship, volunteered to work for the Pro-Peace Committee, a human rights organization created by a fraction of the Catholic Church that subscribed to liberation theology, to protect the life and physical integrity of people persecuted by the civil-military dictatorship. There, helping to draft appeals and habeas corpus, he had first-hand access to the testimonies of victims who had suffered the brutality of the repression. Confronted with the horror, Carlos Droguett decided not to write about these events. According to him, in the face of the atrocities, it is no longer possible to write literature by taking ideas from reality, but only to present it as it is, in the voices of its own protagonists. This article, then, presents the work of Carlos Droguett entitled *Caceria de Mujeres* (Women Hunt), a text of 25 typewritten pages, unpublished until today, where the author gives an account of some of the bloodiest cases of abuse and torture of the dictatorship, where the target was exclusively women, through letters and testimonies of the victims themselves.

Carlos Soto-Román (carlos.soto.roman@gmail.com) is a poet, translator, and pharmacist. He holds an M.A. in Bioethics from the University of Pennsylvania and studied at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in Naropa. While living in the United States, he was a member of the New Philadelphia Poets Collective and obtained an artist’s residency at the MacDowell Colony. He has participated in numerous readings, symposia, talks and festivals in Chile, the U.S. and Europe. He was an instructor in Stetson University’s MFA of the Americas and he actively collaborates in various visual and musical poetry projects, including the bands Radio Magallanes and Sonora Guantánamo. In the United States he has published *Philadelphia’s Notebooks* (Otoliths, 2011), *Chile Project: [Re-Classified]* (Gauss PDF, 2013), *The Exit Strategy* (Belladonna, 2014), *Alternative Set of Procedures* (Corally Press, 2014), *Bluff* (Commune Editions, 2018), *Common Sense* (Make Now Press, 2019) and 11 (forthcoming in 2023 by UDP). In the U.K. he has published *Nature of Objects* (Pamenar Press, 2019), and in Chile, he has published *La Marcha de los Quiltros* (1999), *Huaki Miemo* (2007), *Cambio y Fuera* (2009), 11 (2017), *Densidad (d=m/V)* (2018) and *Antuco* (2019) in collaboration with Carlos Cardani Parra. He
Álvaro Seiça, Veiling and Unveiling: Poems that Protest by Erasing Documents

Erasure is a set of material, literary, and visual composition techniques that has gained global momentum in the past two decades, amid the post-Web context. This impulse to erase is a result, in part, of the contemporary social and technological context: the abundance of online information, databases and digital archives that host creative works, and social network sites. Moreover, it is a result of creative practices fostered by this overflow of sources via appropriation, copying, reusing, and remixing. Erasure is often employed with formalist, rewriting, and poetic purposes, but also with political concerns that tie it to social inequality and silenced individuals. As Solmaz Sharif stresses in “The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure” (2013), “the proliferation of erasure as a poetic tactic in the United States is happening alongside a proliferation of our awareness of it as a state tactic. And, it seems, many erasure projects today hold these things as unrelated.” This talk focuses on works that hold these things as related, by exploring erasure as a political strategy that

Lauren Russell, First Person Second?: A Writerly Reckoning with Uneasy Implications for the Author in Documentary and Investigative Poetics Projects

What are the ethical and emotional implications for a writer grappling with complicated (hi)stories?

Lauren Russell will discuss two recent works, starting with her book Descent, which emerged from Russell’s reading of the diaries of her great-great-grandfather, a Confederate veteran who fathered children by three women he had once enslaved, including the poet’s great-great-grandmother. Drawing on a deep archive of diaries, records, news clippings, oral histories, and photographs, as well as secondary sources, Russell uses multiple approaches, procedures, and forms to juxtapose her own 21st-century perspective with the imagined voices of her ancestors. But, Russell asks, how is she herself implicated as the legacy of slavery bleeds into the present, forcing her to grapple with her own relationship to race and history in the era of police brutality, Black Lives Matter, and the ascent of a President Trump? The question of accountability becomes even more resounding when the author’s personal archive is part of the history she is intervening in—as in Russell’s current book-length manuscript, “A Window That Can Neither Open nor Close.” In the book’s second half, she contextualizes, interrogates, and transforms narratives of her life imposed by others—in psychological evaluations, lab reports, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—while also reckoning with the complicated history of autism spectrum diagnosis and how that larger history has impacted her personal history, identity, and life trajectory. Finally, in this paper Russell hopes to touch on her approach to teaching documentary and investigative poetics practices in a first-year research writing class and to consider practices for guiding undergraduate student writers as they navigate their own positionality in relationship to source texts, history, and poetry.

