

From Berkeley to **Black Mountain:**

Avant-**Garde** American Poetry, 1948-1965

In her introduction to *Unpacking My Library: Writers and Their Books*, a collection of interviews with writers and academics about their private libraries, scholar and book historian Leah Price makes the aphoristic assertion that “[t]o expose a bookshelf is to compose a self.” Of the many bookshelves that line the walls of my apartment, the one that most reflects my “self” is roughly two-feet-by-four, covered in a chipped layer of lemon yellow paint, and reserved for my “special” books—special not because of their rarity, though a few are difficult to come by, but because of their significance for me as someone who writes and writes *about* poetry. This secondhand case sits next to my desk and houses some of my favorite editions—Stephen Mitchell’s translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Selected Poems*, *The Poems of Paul Celan*, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*—insuring that the books I turn to again and again when I want to be reminded of the strange beauty that words arranged in a particular order can evoke are only an arm’s reach away. Though the shelf is packed with everything from the German and British Romantics to several slim volumes by some of my favorite contemporary poets, there is one category in particular that is best represented here: mid-century American avant-garde verse.

There are a great many more poets and books that could be included in a collection of twentieth-century avant-garde American poetry. The Objectivist poets, for instance, though they take up plenty of space on my “special” bookcase, are not represented in these pages. Similarly, I haven’t included in my bibliography the many volumes by New York School poets that line my shelves: Frank O’Hara’s *Collected Poems* and the small City Lights Pocket Poets Series edition of his *Lunch Poems*, *The Collected Poems* of James Schuyler and of Barbara Guest, Ted Berrigan’s *Sonnets*, a lovely and prized first edition of Joseph Ceravolo’s *Spring in this World of Poor Mutts* (the first book to win the Frank O’Hara Prize for Poetry in 1968), and too many books by the prolific John Ashbery to list. What I’m offering for your consideration instead is a more specific, “sub sub” collection within my larger collection of American avant-garde poetry and my even *larger* collection of plain old poetry (which includes everything from Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* to *Intimate Kisses: The Poetry of Sexual Pleasure*, a gag gift that a friend picked up for me at Baltimore’s Book Thing).

I was initially tempted to subtitle this collection “My New American Poetry” for two reasons. First, because it is clearly shaped by Donald Allen’s editorial selections in his seminal anthology *The New American Poetry*, but also reflects my more specific tastes and predilections. And second, as a nod to Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson*, a brilliant account of Howe’s intellectual and emotional engagement with the “Belle of Amherst’s” hand-scrawled manuscripts. Part of an experimental tradition in scholarship which includes such monographs as Charles Olson’s *Call Me Ishmael*, a paean to his fellow New Englander and bibliophile Herman Melville, and William Carlos Williams’

In the American Grain, Howe's genre-bending book—part literary criticism, part personal essay—evinces a profound love of books as physical objects. This kind of criticism—the kind that lovingly invokes and responds to (rather than merely dissecting) its subject—has been a model for my own critical work as a doctoral candidate in the Johns Hopkins English department and has contributed to my interest in the relationship between poetry and print culture.

The subtitle I *did* choose—"From Berkeley to Black Mountain"—helps, I think, establish more specific parameters for this modest collection of poetry and poetics. The writing that emerged from these two loci of mid-century creative activity (North Carolina's Black Mountain College and the University of California at Berkeley) has held great interest for me since discovering the work of Jack Spicer. After having held the University of Iowa Library's lone copy of *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* hostage for nearly a year, I found a reasonably priced third printing on AbeBooks.com. And thus began my collection! I first read Spicer while completing my M.F.A. in poetry in 2007, when his work was still incredibly difficult to come by since *The Collected Books*, published in 1975 by Black Sparrow Press, was long out of print. Since Spicer's *Collected*—the first "rare" book I ever purchased—is the core around which the rest of the collection was formed, I was careful in selecting authors and editions that felt in some way linked to the Bay Area poetry scene of which Spicer was a seminal member.

Spicer's immediate circle of friends and poets included Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser, but many of the poets affiliated with Black Mountain College—who were writing at the same time on a different coast—established connections to the Berkeley circle through visits (Charles Olson and Jonathan Williams visited and/or read at Berkeley during the height of Spicer, Duncan, and Blaser's self-described creative "Renaissance"), correspondence, publication in little magazines (this was in many ways a print community), and Duncan's brief stint as an instructor at BMC. A testament to the significance of the Berkeley and Black Mountain communities and their creative cross-pollination, Allen's *The New American Poetry* devotes roughly half (not counting the Beats) of its pages to this burgeoning trans-continental nexus of poetic influence and collaboration.

