

*Review of Jacket magazine (among others), Times Literary Supplement, 12 November 1999:*

The Internet magazine Jacket, also domiciled in Sydney and also a relative newcomer, conforms to the local tradition of literary journals having single-word titles. (A possible explanation may be found in Patrick White's "The Vivisector" where Hurtle, the onomastically challenged artist-hero, is told by his father that "one name is enough to carry around in Australia'.) Jacket appears quarterly, with all past and present issues hovering together in the ether of cyberspace.

Its founder and Editor is John Tranter, one of Australia's best-known poets; not surprisingly, Jacket is mainly concerned with matters poetic though it occasionally publishes art criticism as well as other cultural commentary. Like HEAT, it gives space to a considerable amount of non-Australian material; overseas contributors include John Ashbery, Eliot Weinberger, Harry Mathews and Mark Ford. One of Jacket's attractions is its unusual photographs of contributors; but despite its high-tech medium, Jacket is, in some ways, a throw-back to the little magazines of a past era, not least because it is available free of charge. Perhaps because of this, its Editor has been able to record over 100,000 "hits" (that is, visits) to its virtual pages since October 1997.

The content tends to be ironic or experimental. Issue 8 contains work by unfamiliar names (and faces) like the up-and-coming American poet Katherine Lederer and the Bolivian avant-gardist Jaime Saenz, published, apparently, for the first time in English. There is a useful review of Ashbery's latest collection (though the piece begins inauspiciously with the proposition that "some People would rather chew a horse-hair blanket than read poetry").

A long interview with Simon Perchik, a New Yorker, is revealing about the postmodern poetic vocation. Perchik explains "carpet-bombing", a strategy which entails sending photocopies of his poems at regular intervals to every address

listed in American periodical directories, with a healthy indifference about the results. A report by Alvaro de Campos on the recent Cambridge Conference on Contemporary Poetry must be taken cum grano salis (particularly when he describes one of the participants as performing "like a macaque in a detergent experiment'): wisely, there is a disclaimer that these views have no editorial imprimatur.

The present number also contains a fine poem by the American writer David Lehman, with the vaguely menacing line that "the codependents are coming over for dinner". Cleverly fashioned out of the clichés of psychobabble, Lehman's poem gives a good indication of Jacket's style and tone. As is inevitably the case with poetry-oriented magazines, Jacket will not please every palate - especially if one does not have a taste for the work of the so-called New York School.

That, however, is assuredly not a weakness. With so much material of dubious worth on the Internet, browsers will at least know what to expect if Jacket is tried on for size. In this most ephemeral of domains, Jacket has now lasted for over two years and shows no sign of disappearing.

Jeffrey Poacher

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*Notes by Pam Brown in Australian Book Review 2000:*

[...]

The content is lush with contributions from a sweeping range of luminaries, lesser-knowns and soon-to-be-someones. The genres are broad -- essays, reviews, poems, interviews, conference papers and reports, memorials, special issues, literary histories, featured writers, all accompanied by jokey photographic oddities, cartoons and comic-strip panels as well as many original photos of the authors, locations and the *Jacket* mascot (a pup called 'Tiger') mostly taken by Tranter who is also an experienced photographer.

Apart from the late Martin Johnston and John Forbes (a memorial) and the hoax poet Ern Malley, the special issues feature U.S. poets -- John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, Paul Blackburn, Joanne Kyger, Jack Spicer, and Philip Whalen, British-born Mina Loy and Ecuadorian-American Jorge Carrera Andrade. These features are comprehensive and include critical essays, reviews and interviews as well as writing by the showcased poet.

To give some idea of *Jacket's* voluminous scope, its index of varying contributors encompasses the respected U.S. critic, Marjorie Perloff, Australian indigenous poet Lionel Fogarty, the editor of the *Norton Anthology Postmodern American Poetry* Paul Hoover, Victorian visual-poet Pete Spence, OULIPO member Harry Mathews, renowned German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Charles Bernstein, *Skanky Possum* magazine founder Dale Smith, Ted Berrigan's son Anselm, Japanese poetry expert Leith Morton, Sydney Poets' Union web-master John Bennett, the late-lamented Ed Dorn through to *Fast Speaking Woman*, American feminist, Anne Waldman and many, many others.

Australians, apart from Johnston, Forbes, an interview with Dorothy Hewett (which first appeared in *overland*) and the piece on Malley, are represented mainly by new poems and occasional reviews. Just about any contemporary Australian poet of interest is given expression here. The list is too long to even attempt and there are just as many new poems from the U.K. and U.S.A. [...]

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*“Australian scene” — Time magazine (Pacific) — April 23, 2001:*

Elizabeth Feizkhah / Balmain: Free Verse

From his Sydney study, poet John Tranter  
broadcasts to the literary world

POETRY and power tools aren't often found side by side. But the cordless drill in John Tranter's book-lined study is there in the service of literature. Tranter, 57, a Sydney poet, is teaching himself bookbinding: the drill is for piercing stacked pages before they're sewn together. Near it, snugly bound in green buckram, lies a sample of his handiwork: a copy of Tranter's poetry journal *Jacket*. This single issue is so big — it's 2.5 cm thick and weighs 1.25 kg — that it would be impossibly expensive to print in any numbers, let alone ship to literary hubs like London and New York. Which is why this tome, and another one Tranter gave to American poet John Ashbery, are the only copies of *Jacket* in existence.

Make that between covers. For *Jacket* also comes in an electronic version, assembled on Tranter's computer in this bright back room of his Balmain home and published around the globe on the World Wide Web (<http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/>). There, free from weight worries, it flourishes. Influential literary journals like *The Paris Review* do well to sell 12,000 copies. *Jacket*, in 13 issues, has logged over 280,000 hits — though many, he concedes, are accidental, people wanting “something smart in dinner jackets, perhaps.” It has also won several awards — last year *Britannica.com* named it one of the best sites on the Web.

