

Dia Art Foundation

Bruce Andrews and Nada Gordon

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

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Introduction by Vincent Katz

Nada Gordon was born in Oakland, California, and lived in Tokyo for 11 years, before moving to Brooklyn, where she now resides. She is the author of seven books of poetry, including *Foreign Bodie* (Detour, 2001), *Swoon* (with Gary Sullivan, Granary Books, 2001), *V. Imp.* (Faux Press, 2003) *Folly* (Roof, 2007), *Scented Rushes* (Roof, 2010), and *Vile Lilt* (Roof, 2013). She blogs at ululate.blogspot.com.

Nada Gordon's fierce volubility depends on our deep desire for otherity. She put herself in an intentionally foreign situation, and her book *foreign bode* is a record of her encounters with the strangeness of language's slippery edges. However, her poetic early on was also determinedly not about anything, therefore eschewing the need for space/time coordinates.

Jumble is the word that comes to mind when thinking of N's poetic: things are mashed together: objects, syntax, form. It is almost unfair to quote selected lines from one of her poems, as she highlights so intensively the relations among elements. There is scant meaning to any particular set of lines. Rather, meaning accrues over the course of an entire poem, and its interminglings.

But, to give an idea of her ear, of the sounds and rhythms created during such intermingling, here's a random snippet from "Gorgeous" (*V. Imp.*):

what a phlanger makes opossum
for the tranquil marquessa
welcoming with gracenotes, open figs

In her Very Important Sonnets, she brings us closer to a formal place we can recognize: these poems, tethered to a 14-line timespan, remind us of Ted Berrigan's late sonnets. "Vaudeville Improvisation," for instance, begins: "Wild fauns create chaos / in the romantic-repressive moss! Where pulses! found in seething birds! / loose their girlishness onto paratactic rock".

"Decency in the Arts" from *Folly* shows how Gordon can take this ultra-playful praxis into the political realm. In this poem, she makes direct attacks on current politicians and actions. There are specific and definite complaints in her poems, but their entertaining presentation softens their subjects' harshness.

Some of her most recent poems play with syntactic setup, luring the listener with logical-seeming flows, only to confound our expectations just when we least expect it. We should know by now. And we do, which is why we are excited to welcome Nada Gordon to Dia!

Bruce Andrews is a poet, literary theorist, sound designer and recently retired political science professor. He co-founded and co-edited *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine with Charles Bernstein and has frequently collaborated with Sally Silvers & Dancers as that company's Music Director. His recent publications include *Yessified* (Sally's Edit) (Mermaid Tenement Press, 2012) and *You Can't Have Everything . . . Where Would You Put It!* (Veer Books, 2011). Earlier collections include *Sonnets (Memento Mori)* (This, 1980), *Ex Why Zee* (Roof, 1995), and *Swoon Noir* (Chax Press, 2007). His poetry was the subject of an issue of the literary journal *Aerial*, published in 1999.

Fiction is past tense, poetry is present tense, Andrews is no tense. But this mother is tense, if by "mother" we mean Andrews' poetry. Andrews himself we cannot pretend to know, but his poetry plumbs various kinds of tension. Critics have often cited social critique as a motivating factor, but this almost seems a given, given that BA is a political scientist by profession. His job is giving assholes shit. If the scatology of that metaphor jars, it's because I've been biding my Bruce. He enters your head, and in fact, once he's been there, it's a pleasant place to be.

So yes, of course he's dismantling power structures, but as I say, when lightbulbs burn out, they need replacing. On another note, I would like to stress Andrews' musicality. He is actually and technically a musician, and the buzz of his poems operates in a zone straddling high-class atonality, Americana, and raw noise. Sorta John Zorn meets Stockhausen meets DNA. And by that I wish to highlight the delicacy with which Andrews moves words, fragments, sounds around on the page and in your ear.

Listen to how the sounds echo and resonate in the opening of this untitled poem from *Sonnets*:

ergo
smokeful
 unanchor
ochre talked
 in all
a fluttery
 sugarin' momentary s.o.s.
Little Johnny Jumpup

There is something here not often noted in discussions of Andrews' work — a touch of pathos masked as bathos. For Andrews works, ultimately, from a place of deep empathy — it's only he does such a good job maskin' it with all his fussin' 'n' poppin'.

A more recent poem, entitled "*Social*," from *Swoon Noir*, ends that book thus:

Dormant pink cheek balked synopsis
Brute news is good news
Italics do not intercept allusion
Storms for contraceptives
Merit diffused

But, try as he may, Bruce Andrews' own merit will not be diffused. He's a hero — that's got to be said — and he's an elite composer with a skill set few other poets can approach. Put your hands together for the mega-maker and give a warm welcome to Bruce Andrews.