Many of the poets in this collection will be discussed in my Ph.D. dissertation—still in its early stages—on the relationship between poetic communities and textual ephemerality in post-war America. And while their writing lends itself to intense intellectual engagement, the way I feel about their poems is also deeply personal, more rooted in the warmth of affective response than in the chilly analytical gaze of the literary critic. This may seem like an atypical reaction to avant-garde or "experimental," verse, so much of which is notoriously difficult and opaque, but it is my belief that poems can—and perhaps should—both mystify and move their readers. Jack Spicer, in his poem "Transformations II" from the book *Language*, establishes a direct connection between innovation and emotion: "We make up a different language," he writes, "for poetry / And for the heart—ungrammatical." Perhaps the playful polysemy and grammatical indeterminacy of innovative poems reflect the lyric obscurity and disorderly beauty of our inner lives. And perhaps poems like Spicer's move us (or me at least) not despite but

precisely *because* of their rejection of proper grammar, narrative continuity, and in some cases, the satisfying click of poetic closure.

Though it was initially the writing itself that sparked my fascination, the poets of the Berkeley Renaissance and Black Mountain College have held such interest for me because of their investment in the art of the book and their awareness of the politics of print culture. Many of these poets defined themselves and their work against what Charles Bernstein has dubbed “official verse,” and their mimeograph machines and tabletop presses made possible the creative freedom that commercial publishers and academic institutions so often curbed. Robert Creeley and Jonathan Williams, for instance, founded small presses. Spicer published a beautiful mimeographed magazine, *J*, that ran for eight issues from 1959 to 1961. Staunchly “DIY” (do-it-yourself) long before “indie” purists started wearing the adjectival acronym as a badge of honor, he only allowed his own poems to be published and distributed locally in small editions. One of his “Admonitions” (to himself, titled “For Jack”) begins: “Tell everyone to have guts / Do it yourself.” Similarly, Robert Duncan insisted, in various essays and talks, that the literary *product* (the book object) should reflect the poet’s unique creative *process*. His preface to a special edition of *MAPS* published in his honor (see entry #41)—in which he urges fellow “word-workers, writers of conscience, to take not only the matter of [their] own writing fully into [their] hands, but...the means of production as well,” invoking Marx and, elsewhere in the preface, Virginia Woolf—speaks to the aesthetic and political implications of grassroots publication and circulation for the “new” American poets.

I became immersed in and fascinated with the interdisciplinary crafts of letterpress printing and bookmaking in 2005 as an intern at the Center for Book Arts in New York City, an experience that continues to influence both my scholarly and my creative interests. My work at the CBA, along with my study of avant-garde poetic communities at midcentury, has shaped the assembly of books, journals, letterpress-printed chapbooks, and ephemera I offer for your consideration. My annotations for most of the entries in my bibliography speak in some way to the relationship between poetry and material culture, between the verbal and the visual, as well as to the importance of community (print and otherwise) and camaraderie for the poets of the “Berkeley Renaissance” and Black Mountain College.

I can imagine my collection expanding in a variety of ways. Besides the obvious gaps I need to fill (Blaser’s *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems* and, I’m embarrassed to admit, *anything* by Denise Levertov), I’d love to own collections of correspondence, in particular the Duncan-Levertov letters, the Levertov-Williams letters, and the four volume (!) complete Olson-Creeley correspondence. The last few years have seen a plethora of new Duncan publications (the previously unpublished *H.D. Book*, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, and Lisa Jarnot’s intriguingly titled biography *The Ambassador from Venus*, all published by UC Press, and *A Poet’s Mind: Collected Interviews 1960-85*, published by North Atlantic Books) that I’d also like to get my hands on. And although cost prohibitive, I dream of someday owning a first or second printing, by White Rabbit Press, of any of Spicer’s individual books (*After Lorca* and *Language* being two of my favorites).

William Carlos Williams, in his poem “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,” writes “I have learned much in my life / from books / and out of them / about love.” The curious distinction he makes between “from” and “out of” intimates that our relationships *with* books can teach us as many important emotional lessons as the writing contained *within* them. His suggestion that we might love our books as we love our friends is a sentiment to which many collectors and bibliophiles can probably relate. My own fondness for books as physical objects has, unsurprisingly I suppose, led me to the poets represented in this collection—poets for whom a deep and abiding love of books so often becomes the subject of their writing, and whose creative and editorial decisions reflect an investment not only in what books contain but also in how they are made and exchanged. In returning to the well-loved volumes in the yellow bookcase to compile this bibliography, I’ve found something new and exciting in each one. I hope that you enjoy perusing these entries as much as I’ve enjoyed writing them!

Bibliography

1. Allen, Donald, ed. *The New American Poetry*. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

It seems serendipitous that this ended up as the first entry, thanks to its editor's surname, in my bibliography of avant-garde American verse. Thought there's nothing special about *my* copy—a somewhat tattered red, white, and black paperback found at Book Thing—Allen's seminal anthology helped define an alternative canon of post-war American poetry distinct from the more “academic” verse represented Donald Hall, Robert Pack, Louis Simpson's *New Poets of England and America* (1957). Robert Lowell described the schism dividing American poetry (or, perhaps more accurately, *poetries*) of the '40s and '50s as a competition between the “cooked and the raw.” According to Lowell, the former—represented by the Hall et al anthology and, indeed, by Lowell's own work—is “marvelously expert, [but] often seems laboriously concocted to be tasted and digested by a graduate seminar,” while the latter serves up “huge blood-dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience...to midnight listeners.” While Lowell doesn't exactly do justice to the nuances of either trend/anthology, his remark does capture something of the stylistic and political division that defined American poetry and poetics at midcentury.