In the welter of literary e-zines, *Jacket* stands out for its stylishness (it was named, Tranter says, with smart attire in mind). Its pages are easy to download and read onscreen, and there's no annoying animation. By publishing only material he has asked for, Tranter also spares readers the self-indulgence that mars so much writing on the Internet. With poetry, reviews, interviews, color images, an audio welcome message and sly editorial humor, *Jacket* is (to quote Tranter's poem “The Popular Mysteries”) “a gift factory/ as silly as a lucky dip.” And as rich. Printed out, its 950 text and image files would cover 2,000 pages — all, says the editor, “free as the breeze.”



Photo of John Tranter by Ross Bird for Time

### *Live Poets' Society: Tranter's Jacket is an Internet café for postmodernists*

Tranter, who started writing and publishing poetry in the '60s, revels in the anarchic freedom of the Net. With an unpaid staff of "five" — all, he jokes, named John Tranter — he can publish what and when he likes, uploading items as he edits them. (His taste leans to the opaquely avant-garde.) He doesn't charge an entry fee for *Jacket* — if he did, he says, "my readers would simply go elsewhere." And while that means there's no money for contributors, "I've never had anyone say they wouldn't send me something because there was no payment."

Poets these days don't expect to get rich — the world is too busy watching television. But the Net lets Tranter piece together a sizeable readership (mostly American), and gather writers from the U.S., Britain, Australia and France, as easily as if they all lived on the same block. "I'd guess that about half the readers have no real idea *Jacket* comes from Australia," he says. "And I don't feel it does. It comes from the Internet; it's almost an outer-space thing."

Unworldly poets might take the same view of Tranter's technical savvy, which he says some of his peers find "weird." (He bound a copy of *Jacket*'s second issue for Ashbery, a computer-shy friend whose work it featured, because "I had the sneaking feeling he'd never actually seen the magazine onscreen.")

But Tranter has always had an affinity with machinery. Growing up an only child on a farm in southern New South Wales, he enjoyed "fixing things with a bit of fencing wire." And when he started publishing poetry magazines — using facilities at the print shop where he worked — he found as much romance in Linotype and Gestetner machines as in the work of Rimbaud and Ginsberg.

Tranter's solitary childhood left him "rather shy," he says. *Jacket* lets him socialize on his terms. "It's like a party, with all these voices discussing things." The Net makes networking easy: e-mailed friends become contributors; contributors located through online poetry groups become friends. Tranter frequently travels abroad with his wife Lyn, a literary agent; when he gave a reading in New York recently, he says, "Almost everyone who came I had

met through *Jacket* , or they introduced themselves because they knew the magazine.”

*Jacket* ’s hypertext structure fosters its own connections: with no page numbers and no defined start or endpoint, visitors follow their fancy from link to link, issue to issue. From a familiar name on the contents list, they might click to a poem, then a related article or interview, then a new poem on the same theme. “It’s like a computer game,” Tranter says. “You can go through it, then start again and go through another way.” Each reader takes a different route — and makes a different mini-magazine. Between covers. *Jacket* is the same for everyone. On the Web, it’s do-it-yourself poetry.

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*Peter Forbes, Thursday June 6, 2002 — The Guardian (U.K.):*

The web, of course, is international, and poetry used to be very insular. But there's no reason now not to check out what's happening in other countries. The prince of online poetry magazines is Jacket [at <http://jacketmagazine.com/> ], run from Australia by the poet John Tranter. It has never been a print journal. The design is beautiful, the contents awesomely voluminous, the slant international modernist and experimental. Issues of Jacket grow slowly so that you can read parts of the June issue already: it is devoted to Ern Malley - the great Australian Poetry Hoaxer - and includes the complete poems and a radio documentary in Real Audio.

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*Web sites featuring the word are thriving:*

Glen Helfand, Special to SF Gate Wednesday, January 9, 2002

Almost everyone I contacted pointed me to Jacket, an Australian site that's perhaps as close to a traditional print poetry journal as can be created online. The site, which publishes a new issue roughly every two months, includes themed sections — the latest issue features an all-star tribute to luminary Kenneth Koch — reviews, poems and substantial scholarly papers; see Marjorie Perloff's article on 'Translatibility in Wittgenstein, Duchamp and Jacques Roubaud' in issue 14.

Published by an office of one — Sydney-based poet John Tranter, who claims to run this hefty enterprise for \$1,000 a year — the journal is very well organized (contents have been plotted out through December 2002) and are posted piece by piece. This is labor-of-love territory, with publisher/editors operating their sites on miniscule budgets or occasionally with the support of foundations or academia, but Tranter boasts in an e-mail that since the publication's debut in October 1997, the site has attracted over a third of a million visits, making Jacket one of the most widely read poetry magazines of all time.

Numbers, however, are relative in the poetry world. 'Sappho, Callimachus, Catullus, Li Bai and John Donne all had small audiences for their poetry,' Tranter writes in a why-I-do-it essay called 'The Left Hand of Capitalism.' 'And any serious poetry faces the same situation today — it's not a profitable market anywhere in the world.'

There are hungry international consumers, though, and this method of distribution seems to reach them more effectively than the bookstore circuit does. Tranter writes, 'In the first issue of Jacket, I published an interview I had recorded with the British poet Roy Fisher, and received an enthusiastic e-mail from a fan. The fellow was grateful for the chance to read an interview with his favorite poet, he said, and went on to explain, 'It's hard to find material on Roy Fisher up here in Nome, Alaska.'"

