Chain 7, summer 2000

Chain appears annually.
$12 for one issue / $20 for two issues.
Please make checks payable to ‘A’A Arts. Send orders to:

Chain
C/o Department of English
1733 Donaghho Road
University of Hawai‘i, Manoa
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822

This issue was made possible by support from the National Endowment for the Arts, ‘A’A Arts, and generous contributions from several individuals. Thanks also to Temple University and the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa.

Distributed by
Small Press Distribution
1341 Seventh Street, Berkeley, CA 94710-1409

Indexed by the Index of American Periodical Verse (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press) and the MLA Bibliography of Periodical Literature.

Business Manager: Charles Weigl
Intern in Hawai‘i: Miriam Gianni
Intern in Philadelphia: Robyn Wilcox
Cover designed by Janet Zweig
Cover images from Lorie Novak’s Collected Visions at http://cvisions.cat.nyu.edu

Copyright © 2000 by Jena Osman, Juliana Spahr, and Janet Zweig. All rights revert back to authors/artists upon publication.

ISSN 1076-0520
ISBN 0-930068-01-8

GUEST EDITOR’S NOTES

Let us not forget, says Jabès, that if we say “I,” we already say different.
—Rosmarie Waldrop, “Lavish Absence: Reading and Recalling Edmond Jabès”

I am not I, pity the tale of me.
—Sir Philip Sidney, “Astrophil and Stella”

[What I was really trying to do was re-center the self because I was tired of hearing about the de-centered self. And when you hear a phrase too many times, if you’re me, you think, “Ha, ha, I think I’ll do the opposite.”
—Alice Notley

How I grew: When I pick up a book and it is not me. The book is a suit that fits. I think another someone. I say. It is this book that limits me. Or if I open it, did I write it somehow? I look at the pages. How can I enter it? Tell me the topic, please, and I will write the story of my life.

But which I found its way into print? What was the mystery, and who solved it.

This issue of Chain grew out of a conversation I had with Jena Osman last year at the Kelly Writers House in Philadelphia. I described to Jena some of the work I’d been hearing from writers who’d been coming through the House, work that seemed to address the motives of memoir without bowing to its generic conventions or ideological assumptions. Juliana Spahr joined the conversation, then co-editors Dorothy Wang, Nzadi Keita and Marina Budhos, and we began to imagine a collection. There were poets whose work was autobiographical yet defied confessionalism’s ahistorical identifications, its solipsism. There were prose writers whose memoirs took as their subjects the constructedness of the selves. There were writers whose work addressed their own political and
social minority and the ways that representing the self can both articulate and challenge one's inscription into a marginal position. One could see a kind of conversation taking place among contemporary writers about how to understand and represent subjectivity—whether or not and how to locate it, name it, cohere it, identify with it.

Hey! I am going to make up an I that will stick to the pages of a book. I'm out there now where you all are. Oh, you say I am already entered into your book. But you wrote yours in a different language. Different story. For a different set of eyes. Can you tell me my sections. It's like a boat floating; it needs a map.

Chain 7: memoir/anti-memoir presents new texts that show the expanse and range of contemporary memoir. The works gathered here reveal memoir as re-invention, as generic interplay, as a conversation among texts, as travel back and forth and across times and states of mind. One can see in these texts the political and psychic stakes involved in self-representation and the ongoing negotiations of subjects, in dreams and particular material histories, making their way. Across the differences, there is a consciousness of language as the inter-me-diary.

Thrown from a boat, a boy nearly drowns but doesn't. Who is his father? George Washington wants him to have all of the opportunities our VCR has. What does an I have to do with an E? Headings in the same world book.

Many thanks to our contributors for the work. Thanks also to Chain's editors Jeni Osman, Juliana Spahr, and Janet Zweig, and to this particular issue's other co-editors, Marina Budhos, Nzadi Keita, Dorothy Wang.

Now always I was swimming. The waves. The terrible waves. How do I dare not identify.

Warm, dry skin of the book.