2. Bertholf, Robert J. *A Symposium of the Imagination: Robert Duncan in Word and Image*. Buffalo: State University of New York, Buffalo Poetry/Rare Books Collection, 1993.

This is the catalog meant to accompany an exhibition of “Duncaniana” at SUNY Buffalo. In addition to an annotated list of the documents and works of art in the exhibit, the catalog features (black and white *and* color) plates of photographs, letters, manuscript pages, art by Duncan, and portraits of Duncan by his partner Jess, along with an afterword by Robin Blaser.

3. Birmingham, Jed and Kyle Schlesinger, eds. *Mimeo Mimeo 2*. New York, 2008.

This journal was inspired by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips' sourcebook *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side* (see Wish List entry #3) and is, as its editors suggest in their masthead, “a forum for critical perspectives on artists' books, fine press printing, and the mimeo revolution.” I own several issues of the journal, but I've included this one in my bibliography because of James Maynard's essay on Robert Duncan's adventures in small press publishing, “Epitaph to Experimental Review: Robert Duncan's Little Magazines 1938-1941,” and Derek Beaulieu's essay “Nodes: Black Mountain, TISHbooks, and MOTION.”

4. Blaser, Robin. *Bach's Belief: A Curriculum of the Soul*. Canton, NY: Institute of Further Studies / Glover Publishing, 1995.

The youngest of the Berkeley Renaissance “triumvirate”—the other two being Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan—Blaser went on to become a fixture in the Vancouver poetry scene from the 1960s until his death in 2009. He edited Black Sparrow Press's *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (see entry #38), which includes his essay “The Practice of

Outside,” later reprinted in *The Fire* (see entry #5). *Bach’s Belief* is chapbook number 10 in a series of 28, each a response by a different member of Charles Olson’s poetic community to a single word or phrase from his “Plan for the Curriculum of the Soul,” originally published in issue 5 of *The Magazine of Further Studies* (1968). Jack Clarke began this collaborative chapbook project just after Olson’s death in 1970 by assigning poets (Bay Area poets Robert Duncan, Joanne Kyger, and Michael McClure among them) a word on which to base their “fascicles.” Olson’s “Plan”—a “text map” of 223 names, subjects, and ideas spread across the page at all angles—resembles an entry in a journal or daybook (only typed rather than handwritten), and Blaser’s response feels similarly exploratory in its treatment of the relationship between poetry and music. A fortuitous purchase, I discovered *Bach’s Belief*’s significance vis-à-vis Olson only *after* it was in my possession! Clarke’s series—of which I’d like to eventually purchase more—is a beautiful homage to the charismatic and influential Olson and a fascinating example of how creative communities are established and reinforced through textual collaboration.

5. -----, *The Fire: Collected Essays*. Edited by Miriam Nichols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Blaser’s eponymous essay is a statement of his own poetics and a defense of poetry in general. A sense of community and companionship was important in his life and became a theme of much of his work. Indeed, he attests to the significance of affective reading and textual community in the first paragraphs of “The Fire”: “Because the personal stake in companionship becomes so great in the way I live, I am sometimes lost when a reader finds me uninteresting or too obscure, his interest too soon exhausted to come to any meeting.”

6. Corman, Cid, ed. *The Gist of Origin*. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975.

A first hardcover edition of this anthology of poems originally published in Corman’s self-described “very little little magazine” *Origin*, between 1951 (the year *Origin* was founded) and 1971. *Gist* contains chronologically organized selections of poems and essays by American poets such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Charles Olson, many of whom (Olson and Robert Creeley in particular) found their first outlet for publication in Corman’s journal.

7. Creeley, Robert. *The Collected Poems, 1945-1975*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Creeley, one of the preeminent figures in post-war American poetry, participated in the Black Mountain College community as both a student and an instructor. He and his wife Ann established a small imprint, Divers Press, which published a number of avant-garde poets including Robert Duncan (the first edition of *Caesar’s Gate*—see entry #13), Charles Olson, Larry Eigner, and Paul Blackburn. In an interview with Alastair Johnson, Creeley expressed his approval of the design and layout of UCP’s *Collected Poems* (versus that of Scribner’s *Selected* which, he felt, failed to convey a “sense” of his poetry). I’m glad that this hefty, off-white edition is Creeley-approved!

8. Duberman, Martin. *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993.

A fascinating and fun read, Duberman's history of Black Mountain College, from its foundation in 1933 through its closure in 1956, provides an introduction to the pedagogical ideals upon which the experimental institution was founded, as well as to the cast of characters who found a temporary community on its rural campus.

Interdisciplinary in its approach to liberal arts education, BMC attracted a range of avant-garde artists, poets, and designers including John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, Josef Albers, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Creeley. Its collaborative approach to education led to the productive cross-pollination of ideas and, more often than not, to the butting of heads. Added bonus: Duberman devotes several chapters to Charles Olson's pedagogical and administrative influence on the institution.