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*Jacket reviewd on <http://www.newpages.com/magazinestand/online/default.htm>:*

Jacket may perhaps be the best place to begin a search for innovative and intelligent contemporary poetry and poetry reviews. Edited by John Tranter and Pam Brown, the journal's up to Issue 24 and includes links to all its archives, many of which will take you on lengthy detours. Some highlights from October 1997 to now: Issue 1, "Poetics at Buffalo," Susan Schultz; Issue 2, "Interview with John Ashbery," John Tranter; Issue 5, "English as a 'Second' Language: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,'" Marjorie Perloff; Issue 8, "Plain Luxe: Lederer, Spahr, Celona and Corless-Smith," Jack Kimball; Issue 12, Mark Weiss's poem "Translated"; Issue 14, "The Hills of Dublin and Czernowitz (now Chernovtsy) as Rendered in the French and German of the Authors," Michael Scharf; Issue 15, Dale Smith's review of *Birth of the Cool* by Lewis MacAdams; Issue 16, Mark Scroggins reviews *The Shrubberies* by Ronald Johnson; Issue 18, Shane Rhodes reviews *The Natural Selection* by Christopher Dewdney; Issue 19, Ian Tromp reviews *Unsleeping* by Michael Burkard; Issue 20, Drew Milne's piece from *Ill* at these numbers; Issue 21, Bob Slaymaker and Joe Sorge, "Beginning Poets"; Issue 22, Simon Perril's poem; Issue 23, Eleni Sikelianos's piece; Issue 24; Issue 25....

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*Review by Tom Hibbard: from: Word for Word: A Journal of New Writing, Issue 5, Winter (Northern Winter) 2004:*

<http://www.wordforword.info/vol5/reviews.htm>

Jacket Magazine: The New Wilderness

<http://jacketmagazine.com/>

Despite his unassuming demeanor in photographs I've seen of him and his backshop style sheet, I view John Tranter, editor of the widely read online journal Jacket, as something of a Theodore Roosevelt of the intellect, journeying to uncivilized wilds and frontiers, garnering topical trophies, writing papers, all for the enlightenment of his readership and geographical societies of societies to come. His publication offers a robust cosmopolitan range both in content and style, from Ethiopia to San Francisco, from Edwin Denby to John Wieners, from the exotic stylish translations of Henry J.M. Levet to a frenetic wildcat-looking Joanne Kyger, from the bluejean depths of Beat dopefiend despair to the hallowed rarified quiet of Cambridge mathematical precision. All this is presented, rather neatly and succinctly, in a bully decor of fonts, splashy-colored panels embedded with contrasting colored headings, "candid" photos, linking dots, nimble art tastes.

In a subtle etude of grays, pinks, browns, light greens with dark blue text, the current issue 21 skips from Edwin Denby to the poetry of Baja California edited by Harry Polkinhorn, articles on John Wieners -- including Pamela Petro's 'The Hipster of Joy Street' -- to excerpts from a Tom Clark novel about London, to a Tranter-written contribution about America's poet laureate position, to the sturdy "reviews" section (including one by yours truly), to a collaboration between Anne Waldman and Tom Clark, an article on film noir and "poetry" section. Everything in this issue makes the pulse beat faster and multiplies the wrinkles of the cranium.

There is an intangible feeling of importance in Jacket that I think derives from journalism. Often a feature is prompted by the passing of a writer -- Wieners, Philip Whalen, Ed Dorn, John Forbes -- or some sort of event or information-based subject. Thus the issues of Jacket become a document of change, the progression of numbers at the top of each home page a calendar of progress of the literature of our age. Add to this the in-depth quality that comes from many contributions on a subject. Tranter's use of previously published writing gives an archival sense of lasting endeavor.

But the tone of Jacket is far from somber and is often humorous, sometimes satirical. Issue 12 contrasts a striking photo of Paul Blackburn in black cowboy hat with a vacuous 50s-style pop-deco drawing, preface to a series of gritty, tantalizing offerings on American literature, such as Robert Creeley on Charles Olson, four poems by Rae Armantrout, a review of Jerome Rothenberg's *A Paradise of Poets*. This is followed by a section on Jorge Carrera Andrade, with dapper-mustache horn-rimmed businessman photo, followed by a section on Kenneth Patchen ("Poetry and Jazz Days, 1957-1959") with soulful photo of angst-ridden Patchen and young self-effacing Allen Ginsberg.

Teddy Roosevelt does not represent the demise of the wilderness but the beginning of its

preservation. In the same way Tranter is not taming the wilds of literature but extending its borders. All subject matter of Jacket is presented as out-of-the-way. Many of the names in this web space are familiar or "famous," but the editorial good nature of Jacket does not acknowledge renown that accrues beyond a certain modest amount. Famous or not, everything within this lively and lifelike virtual harvest is to some degree infamous, mistaken, human, unerringly on the wrong track. On purpose, there is too much crammed into each issue for any one person to encompass. The reader is forced to select, to choose his or her path.

The premier issue of Jacket -- from 1997, begun by Tranter "in a rash moment" and sponsored by Australian Literary Management -- is somewhat brief in comparison to the more recent ones. It contains an article on "Cyberpoetics" by Kurt Brereton of the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. Brereton states in his essay, "Virtual texts have no substance in any physical terms." Though Jacket has not continued to focus much on the subject of technology and what the new medium means, I feel that that newness underlies all of the contents of the publication, permeates its impetus. Jacket seems to constitute a bold, outwardly-directed exploration, not a diversion but a search to uncover distant value with the highest aim of improving humanity in every way.