Lauren Russell (russe556@msu.edu) is a poet and writer in hybrid forms. She is the author of Descent (Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2020), winner of the Poetry Society of America’s 2021 Anna Rabinowitz Award, and What’s Hanging on the Hush (Ahsahta Press, 2017). Her third full-length book, A Window That Can Neither Open nor Close: Poems, Plots, Chance, is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions in 2024, as part of the Multiverse series. Russell has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Cave Canem, and the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and residencies from Millay Arts, Ucross, Yaddo, and MacDowell, among others. Her work has appeared in various places, including The New York Times Magazine, the Academy of American Poets’ Poem-a-Day, and The Brooklyn Rail. She is an assistant professor in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State University and is director of the RCAH Center for Poetry at MSU.

Alvaro Seiça, Veil and Unveil: Poems that Protest by Erasing Documents

Erasure is a set of material, literary, and visual composition techniques that has gained global momentum in the past two decades, amid the post-Web context. This impulse to erase is a result, in part, of the contemporary social and technological context: the abundance of online information, databases and digital archives that host creative works, and social network sites. Moreover, it is a result of creative practices fostered by this overflow of sources via appropriation, copying, reusing, and remixing. Erasure is often employed with formalist, rewriting, and poetic purposes, but also with political concerns that tie it to social inequality and silenced individuals. As Solmaz Sharif stresses in “The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure” (2013), “the proliferation of erasure as a poetic tactic in the United States is happening alongside a proliferation of our awareness of it as a state tactic. And, it seems, many erasure projects today hold these things as unrelated.” This talk focuses on works that hold these things as related, by exploring erasure as a political strategy that
encompasses critique and resistance. It discusses how this form of political poetry uses appropriation and erasure as material procedure, together with themes of injustice that go beyond formalist, conceptual or aesthetic trends. By erasing documents, or fictionalizing erasure, authors have been writing poems on top of existing material with the aim of drawing attention to social injustice, systemic violence, racial profiling, police brutality, state repression or mass incarceration, censorship, state and corporate surveillance. These poems become sites of resistance and protest. Erasure becomes a political act that seeks to veil and unveil to resist and protest. The talk will contrast works by non-Anglophone authors from Chile, China, and Taiwan with Anglophone authors who have dual cultural background: Carlos Soto Román Chile Project: [Re-Classified] (2013) and 11 (2017), Winnie Soon’s The Unerasable Characters (2020-21), Hung Hung’s “Those Vanished Sensitive Words” (2021), Solmaz Shari’s Look (2016), Reginald Betts’s Felon (2019), and M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong! (2008). Zong! is exemplary in that the material marks left by the erasure of text act in tandem with the obliterated human lives and their stories, which NourbeSe’s work uncovers—the author deletes and isolates the legal text of the court record Gregory vs. Gilbert, the only account left from a brutal act of murder perpetrated in 1781 by the ship captain of the slave boat Zong, who “ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning so that the ship’s owners could collect insurance monies.” It is at this juncture that the use of erasure in documentary poetry becomes promising, as poets recreate the dryness of language in legal (public or secret) documents to unveil poems that hold power accountable and rescue hidden histories.

Álvaro Seiça (alvaro.seica@uib.no) is a Portuguese writer and researcher based in Bergen, Norway. I am currently an Associate Professor in Digital Culture at the University of Bergen (UiB). Previously, I was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow at UiB, a visiting researcher in Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a postdoctoral fellow in Materialities of Literature at the University of Coimbra, where I investigated the poetics and politics of erasure within the EU-funded project “ARTDEL: The Art of Deleting.” I hold a PhD in Digital Culture from UiB, with the thesis “setInterval(): Time-Based Readings of Kinetic Poetry” (2017). My publications include the poetry books Supressão (2019), upoesia (2019), Previsão para 365 poemas (2018), Ensinando o espaço (2017), Ô (2014) and Permafrost (2012), and the scholarly book Transdução (2017). My current research interests lie at the intersection of 20th-century Portuguese book censorship, poetry, and digital humanities.