9. Duncan, Michael and Kristine McKenna. *Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and His Circle*. Santa Monica: D.A.P./Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2005.

This lovely hardcover art book was published in conjunction with a retrospective of Wallace Berman's assemblage art, photography, and experimental films from the 1950s and '60s at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. It contains scholarly essays on Berman and surveys the work of artists and writers associated with him, many of whom—Robert Duncan and his partner Jess, Joe Dunn (a friend and love interest of Spicer's who ran White Rabbit Press), Michael McClure, and Allen Ginsberg, to name only a few—were part of the post-war Berkeley/SF scene. In addition to his many Berkeley connections, Berman was a fascinating figure in his own right. He hosted countless artists, writers, and bohemians at his Topanga Canyon home, and his hand-printed, personally distributed journal *Semina* (1955-64) was a model of avant-garde, grassroots publishing practices. I had no idea that this book was rare or valuable (I bought it several years ago for not very much money), but when I went to double check the publisher's name on Amazon, I discovered that it's out of print and copies in "like new" condition are priced at upwards of \$1000!!!

10. Duncan, Robert. *a little endarkenment and in my poetry you find me*. Buffalo, NY: SUNY Buffalo Poetry/Rare Books Collection, 1997.

A lovely chapbook containing the Naropa Institute's 1978 interview with Duncan. Jointly published by The Poetry/Rare Books Collection at SUNY Buffalo, Rodent Press (Chicago), and Erudite Fangs Editions (Boulder), it has a beautiful, letterpress-printed cover.

11. ----- . *A Selected Prose*. Edited by Robert J. Bertholf. New York: New Directions, 1995.

Includes statements of poetics ("Towards an Open Universe" and "Ideas of the Meaning of Form") and politics ("The Homosexual in Society"), along with essays on the work of his poetic predecessors (Louis Zukofsky and Marianne Moore) and contemporaries (Spicer, Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Wallace Berman, among others). The appearance of "The Homosexual in Society" in Dwight MacDonald's *Politics* in 1944 caused John Crowe Ransom to infamously revoke his acceptance of Duncan's "African Elegy" for

publication in the *Kenyon Review*. Bertholf's selection gives a sense of the many facets of Duncan's persona: pre-Stonewall gay activist, vatic poet, prolific reader, and independent scholar of everything from Italian Renaissance poetry to philosophical pragmatism to Jewish mysticism to Greek mythology.

12. -----. ***Bending the Bow*. New York: New Directions, 1968.**

In his preface to the collection, Duncan discusses his practice of "grand collage." He begins his open series "Passages" in *Bending the Bow* as well. Fun fact: one of the "Structures of Rime" poems published in this volume is dedicated to actor Dean Stockwell (who was active in the bohemian West coast art scene in the 1960s); another is dedicated to experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger.

13. -----. ***Caesar's Gate: Poems, 1949-50*. Sand Dollar Press, 1972.**

This is the second edition of *Caesar's Gate*, which was first published by Robert and Ann Creeley's Divers Press in 1956. It contains "paste-up" collages by Duncan's partner, artist Jess Collins. Some of the poems appear in the author's handwriting and were intended as responses to Jess's art.

14. -----. ***Ground Work: Before the War/In the Dark*. New York: New Directions, 2006.**

In the letter/essay that serves as a preface to *MAPS 6* (see entry #41), Duncan bemoans editors' and printers' refusal to adhere to his original typescripts. Though Duncan repeatedly insisted that the inconsistent spacing before and after diacritical marks and between lines and stanzas was part-and-parcel of his poems' meaning, many of his editors, much to his chagrin, insisted on resetting the poems to conform to more conventional print standards. This New Directions single edition of Duncan's final books (*Ground Work I: Before the War* (1984) and *Ground Work II: In the Dark* (1988)) measures 8 ½ inches by 8 ½ and includes primarily typescript pages. I'm sure co-editor Robert J. Bertholf—former curator of the renowned poetry collection at SUNY Buffalo and executor of Duncan's literary estate—played a pivotal role in ensuring Duncan's vision was realized.

15. -----. ***Ground Work II: In the Dark*. New York: New Directions, 1987.**

The concluding volume of Duncan's later poems, published shortly before his death. I found this prior to buying the single edition of *Ground Work I and II*. Both volumes are built upon thematic groups of poems, which include continuations of the "Structure of Rime" poems and "Passages"—sequences that he began decades earlier in *The Opening of the Field* and *Bending the Bow*, respectively.

16. -----. ***Letters: Poems 1953-56*. Chicago: Flood Editions, 2003.**

A collection of short lyrics and lyrical epistles originally published in 1958 by Jonathan Williams' Jargon Society. This lovely Flood edition features line drawings by Duncan, an afterword, and a series of memos from Duncan to Jargon's typesetter.