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*Lisa Gorton in Australian Book Review June-July 2005* pages 59-60:

POETRY

## Endless ramifications in outer space

Lisa Gorton

John Tranter and Pam Brown (eds) JACKET

<http://jacketmagazine.com/>

Anthony Lynch and David McCooney (eds)

SPACE: NEW WRITING, NO. 2 Whitmore Press, \$19.95 pb, 174 pp, 1449 2229

JOHN TRANTER ONCE remarked of his online journal, Jacket, 'I'd guess that about half the readers have no real idea [it] comes from Australia. And I don't feel it does. It comes from the Internet; it's almost an outer-space thing.' In fact, Jacket seems to come from the far more intimate and sociable realm of poets talking to each other. And the talk is endless.

Reading Jacket is a little like finding yourself in a labyrinth of conversation. Follow this thread through the current issue, for instance: read the extract from Lisa Jarnot's biography of American poet Robert Duncan; then turn to Tranter's 1985 interview with Duncan, where Duncan describes his meeting with Robert Adamson. From there, go to Michael Davidson's discussion of how Duncan influenced Adamson; see how Duncan's work was 'the catalyst for conversations among poets on several continents'. As a digression, look at Davidson's poem in this issue, and compare Duncan's poems with Adamson's 'Eurydice Reads "Roots & Branches"'. If you like it, turn to Adamson's 'Letter to Robert Creeley' — perhaps the finest poem in this issue. Or follow a link to another site to hear Duncan's and Creeley's and Olson's and Ginsberg's 1963 discussion of poetry. Or read Landis Everson's discussion of the Berkeley Renaissance in American poetry: 'It really just meant, to me, a whole lot of poets.'

People often speak of poetry as a solitary undertaking. Tranter's Jacket shows how it derives from conversations, allegiances and betrayals — from the human work of inheritance and innovation. Jacket is often playful but it is serious in this purpose: to serve as an archive not just for poems but for those poems' particular worlds. Each issue offers a special feature: on the 'Ern Malley' hoax, on John Ashbery, on John Forbes, on Mina Loy; adding up to a modern encyclopedia of contemporary writing.

Jacket has no starting point and no end point. Its links lead you between articles, poems and reviews, from issue to issue, and to other sites. If you read it for long enough, you are likely to regard it as a form of time: exhausting, inexhaustible, made of promises and deferrals. Most of the poems that Jacket features depend upon this sense of time: they break syntax; they juxtapose fragments. Landis Everson's poem in this issue, 'At the Window', is one of the finest examples of this form:

Insanity is a precious thing under

an umbrella and grows like twisted vines  
in our heads. Sometimes the rain comes down

to tickle us and drown out our tears.  
The cows outside the institution  
have none of our fears. At the window

the bars seem to shift shadows  
on the backs of the sweet beasts, and  
I wonder at the pastures of peaceful stupidity

that are always inside them to eat.  
Like zebras one moment, if the sun  
is just right with the bars, their made-up

stripes dance, until the rains come  
to put them out. I wonder why  
these magic drops tickle when they don't

hit me on the ears and like crinkled paper  
getting wet, the vines uncurl and grow straight  
until the rain stops and waits for the zebras.

With its disjunctions and odd felicitous connections, the Internet is peculiarly suited to this form. Jacket is remarkable, in this way, for its self-consistency; for an editorial stance that takes advantage of the particular conditions of the Internet — its endless ramifications; and in all that outer space, keeps its own world view.

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*US Poet Robert Kelly, late 2005:*

dear JT,

I've always thought that Jacket was the best thing on the web, but this new issue [Announcing Jacket 28, October 2005] exceeds anything I could have imagined. This is fantastic gathering and weaving and showing forth. It's like a whirlwind of opening doors. Bless you!

Robert

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<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/>Thursday, July 07, 2005:

A few folks have written to let me know that they were “disappointed” or “hurt” that their ezines were not mentioned as the obvious answer to the comment I made last June 22nd, when I asked “why is it, nearly eight years after John Tranter first introduced Jacket, no other HTML journal does it half so well?” It makes sense, I think, to spell out why I think that Jacket does such a superb job. And to note two important qualifications:

- Just because Jacket does a great job does not necessarily mean that all other e-journals do poor jobs.
- One ezine, in fact, does very nearly just as good a job as does Jacket. That publication is How2.

Comparisons of the two journals are, in fact, instructive with regards to what makes not just a great e-zine, but a great journal altogether. Both publications, for example, publish both poetry & critical writing – an absolute necessity to my way of thinking – and both do so from points of view that are partisan, articulate & far-reaching. John Tranter’s vision, as viewed through Jacket, might be said to be the following:

The New American Poetry (NAP) of the 1950s & ‘60s was a phenomenon that touched all avant movements of poetry in the English speaking world. As such, one can use it as a focal point from which to investigate the poetries of the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand & the British Isles, not only going forward from the 1950s to the present, but also in reconstructing their modernist heritages. As such, Jacket is not only interested in the NAP, but it is almost always the point that will enable you to get from poet A in this country to poet B in that one.

How2’s editorial vision is broader & more diverse, a reflection of an evolving and collective / collaborative approach to editing. The journal’s website pegs its role as

Extending HOW(ever)’s original spirit of inquiry into modernist and contemporary writing practices by women.

For good reasons<sup>1</sup>, neither HOW(ever) nor How2 have ever focused in the same way on the NAP as does Jacket, but it is worth noting how complementary the two journal’s missions are, otherwise. Each takes on a range of writing that gives them over a century of material on which to focus, a substantial amount of which may be “news” in the most literal sense to readers outside of its original closely held context. Thus an American, turning to Jacket 25 out of an interest in the poetry of Barbara Guest or Kathleen Fraser, or interested perhaps in the memorials to the recently deceased Donald Allen & Carl Rakosi, can find out also about the Bolivian Jaime Saenz, the Brit Peter Robinson or the New Zealand modernist (pre-modernist?) Robin Hyde. Something akin to this process is possible with every single issue of Jacket & How2. They are educations in themselves.