—Kerry Sherin

CONTENTS

Zelda Alpern • Discourse of a Difficult Daughter 7
David Antin • Alphabet Memories 12
Eleanor Antin • Two Stories 14
Rae Armantrout • My Advantage 17
Dodie Bellamy • Cunt-Ups 19
Jen Bervin • Code word, Arbor 23
Tisa Bryant • from Tzimmes 25
Darryl Keola Cabacungan • Lei Day '99 32
Dubravka Djuric • Letters from Belgrade 33
Nicole Eisenman 46
Robert Feintuch 47
Alejandro Fogel • Root to Route: 10 Rumbach St 49
Kenny Fries • Disability Made Me Do It or Modeling for the Cause 58
Jacinta Galea'i • The Body 65
C. S. Giscombe • Natural Abilities & Natural Writing 68
Robert Glück • Experimental Writer Gets Sucked Off In A Field 79
John Havelda • Labore et Honore 81
Elvira Hernández • In Memoriam Letra Ñ 83
Hsiayü (translated by Steve Bradbury) • Carte Postale 84
Lisa Jarnot • Biography and Autobiography 86
Kim Jones 98
Summi Kaipa • from The Epics 103
Mark Leahy and Mark Storor • Doris Green: In Memory of Edward Peter John and Child 108
Aaron Levy • If It Cannot Look at Itself 114
Warren Liu • Xiao Bai II 120
Loren Madsen • The Long Scroll 123
Bernadette Mayer • from *Studying Hunger Journals* 128
Cathleen Miller • from *Spectrum* 131
Eileen Myles 135
Shirin Neshat 138
Sandra Newman • *TRUE BLUE & Love Always* 143
Alice Notley • *Where Leftover Misery Goes* 147
Akilah Oliver • *Filbs 7809* 152
Rona Pondick 155
Joan Retallack • *Memnoir* 156
Deborah Richards • *The Beauty Projection* 159
Bhanu Kapil Rider • from *Autobiography of a Cyborg* 164
Kit Robinson • *Notes Toward a Phenomenology of Memory* 167
Thaddeus Rutkowski • *Misfires* 169
Susan Schultz • from *Memory Cards* 173
Ron Silliman • from *UnderAlbany* 176
Jeanne Silverthorne 193
Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard • *Ganny* 196
Christina Olson Spiesel 198
Edwin Torres • *Birthday Present; Birthday Boy* 200
Anne Waldman • *Save My Dockage* 202
Rosmarie Waldrop • from *Rosmarie Waldrop, 1935-* 207
Yolanda Wisher • from *Spotlight* 218
David Wojnarowicz • from *Arthur Rimbaud in NY* 225
Allison Yap • *Rituals of Remembering* 228
Susanda Yee • *Hurting Herself Into the Center* 234
WHERE TO LOOK NEXT … 237
Sandy Huss • *Huss Sales and Service* 243
it is said that it

happens even in nature e.g. during the childhood the mother might have a taste for film noir and take the child along i.e. onderful I explained

my machine is hooked up to my machin fiction is precisely what they call non-fiction so too get a bit presonal

it would be necessary to go the other way i.e. she wanted more than she could say to not want more than she could say

or it might be necessary to replace all vowels with x mxgxcxilly txrnxng prxmxtxrrx txrrxr xntx pxstxblx pxst-pxst xxn

not idle play to forgive that we in the spilt second of a single space i.e. it is said that it happens even in nature if only the space at the watering hole is large or small enough the animals the timing is all that is off

it is that that is the problem with the timing that it is always off while it cannot be off at all that is the he to be sure that the she did not choose the wrong thing

given the diversity of forms that even a soap film or any other minimal surface can this time at or on this point that is however not an Archimedean point

that will entirely explode the wild idea to try say that I had a wild idea just as a hummingbird flew by just like a deluxe model bumble bee engine with mechanical wings beating the sky like a wild idea in a hot majestic interlude containing profanity violence and graphic photos of murder victims before the clouds parted and the sun turned into a coffee mug or a doughnut

and/but/though

over the years mathematicians have been able to prove that every
noninteresting closed curve is spanned by at least one smooth minimal surface or surface reflecting the twisting of the sun into someone's bird's eye view or the limits of any horizon always being a point of view just like the one unflooding here

and then she found that to find one's position on the graph using xy coordinates one must replace all the consonants with y

 Memoir, like all the work I do, comes out of a perforated self—permeable, in conversation, not wanting to finish a story about a self that must be in motion for the I to believe in the I as a vital principle. This isn't about owning a self, or having a story to tell, though narrative strands weave in and out of chance-developed configurations. Since everything is made of the dynamic interaction between memory and experience... Memory in this piece is a process of connecting language with ambient conditions that include material residues of the past while navigating the continuing flood of experience. It's profiles/suses, before/after, mean/while. Experience will always interpolate its noisy silences. All that is and is not the self is all that is and is not poetry or prose, but poetry.