17. -----. ***The Opening of the Field*. New York: New Directions, 1973.**

Originally published by Grove Press in 1960, this is the ND reissue with a different cover. Duncan conceived of his poems less as made things/finished products than as processes—expansive, open-ended and, at times, diffuse. While I find this kind of process-oriented work interesting, I'll admit, I like Duncan best when he's reigning himself in! His shorter lyrics are often profoundly moving, which is perhaps why "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" (contained in this volume) is one of his most-cited poems. "Often I Am Permitted..." and "A Song from the Structures of Rime Ringing as the Poet Paul Celan Sings" (from *Ground Work II*) are beautiful examples of Duncan's negative lyricism, his attempt to, as Michael Palmer observes in his introduction to *Ground Work I/II*, "manifest...the incommunicability at the heart of things."

18. -----, ***Roots and Branches*. New York: New Directions, 1964.**

A continuation of Duncan's work in *The Opening of the Field*.

19. **Eigner, Larry. *lined up bulk senses*. Providence: Burning Deck Press, 1979.**

A lovely letterpress-printed chapbook from Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop's Burning Deck Press. Eigner's poetry was featured in Donald Allen's anthology and was published in numerous issues of Cid Corman's *Origin*. He was affiliated with the Black Mountain school. Though he was confined to bed and wheelchair by cerebral palsy, Eigner's short, staggered lines, staccato rhythms, and light, airy imagery evince an unexpected and inspiring jubilation. Poet and critic Michael Davidson has written beautifully on the relationship between Eigner's poetics and his disability in "Missing Larry: The Poetics of Disability in Larry Eigner."

20. **Eshleman, Clayton, ed. *Caterpillar 12*. New York, 1970.**

This special issue of *Caterpillar* (a little poetics magazine) devoted to Spicer and Blaser contains some original poems by Blaser and his translations of Gérard de Nerval's "Les Chimères" (Duncan's translations of the same poems can be found in *Bending the Bow*). The Spicer section includes early lyrics, the first chapter of his detective novel (see Wish List entry #7), and letters to his friend Graham Mackintosh and his love interest Jim Alexander. Added bonus: cool collage cover art, which includes a rakish mug shot of a young, mustachioed Spicer.

21. **Fass, Ekbert, ed. *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews*. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978.**

A first edition found in a used bookstore, though not in very good condition (foxed, worn covers and some writing in pencil on the inside). Its beautiful design (pebbled paper covers and clean, minimalist typographical choices) is typical of Black Sparrow Press. It contains essays and interviews with Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and Ginsberg, along with Gary Snyder and Robert Bly.

22. **Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. *A Coney Island of the Mind*. New York: New Directions, 1958.**

Though there was some overlap between the Beat poets of the West Coast and the Spicer/Duncan/Blaser circle (Spicer co-founded San Francisco's Six Gallery and attended

the inaugural reading at which Allen Ginsberg read *Howl* publically for the first time), the two “schools” had fairly divergent intellectual, aesthetic, and political, aims and interests. Accordingly, I only give a brief nod to the Beats in this collection. Though I’m not, I’ll admit, a huge fan of Beat writing, Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind* was one of the first books of poetry with which I fell in love.

23. ----- . *Starting from San Francisco*. New York: New Directions, 1961.

24. Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems, 1947-1980*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984.

As I mentioned above, though this collection’s emphasis is not Beat poetry, I couldn’t in good conscience *not* include an avant-garde figure as influential and charismatic as Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg’s approach to innovative writing was quite different from Spicer’s and Duncan’s.

25. Gizzi, Peter, ed. *The House that Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press / University Press of New England, 1998.

I cannot say enough about how amazing these lectures are. I realized, after reading them, that Spicer’s theories of poetic inspiration and composition (by “dictation”) are clearly influenced by the Yeats of *A Vision*. The lectures reference everything from baseball, to radio serials, to Jean Cocteau, to ghosts and Martians. A fun and fascinating read!

26. Hollander, Benjamin and David Levi Strauss, eds. *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing*, No. 6. San Francisco, 1987.

Many of Jack Spicer’s early lyrics and letters were published posthumously in little poetry and poetics journals like this one. *ACTS* 6, a special issue subtitled *A Book of Correspondences for Jack Spicer*, contains essays on Spicer’s work by poets and scholars like Ron Silliman and Michael Davidson, a transcribed talk by Robin Blaser (Spicer’s friend and fellow Berkeley Renaissance poet), and poems inspired by Spicer. Blaser’s talk, along with the scholarly essays, were originally presented at the *Jack Spicer Conference and White Rabbit Symposium*, held in San Francisco in June of 1986. (White Rabbit Press, run by Spicer’s friend Joe Dunn, published—in tiny, letter-pressed editions—Spicer’s individual books.) This issue of *ACTS* also includes selections from Spicer’s correspondence with Duncan and facsimiles of Spicer’s handwritten missives. This, of course, was the selling point for me!

27. Killian, Kevin and Lewis Ellingham. *Poet, Be Like God*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press / University Press of New England, 1998.