Naomi Toth, Reginald Dwayne Betts: writing, redacting and fighting mass incarceration in the United States

Naomi Toth (naomi.toth@parisnanterre.fr) is Maitre de conférences in Anglophone literature at U Paris Nanterre.

Lisa Waller and Jessica Wilkinson, A poetic approach to understanding journalists’ experiences of covering institutional child sexual abuse.

This paper explores the potential role/s that poetry can play in understanding journalism, especially when it comes to conceptualising what it might be like for journalists to bear witness to traumatic issues and events on behalf of their audiences over a sustained period. We introduce a project currently being undertaken by a group of Australian creative-practice researchers (a mix of journalists and poets), who are deploying techniques of ‘poetic transcription’ (see Glesne, 1997) and ‘poetic inquiry’ (see Faulkner 2017, Galvin & Prendergast 2016) in order to process and analyse research interviews with journalists who covered the recent Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and related stories. The paper argues that non-fiction poetry can play a significant role in journalism research, not only through disseminating research findings beyond, and as a complement to, ‘traditional’ academic texts, but also by opening a creative space for the investigation of the vivid details of the situated practices of journalism as they are lived in real life. To date, despite a growing body of work documenting the importance and impact of research in the form of poetry, applying a poetic lens is rare in journalism research. Yet we argue that this approach can have far-reaching epistemological and ontological implications as we are led to consider such
things as the relations between fact, feeling and imagination, or between reportage and art; the undecorations of the language we use to represent the world; different ways of perceiving and ‘knowing’ that world; the participatory role of the scholar/journalist/poet in relation to subject matter; and the benefits of transdisciplinary collaboration in the research process.

Lisa Waller (lisa.waller@rmit.edu.au) is Professor of Digital Communication in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University. Her research investigates how the news media shapes society, from its relationship with policymaking to its roles in local communities and the justice system. Lisa is the co-author of Local Journalism in a Digital World (2017, Palgrave Macmillan) and The Dynamics of News Media and Indigenous Policy in Australia (2017, Intellect). She has taught and researched different aspects of Australian news media and journalism since 2006, following twenty years’ experience as a journalist at some of Australia’s leading newspapers. One of her current projects concentrates on the role of media, journalism and social media activism in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Jessica L. Wilkinson, Dealing with Difficulty: Writing Questionable Characters through Poetic Biography
As a (poetic) biographer who has dedicated considerable time to wading through archives and other research materials, I have often found myself wanting my biographical subjects to reveal themselves not only to be interesting, intelligent, accomplished, but to be “good people” also, perhaps sharing my own artistic and political views of the world. Occasionally, however, I have been confronted with information that has stopped me short. And I have asked myself ‘How do I deal with that?’ Marion Davies, for instance, gave her child with William Randolph Hearst to her sister to raise, to protect Hearst’s reputation (he was married to another woman). More troubling were Percy Grainger’s racial views—he thought that blue eyes, blonde hair and rosy cheeks were the preferable human complexion, and that blue-eyed composers were superior; he even took photographs of the eyes of composers (with their names written on small rectangles of paper, stuck to their foreheads) as a way to prove or document this theory. And George Balanchine’s name is frequently associated with poor treatment of female dancers (though many have jumped to his defence). Of course, life stories are much more complex than a singular focus on such details will allow, and a biographer must consider all angles. It is too easy, also, for a biographer to cast moral aspersions on such aspects to cover their own reputation. Rather, as this paper will discuss, I am more interested in how poetry’s many affordances have enabled me to approach difficult material in ways that adequately distance my own moral judgement from the text and instead encourage a more active readerly engagement with facts and/or ambiguous information.

Jessica L. Wilkinson (jessica.wilkinson@rmit.edu.au) has published three verse biographies, Marionette: A Biography of Miss Marion Davies (Vagabond 2012), Suite for Percy Grainger (Vagabond 2014) and Music Made Visible: A Biography of George Balanchine (Vagabond, 2019). She co-edited Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry (Hunter Publishers, 2016) and Memory Book: Portraits of Older Australians in Poetry and Watercolours (Hunter Publishers, 2021). She is also the founding editor of Rabbit: a journal for nonfiction poetry. She has written numerous essays, articles and book chapters on poetic/verse biography and documentary poetry. She is Associate Professor in Creative Writing at RMIT University, Melbourne.