A second feature that both publications share is an understanding of the importance of archives. This is another absolute requirement in my mind for any journal that seeks to be taken seriously. Both are meticulous in presenting everything they have published – Jacket, in addition, has a search capacity and an index that is essentially the table of contents over every issue published on a single page of HTML. Indeed, it is this ability to find material that is the primary advantage Jacket has over How2.

One might argue that neither publication focuses primarily upon the publication of new poetry – but, in fact, both publish large amounts of it, almost always with some sort of context. Indeed, it is precisely that giving context that unites both journals’ vision of the editorial function to the body of work they publish. Contrast this with journals that never publish any critical writing, or do so only in the framework of reviews, or with critical journals – such as Chain – that print some extraordinary work, but which actively resist any editorial perspective beyond the broad topic assignments given to an issue.

So, yes, I will stand behind my original comment with regards to Jacket, even if I will modify it a little to make room for How2. And I note, for what it’s worth, that at the moment both are being edited by Australians – this may be the first moment in history when that continent can claim to be the center of the English-language literary universe, at least in this one regard.

I also note, of course, what seems to me the obvious next step, the journal that so clearly needs to exist that it will feel “inevitable” once it arrives, and that is the one that steps forward to focus in similar manner, but from a contemporary perspective, on the literary scene. The NAP, after all, is a phenomenon of a half century ago & modernism, How2’s unifying framework, is older than that. Where is the journal that steps up to looking at the world with such rigor, but from the framework of poets age 35 & under?

<sup>1</sup> Having to do with the sexism that was rampant & often explicit in the NAP.

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*Ron Silliman, January 2005:*

On Wednesday, I thought to write a note on the changing status of literary magazines in the age of post-mechanical reproduction. For, while there are certainly some print journals — Chain, Kiosk, Poker, Combo — as great as any that have plied their trade in & around the fields of verse, there is also Jacket & a rapidly growing legion of online journals that have demonstrated that they can be just as well-edited — and just as creatively formatted — as anything in print. I was thinking about a conversation I'd had with Laura Moriarty at the books exhibit at the MLA last month — she had told me, in so many words, that my contention that the chapbook was the primary unit of exchange or of production — I can admit to being vague here — in contemporary poetry was so much hooey. She sees, as she noted, so many more books than I do — and of an aesthetic breadth that I can barely imagine (indeed, I could never work at an operation like SPD precisely because its view into the world of poetry, not unlike that of institutions like Poets & Writers or CMP, would depress me to the point of psychic paralysis). Bookstores hate chapbooks for obvious reasons — the cost of retail space argues against presenting anything not a best-seller face up to potential consumers. But, even with perfect binding & high-format covers, “nobody wants journals, either.” On this, Laura & I were forced to agree.

This puts the print magazine into a curious double-bind, one from which I'm not at all certain it will be able to emerge. The expense of publication is prohibitive. Distribution borders on the impossible. Unlike a book, back issues become an albatross of storage. When I was with the Socialist Review in the 1980s, we struggled with finding the right balance on any given print run between enough volume to drive down the cost per copy & literally having to bring in dumpsters to handle overstock that was crowding us out of our four-room office in Berkeley.

Jacket, with its strategy of publicly building each issue up from scratch on-line, actually solves one of the inherent problems of the online journal: how to cope with the out-of-sight/out-of-mind issue that can make “distribution” online even more of a challenge than getting bookstores to carry little magazines. Where most other online zines have to start from scratch getting a readership for each & every issue, Jacket gives its readers a reason for checking in with great regularity — there's almost always something new. This I suspect makes it not only the most well-edited poetry journal online, but the most widely perused as well.

Journals exist for a reason — yet in the print world, the most common path for a small press publisher has been to begin with a journal & to shift at some point into doing books. A lot of presses go through a both/ and stage, but sooner or later, it's usually the journal that gets jettisoned. Publications with the lasting power of Jacket do exist of course — think of Sulfur, let alone the institutionally based journals like Chicago Review — but by keeping all 5,000 web pages (some of them quite long) online, Jacket demonstrates how the online journal can even trump the availability of something like Sulfur or Poetry. Too often e-zines keep only the current issue online — Jacket really is the example of how to keep material “in print” electronically. Against this, I look at the one narrow bookcase I do devote to journals (plus a stack of still-to-read ones atop another bookcase). The reality is that there just isn't enough real estate in my bookshelves to accommodate everything. I have ready access to anything in Jacket in a way that will never be possible with, say, boundary2.

All of which I was about to write on Wednesday, when Verizon's DSL service to the

Philadelphia region (“and the state of Delaware” says the tech support hotline) went down for over ten hours. Which reminded me of the weak link in this process altogether. Sigh.

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*Ron Silliman, Wednesday, February 09, 2005:*

*The Paris Review* is, as I noted, a serious brand. Its interviews, especially in the early years, largely defined the form as we know it today. Happily, one thing the *Review* is now doing is putting its interviews up in PDF format on its web site. Its reputation for poetry has varied widely with its poetry editors over the years – far better in Tom Clark’s hands than in Richard Howard’s – and its reputation for fiction has, in good part, had a lot to do with the publication’s close relationship to the New York trade houses that can make somebody like Matthiessen successful. But it’s really just a little magazine – in recent years, it hasn’t been able to hold a candle to *Can We Have Our Ball Back* or *Jacket* or *Shampoo*.