This co-authored biography takes its title from Spicer’s series *Imaginary Elegies*. One part gossipy exposé comprised of anecdotes from poets in the Berkeley scene (everyone seems to have concurred that Spicer—a purported virgin until well into his twenties with an awkward, loping gait and unusual facial features—was not a “hot commodity” among his cohort of mainly gay male poets and artists); one part useful scholarly history (Killian and Ellingham include extensive footnotes which are helpful in piecing together Spicer’s publication history). All in all, an utterly engaging read! It made me feel for the brilliant,

curmudgeonly, perpetually rejected Spicer and lent biographical relevance to poems like “The Dancing Ape,” which begins: “The dancing ape is whirling round the beds / Of all the coupled animals; they, sleeping there / In warmth of sex, ignore his fur and fuss / And feel no terror in his gait of loneliness.”

28. levy, d.a. if you break an iron angels wings (cleveland bridges). Berkeley: Verdant Press, 2005.

Though levy was not a member of the Berkeley or Black Mountain communities (he spent most of his short life in Cleveland, Ohio), his outsider, anti-establishment status, his “zine” art, and his do-it-yourself publishing ethos are reminiscent of poets like Spicer and Jonathan Williams. Born in 1942, levy committed suicide in 1968, at age 26. This beautiful letterpress-printed chapbook contains a single poem/sequence—originally published in HIKA, vol. 28, no. 3 (Gambier: Kenyon College, Spring-Summer 1966)—that recalls, in style and subject matter, sections of Hart Crane’s *The Bridge*.

29. Mattison, Robert S. *Black Mountain College and its Legacy*. New York: Loretta Howard Gallery, 2011.

Another exhibition catalog. This one includes a list of the artists featured in the exhibition along with brief descriptions of their work and its relationship to Black Mountain College. Centered primarily on visual art, design, and dance, the writers/writing of BMC is, sadly, not well represented here. But the catalog contains some great documentary photographs of life at the college. Buckminster Fuller leading an architecture class and John Cage poised at a piano are two of my favorites.

30. Olson, Charles. *Charles Olson and Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeth’s*. Edited by Catherine Seelye. New York: Paragon House, 1991.

Charles Olson began as an instructor and eventually became rector of Black Mountain College in the 1950s. His work as a poet and a theorist was among the first (in America) to be deemed “postmodern,” and the legacy of his “open field” poetics continues today. He was a colossal poet both in terms of influence (he was considered a “major” poet by his contemporaries and his work still inspires countless articles, monographs, and imitations) and stature (he was over seven feet tall!). I picked this book up at Normals Books in Waverley/Charles Village. It’s a collection of Olson’s notes, diary entries, and poems documenting his visits with Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth’s mental hospital in Washington, D.C.

31. ----- . *The Distances*. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

Grove’s selection of Olson’s shorter poetry. I have most of these poems in other editions but, as with the next entry, I couldn’t resist the cover!

32. ----- . *In Cold Hell, in Thicket*. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1967.

Another slim volume of Olson’s shorter poetry. The cover is a bit foxed/soiled—I found it in a used bookstore—but it’s a first edition with a well-designed cover.

33. -----, *The Maximus Poems*. North Carolina/New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1960.

Jonathan Williams' Jargon Society (a small press run from his home in rural North Carolina) published numbers 1-10 of Olson's "Maximus" poems (Olson preferred to call them "letters") in 1953 and 11-22, in a separate edition, in 1956. *This* edition, published in conjunction with Corinth Books in New York, was the first complete *Maximus Poems* to (that) date. In addition to this trade paperback version (which is itself quite beautiful), Jargon/Corinth also printed specially bound copies, in a limited edition of 101, all numbered, 26 of which are signed by Olson.

34. -----, *The Maximus Poems*. Edited by George F. Butterick. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

This complete edition of *The Maximus Poems* brings together the following volumes (with some additions and corrections) of Olson's epic project (begun in 1950 and completed shortly before his death in 1970): *The Maximus Poems* (Jargon/Corinth, 1960), *Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (Cape Goliard, 1968), and *The Maximus Poems: Volume Three* (Viking/Grossman, 1975).

35. -----, *Selected Poems*. Edited by Robert Creeley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

A nice hardcover copy. It's not as comprehensive as the massive, UC Press-published *Collected Poems*, which includes everything but *Maximus*, but it contains a variety of shorter poems (including "Variations Done for Gerald Van De Wiele"... a favorite of mine!) and selections from *Maximus*.

36. -----, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions, 1966.

Along with a selection of Olson's poetry, this book contains essays such as the "epoch-making" (as the back cover puts it) "Projective Verse" and the less famous but no less interesting "Human Universe." This is a useful volume for anyone interested in Olson's theories of poetry/poetics and history. It also includes an introduction by Creeley.

37. Silliman, Ron. *The New Sentence*. New York: Roof Books, 2003.

Though Silliman is not a "new" American poet, he was an important member of the Bay Area poetry scene of the 1970s and '80s, an affiliate of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school (which was influenced by the poetics of Olson, Duncan, and Spicer), and is now a prolific poetry blogger. I've included Silliman's collection of essays and talks primarily because of his essay on "Spicer's Language," which traces a lineage from semantic disjunction in Spicer's poetry to Silliman's own poetics of the "new sentence" and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing more generally.