<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/>

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*US poet Adam Fieled: two comments:*

AF: I was always skeptical about Net publishing until I had an article published in JACKET. Dealing with John Tranter (who helped me edit my piece, & in fact re-titled it), seeing what he was able to accomplish with a Net journal (a primer of wonderful post-avant writing, easily accessible & continually evolving & encouraging the development of a global post-avant community) just sort of blew my mind. Around the same time, I started a blog for the Philly Free School, an artists' co-op that I was running at the time. When that was put on hiatus, it occurred to me that I could use the blog to publish people whose poetry I admired (including, incidentally, John Tranter). What had been the Philly Free School blog became PFS (Philly Free School) POST.

Interview with US poet Adam Fieled on  
<http://artrecess.blogspot.com/2006/02/feature-dialogue-lars-palm-spain-adam.html>

[....]

AF: All good points & taken. One thing I would add about the Net is its international aspect. How else could we be in daily contact with poets in Mexico, Canada, England & Australia? This, I think, is the key to the success of JACKET & Silliman's blog. All artists have a need for commonality, to be part of a community larger than the small milieus that they generally, inevitably inhabit. JACKET has been instrumental in turning post-avant from a plethora of small, insular groups into a unified, international whole. This also applies to Silliman's blog. Between them, we have two publications that everyone, or almost everyone, in the post-avant community reads. The consolidation & unification of post-avant is almost entirely due to the influence of the Net. Centrist poetry can lay claim to no such unity. Do English & Australian & Canadian Centrist poets read American Centrist journals, & vice versa? I would wager that they don't. What I think post-avant really needs is a print equivalent of JACKET. If we could get in print what's already in motion on the Web, we'd really be poised for world domination.

Adam Fieled, on <<http://www.artrecess.blogspot.com/>>, 08:59 a.m. 26/04/2006

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Lisa Gorton: *Australian Book Review* February 2006 Page 46:

## Retrospectives

Lisa Gorton reviews

Patricia McCarthy (ed.) *Agenda: Australian issue* Volume 41, nos 1–2, spring/summer 2005  
*Agenda*, \$35 pb, 222 pp, 00020796

John Tranter (ed.) *Jacket* 28, October 2005 <http://jacketmagazine.com/28/>

WILLIAM COOKSON was eighteen. He had been writing to Ezra Pound for three years. At last he spent a week in Italy with the great man. ‘Does he ever speak?’ Pound asked his mother. Nonetheless, or as a consequence, Pound encouraged Cookson to start a literary magazine. Cookson founded *Agenda* in 1959 and edited it until his death in 2003.

This is *Agenda’s* first Australian issue, a double issue crammed with good things. *Agenda* typically publishes established and new poets, and long sequences. This issue includes two young Australian poets whose poems you can read online ([www.agendapoetry.co.uk](http://www.agendapoetry.co.uk)), as well as striking poems from Judith Bishop, Michael Brennan, M.T.C. Cronin, Rosemary Dobson, Emma Lew, Les Murray, Peter Porter, Andrew Sant, Vivian Smith, Maria Takolander and John Tranter; as well as long poems from Peter Boyle, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Alison Croggon and Kevin Hart.

The long poems are highlights of this issue. Take Hart’s ‘Dark Retreat’, compressed in style and baroque in spirit, like Richard Crashaw in the suburbs: ‘I went there yesterday /When someone left /A clock ajar: /There was no dust, /Only the faintest smell /Of half-drunk milk; //And you were there, /Dark One ...’

So, in one sense, the editor, Patricia McCarthy, is right in her claim: this issue proves ‘Australia is a vital, unique and highly energetic poetic force’; though the issue as a whole seems uncertain about what, if anything, Australia means to Australian poets. Probably this is how it ought to be; most Australian poets would disagree on the subject. Only this issue offers itself as an overview of the Australian scene, and thus sets itself up as more definitive.

According to its editorial policy, *Agenda* aims ‘to bring to English-speaking audiences poetry that they would not normally have access to’, and this issue seems designed for readers who know very little about Australia: there’s a map inside the back cover. It starts with three introductory essays and includes seven review essays on notable Australian writers. McCarthy suggests these essays ‘balance one another and give a perspective on Australian poetry in the past and now, elaborating on the literary scene in the Antipodes’.

Certainly, there are some fine essays here. Katherine Gallagher’s introductory essay describes the friendship between Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Judith Wright, and reflects on the difficulty and promise of reconciliation. Paul Kane remembers Philip Hodgins and marks out a place

for humane values in his poetry. In a gently illuminating review essay, David McCooey pays tribute to Laurie Duggan; and, in an introductory essay, assesses the contemporary poetry scene, finding a ‘new lyricism’ that is lyricism plus worldliness and uncanny effects.

Still, it seems McCarthy claims too much when she suggests these fine essays ‘balance one another and give a perspective on Australian poetry in the past and now’. For instance, the review essays cover sixteen poets, only three of them female and those three grouped together in an essay from the editor on ‘women poets’. And the first essay reads as though no one told David Brooks it would be serving as an introduction to ‘Australian poetry in the past and now’ — for instance, Brooks mentions just three women: Judith Wright, Gig Ryan and Pam Brown. Instead, he enters the old bush versus city debate, claiming that ‘there is something retrospective, dated, about the concern for landscape in the first place’. This is, of course, thought-provoking; and Brooks acknowledges how few Australian poets fit either category (though Les Murray gets the usual, seemingly obligatory drubbing). Still, as an overview of ‘Australian poetry in the past and now’, his argument makes no place for poets you might well consider essential: Mary Gilmore, Dorothea MacKellar, Francis Webb, Gwen Harwood, Michael Dransfield, Robert Gray, David Malouf; and Brooks treats Bruce Chatwin’s *Songlines* (1987) as if it were a reliable guide to ‘the Dreamtime’. Like Brooks’s essay, *this Agenda* has many fine things in it; but it works more as a starting point than an overview.

The online poetry magazine *Jacket*, on the other hand, covers a remarkable range of poets in remarkable detail. A choose-your-own-adventure hyperspace encyclopedia, it features notable poets and ringleaders: their friendships, factions, letters, essays and reviews, as well as their poems. This issue covers critic and essayist Kenneth Cox, the Black Mountain poet Robert Duncan, and George Bowering, Canada’s first poet laureate.

In addition, it has perhaps a hundred poems, most notably Annie Finch’s ‘Feeding the Emperor’s Pussycat’, Peter Robinson’s suite of prose poems from *Other Trespasses* and David Lehman’s ‘To You’, which contains the best definition of a prose poem you’re likely to find: ‘As twenty measures of gin to one measure of dry vermouth make an acceptable Martini, so one unit of poetry converts twenty of prose into a prose poem.’ It also has interviews and more than thirty reviews, notably Larry Sawyer’s review of John Ashbery’s and Joe Brainard’s *The Vermont Notebook*, Ben Lerner’s review of W.S. Merwin’s *Migration: New and Selected Poems*, and Liz Parson’s review of Australian poet Michael Farrell’s *ode ode*. The feature on Robert Duncan includes excerpts from letters that Duncan wrote to the Australian poet Chris Edwards (whose poems appear in *Jacket* 15) and letters to his one-time close friend, poet Denise Levertov. The letters to Levertov mark out Duncan’s commitment to poetry as an art outside politics: he vehemently opposes Levertov’s activism; her writing against the Vietnam war. His letters to Edwards also mark out his idea of poetry: ‘The close with its full rimes and its metaphorical current is, as I still feel it, dangerously *poetic*. Yet, the more so, I know it to be necessary ...’

With its vast place in hyperspace and endlessly ramifying links, *Jacket* can trace poets’ networks and interconnections across countries and generations. For instance, this issue

shows how Robert Duncan's writing influenced George Bowering. Bowering led a poetry revolution in Canada, similar to the one that Robert Adamson led here when the 'Generation of '68' wrested control of *Poetry Magazine*:

Preferring an American postmodern poetic ... they initially dismissed the Canadian modernism ... that had been created from more British models, opting instead for heroes closer to their interest, such as Jack Spicer, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Robert Olsen, Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan.

With this connection in mind, it is interesting to note Bowering's early struggles against a national idea of poetry: 'that the poetry is there to awaken you to how Canadians feel and so forth, rather than to tell you what the muses are telling the poets.'

Yet perhaps this issue's most involving feature describes the life and work of a brilliant critic, Kenneth Cox. Born in London in 1919, his father a grocery manager, his mother part-gypsy, he taught himself French by reading labels on French products in his father's store. During the war, he worked as a cryptographer in Cairo and Palestine, receiving an MBE for his work. After the war, he returned to London and stayed there for the rest of his life. In his fifties, he began publishing essays on literature in *Agenda*. According to August Kleinzahler, these are: 'Models of clarity, concision and insight, they make a mockery of almost all contemporaneous academic criticism, which by comparison will strike the reader as fuzzy, ham-fisted, self-aggrandizing, tendentious and dim.'

Still, Cox struggled to find a publisher for his selected essays. Finally *Agenda's* offshoot, *Agenda Editions*, published them, though Cox paid. It seems he considered his greatest achievement the promotion of little-known poet Lorine Niedecker, of whom he wrote:

The prevailing mood of the poems is alert calm. It conveys pathos, asperity or affectionate irony, rather as if one were in the presence of a relative from whom little is hid and to whom little needs to be explained. The poems acknowledge semi-articulate intimacies, their interrupted cadence, a shrewd tenderness, a tang.

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Ron Silliman blog 2006:

John Tranter responded to my comments regarding Aaron Kunin's text that deploys both verse *and* prose within the same text without having to resort to haibun-like before-&-after effects by reminding me of this link on *Jacket's* website. It's a discussion of line lengths online, just a part of *Jacket's* editorial style guide. One of the reasons that *Jacket* is the best online poetry publication – tho hardly the most important reason – is that it does think to have, and publish, its style guide.

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-- <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/> 15:02 16/sep/2006"

I've noted these dynamics before. In the late 1940s, the U.S. had a population of rough 150 million people and saw in any given year the publication of roughly 8,000 book titles of all kinds. There were maybe 200 publishing poets in the U.S. The U.K. and Canada were distinctly different markets in those days. Today we have 300 million people in the U.S., and last year there some 174,000 different titles published (a drop, actually, of about 16,000 from the previous year), of which perhaps 4,000 were books of poetry. There are at least 10,000 publishing poets and the borders between markets have become fully permeable in the age of the internet, where the most influential online zine for American poetry is published by John Tranter in Australia.

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*US Publishers Weekly, February 2007, page 61:*

Known internationally as the founder and editor of *Jacket*, the first (and best) large-scale Internet poetry journal, Tranter, since the 1970s, has enjoyed another, broader reputation in his native Australia: readers there see him as a leading figure in Australia's slippery, intellectual, urbane, post-'60s, postmodern poetry scene. This (rightly) big third selected is the first to sample his whole career. Here are the racy early-1970s poems whose sharp fragments protest middle-class complacency, Australian traditions and the Vietnam War, "when the new alphabet soup of the earth/ is raised into a flag." Here are Tranter's declarations of literary rebellion, showing "a gift to stir up fevered passions/ in a fit to envision a disastrous future." Here are his hymns to Sydney, regrets about his rural youth, and later reconciliations with bourgeois householdry and fatherhood: "would we be satisfied/ with our childhood," he asks, "if it happened again?" Here, too, are Tranter's many, repeated, successful experiments with traditional forms: sonnets rhymed and unrhymed, sestmas, Sapphics, pantoums and haiku, among others, including some of Tranter's own inventions. Tranter's cool, cosmopolitan versatility, with its eye on an ambivalent future, has yet to attain the international reputation of his bitter, backward-looking Australian rival, Les Murray; with this big collection, that may change.