38. Spicer, Jack. *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*. Edited by Robin Blaser. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

One of my favorite aspects of this edition is its beautiful cover image: a ghostly letterpressed (but not inked) Four of Cups Tarot card. It contains Spicer's twelve short books (arranged chronologically), an essay by Robin Blaser on Spicer's poetry called "The Practice of Outside," and an appendix of "Poems and Documents" which includes, among other things, several early poems not featured in any of his books and the questionnaire for applicants to Spicer's legendary "Magic Workshop." Answers to questions like "Who were the Lovestoneites?" and "What card of the Tarot deck represents the absolute of your desires?" were supposed to, according to Spicer, help determine who "would most benefit" from his class.

39. -----, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*. Edited by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

This includes everything from the Black Sparrow *Collected Books* to his 1962 "Golem" sequence, and so much more! Gizzi and Killian have spent a lot of time in the Spicer archive at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library and it shows in this volume. It takes its title from Spicer's last words.

40. -----, *One Night Stand and Other Poems*. Edited by Donald Allen. San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1980.

A collection of Spicer's shorter lyrics—which he referred to, irreverently, as "one night stands"—not collected in any of his book-length sequences. It features a preface by Robert Duncan that offers some insight into the decision to publish Spicer's early and previously uncollected work.

41. Taggart, John, ed. *MAPS 6: Robert Duncan Issue*. Athens, Ohio: Lawhead Press Inc., 1974.

MAPS, a small journal of poetry and poetics edited by poet John Taggart, was published irregularly from the late 1960s through the mid 1970s. This special issue on Duncan, limited to 400 copies, is divided into two sections: *By Robert Duncan* and *On Robert Duncan*. The former contains excerpts from his poetry and prose, including his complete "Seventeenth Century Suite." The latter contains essays by Ron Silliman, Ronald Johnson, and Wendy MacIntyre, along with photographs of Duncan. The issue opens with a preface by Duncan which is both a curmudgeonly rant about the publishing industry in general and his experience with Black Sparrow Press in particular, and an inspirational paean to the typewriter and the mimeograph machine. The incredible cover image is a photograph of an aging Duncan silhouetted against what appears to be William Morris-designed floral wallpaper.

42. Vincent, John Emil, ed. *After Spicer: Critical Essays*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

The first collection of scholarly essays on Spicer since the 1977 special issue of *boundary 2*. I've been a fan of Vincent's scholarly work on modern and contemporary poetry since reading his book on John Ashbery, and his introduction to and essay in this collection confirm my high opinion of his critical acumen. Essays by Norman Finkelstein, Michael

Snediker (who earned his Ph.D. in English from Johns Hopkins!), Kevin Killian, and others explore Spicer's continuing legacy. An inspiring book!

43. Williams, Jonathan. *An Ear in Bartram's Tree: Selected Poems 1957-1967*.

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969.

This is a hardcover first edition in amazing condition. I found it in an equally amazing bookstore called Hermitage Books in Beacon, NY, which specialized in...you guessed it, avant-garde American poetry! Run out of a small, somewhat rustic wood-frame house—which also served as a gallery and letterpress print shop—Hermitage sold everything from journals like *Origin* and the *Black Mountain Review* to artists' books and broadsides, all displayed impeccably. Sadly, the Beacon store is now closed, but its owner (who also runs a small press) still buys and sells specialty books from his home in Brooklyn. I picked this book up because of my interest in Williams as a small press publisher. I had been researching and writing about the poet Lorine Niedecker, and Williams' Jargon Society published several editions of her work. He has proven to be a fascinating poet in his own right!

44. *Ironwood* 28. *Listening for the Invisible: Emily Dickinson and Jack Spicer*.

Ironwood Press, 1986.

Inspired by my work on this bibliography, I decided to buy this special edition of the journal *Ironwood*, which I've been coveting for some time. I found and ordered a copy on AbeBooks.com, but it hasn't arrived yet (hence the incomplete bibliographic description). Dickinson is another favorite poet of mine, and I'm eager to see what the editors of and contributors to this issue have to say about the relationship between her work and Spicer's.

Wish List

1. Blaser, Robin. *The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser*. Edited by Miriam Nichols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Much like Spicer's *Collected Books*, I renewed this book from the U of I library quite a few times! For some reason, I still haven't purchased it.

2. Boone, Bruce, ed. *Sulfur* 10. Los Angeles, 1984.

Yet another little poetry/poetics magazine! This one contains, among other things, Spicer's letters to Allen Joyce.

3. Clay, Steve and Rodney Phillips (with a preface by Jerome Rothenberg). *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing 1960-1980*. Granary Books, 1998.

Based on a 1998 exhibition at the New York Public Library, this book documents the "underground" publishing scenes in downtown Manhattan and San Francisco from 1960 to 1980. Includes selections from Spicer and Fran Herndon's *J Magazine* (see Wish List entry #8), Wallace Berman's *Semina*, and White Rabbit Press.