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MARCIA BRENNAN: in *PN Review* 184, Volume 35 Number 2, November - December 2008:

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SLANTS AND RIGHT ANGLES

By MARCIA BRENNAN

Jacket Magazine, edited by John Tranter, special review edition CD, on the Internet at [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com)

A recent issue of *Jacket*, the award-winning online literary magazine edited by the Australian poet John Tranter, contains an evocative photograph entitled *Slant Fence, Blackheath, NSW* (December 2007; <http://jacketmagazine.com/35/index.shtml>). Taken by Tranter himself, the landscape displays a single named location, yet the image also manages to inhabit multiple spaces at once. As such, the photograph can be seen as a suggestive metaphor for the ways in which *Jacket* can be critically approached, and ultimately appreciated, through the multiple frames of its own imagery. In *Slant Fence*, a sloping white picket fence frames the edge of a modest yard, behind which a wooden house lies largely concealed by the lush vegetation of an over-grown pine tree. The bright white upright slats of the fence are vividly positioned against horizontal wooden boards that appear in muted earth tones and form sharp right angles at the corners of the house. In Tranter's microcosmic image of interwoven contrasts, something straight is placed in relation to something that is leaning, while something that is revealed serves as a screen for that which remains concealed.

*Prima facie*, *Jacket* appears to be a postmodern literary magazine; *Time* magazine (Pacific edition, April 23, 2001; <http://jacketmagazine.com/00/jacket-reviewed.shtml#time>) characterised it as 'an Internet café for postmodernists'. Yet *Jacket* is much more than this. The journal is a collection of slants and right angles, poetry and prose, modern and postmodern production, all of which are embedded in a complementary dialogue that encompasses literary expression, critical commentary, and their related visual culture.

As a web-based publication, *Jacket* is expansive in both form and content. International in scope, the magazine features longer articles than it would be possible to accommodate in a traditional print journal. Tranter founded the magazine in the autumn of 1997. All thirty-five issues are easily accessible online, while the current number appears piecemeal as a work in process. In this evolving digital framework, poetry and criticism become media objects, and it almost feels as though the journal itself exists in

multiple editions even before it is published.

*Jacket* brings editorial discernment to online publishing. Hybrid and heterogloss, this innovative magazine not only features literary essays, poetry, and book reviews, but a broad selection of articles spanning the arts and humanities, including comparative literature, architectural history, the history of photography, conceptual and performance art, philosophy, information technology, and cultural criticism. Experimental works by younger and lesser-known poets appear alongside pieces by established writers. Both are interposed with verse and critical commentary on such venerable figures as Arthur Rimbaud, Ezra Pound, Arthur Cravan, Mina Loy, Wallace Stevens, Marcel Duchamp, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Allen Ginsberg, and many others. Thus while *Jacket* is filled with postmodern self-reflexive commentary - the discourse on the discourse - it also contains a surprisingly extensive selection of primary source materials, including photographs, conversations, and interviews of considerable historical and documentary interest. Placing these diverse selections in a fluid digital dialogue, *Jacket* appears retrospective and progressive, deliberative and spontaneous, established and experimental, as it appeals at once to a scholarly and an educated general audience.

*Jacket* is free. It is not possible to subscribe to the magazine, and no advertising appears on its web pages. In an early essay notably entitled 'The Left Hand of Capitalism' (1999, <http://jacketmagazine.com/00/about.shtml>), Tranter discusses the practical and conceptual dimensions associated with his digital enterprise. In particular, he notes that the ubiquitous and timely nature of the Internet addresses the single most 'intractable' problem in literary publishing, namely 'the cost and difficulty of distribution' associated with a small, unprofitable market. Accompanying Tranter's essay is a deceptively simple-looking cartoon of a playful, salivating canine. This witty retro illustration bears the caption, 'Give the dog a bone, Graphic from *Jacket* #1'. As Tranter observes, *Jacket* creates immediate, cost-free access between the literary product and its audience, thereby reconfiguring traditional models of production and consumption, just as it inverts established structures of price and distribution. As a web-based publication, *Jacket* not only gives the dog a bone; it gives the bone a dog.

While most of the magazine's materials are original, some selections are 'excerpted from or co-produced with hard-to-get books and magazines, partly to help them find new readers' (<http://jacketmagazine.com/00/about.shtml>). One important example appears in a recent issue (no. 35, 2008) as a conversation on 'Structuralism and Linguistics' that Pierre Daix

conducted with the French structural linguist Émile Benveniste (<http://jacketmagazine.com/35/iv-benveniste-ivb-daix-t-reeck.shtml>). In this interview, which was originally published in the July 1968 issue of *Les Lettres françaises*, the two men discuss Jules Gilliéron's idea that the elements of a complex living language must be collected and meaningfully assembled on maps that form a 'linguistic geography'. Through features such as this, which add valuable intellectual ballast to the novelty associated with new media and contemporary cultural expression, *Jacket* accomplishes something similar. In its convergent terrain of linguistic geographies, the magazine both embodies and performs the 'aesthetics of information systems' (<http://jacketmagazine.com/34/index.shtml>), as technical and conceptual structures engage in a constantly evolving dialogue with emergent forms of creativity.

In short, *Jacket* is perspectively complex. The magazine turns its gaze in multiple directions simultaneously, as it looks forward and backward to show its readers the slants in the fence and the spaces between them.

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