4. Corman, Cid. *Origin*. Any issue!

I'd like for my collection to contain more little magazines. Corman published *Origin* from 1951 to 1984 in four series (series one, three, and four contain twenty issues, series two, fourteen, and series five, published from the fall of 1983 to the fall of 1984, a mere four.) The later issues are easier to find and less expensive.

5. Jarnot, Lisa. *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

I heard Jarnot read selections from her long-awaited Duncan biography in D.C. last fall. I eagerly await the rest!

6. Paul, Mariah, ed. *Manroot 10: the Jack Spicer Issue*. 1974.

Contains a small selection of material by Spicer not published previously. Other contributors of poetry, prose, etc. include: James and Fran Herndon, George Stanley, Jess, Stan Persky, and Jonathan Williams.

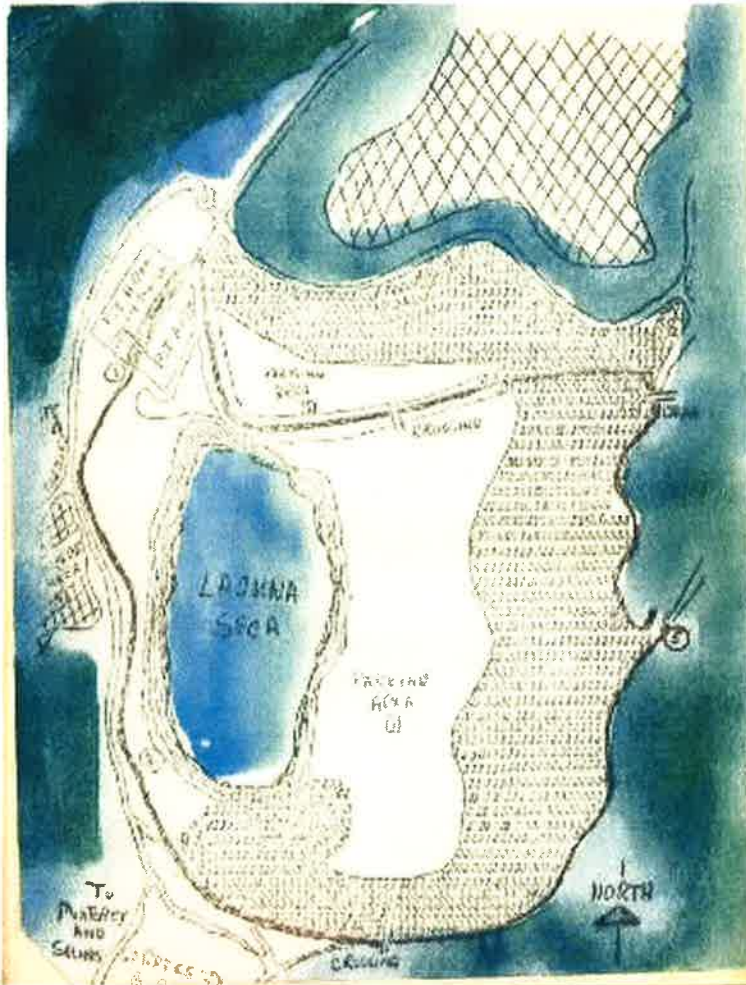
7. Spicer, Jack. *The Tower of Babel*. Talisman House, 1994.

Spicer's unfinished, posthumously published detective novel set in the San Francisco poetry world of the 1950s.

8. Spicer, Jack, ed. *J*. Nos. 1-8. San Francisco, 1959-61.

Spicer edited, published, and distributed this little mimeo magazine with the assistance of occasional guest editors (George Stanley nos. 6-7; Harold Dull no. 8) and the magazine's "art editor," painter and collage artist Fran Herndon. It was known for its eclectic editorial selections (Donald Allen, who helped distribute the magazine in New York, wondered "what [Spicer's] editorial policy may be. Seduction by print?"), its often intricate typographic design, and its original artwork (see images below). While I will most likely never own a copy of *J*, I'm looking forward to this coming year, when dissertation research will take me back to The Poetry Collection at SUNY Buffalo to peruse the five issues that they own, and much more!

9. And last but not least on my wish list: **Any of the chapbooks published by *Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative***, a graduate student-run series that prints small editions of "original research based on sources and related to figures central to or associated with the New American Poetry." Their series publishes primarily "extra-poetic" work: correspondence, journals, and lectures. My most coveted chapbooks include *Lorine Niedecker: Homemade Poems* (a beautiful blue-ink facsimile of the poet's hand-assembled book), *Michael Rumaker: Selected Letters* (Rumaker was a student at Black Mountain College in the 1950s and is the author of *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*), *John Wieners and Charles Olson: Selected Correspondence*, and *Jack Spicer's Translation of Beowulf: Selections*. Kudos to the graduate students in CUNY's English department...what a great selection!



Cover of *J*, issue number 4 (hand tinted by Fran Herndon)



Close-up of issue 4 cover