

An Apparent Event

a Second Story Books Anthology

edited by Mary Burger



All works were previously published as chapbooks by
Second Story Books on the following dates:

Not Right Now, Renee Gladman, 1998.

A Summer Newsreel, Brenda Coultas, 1999.

The Television Documentary, Lauren Gudath, 1999.

A Duelling Primer, Avery Burns, 2000.

Confuzion Comix, Jacques Debrot, 2000.

Red, Kristin Prevallet, 2001.

Spirit's Measure, Gregory Brooker, 2001.

Cracquer, Camille Roy, 2002.

The Boy Who Could Fly, Mary Burger, 2002.

A Summer Newsreel was reprinted in *A Handmade Museum*, Brenda
Coultas (Coffee House Press, 2003).

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Introduction

An Apparent Event brings together the nine chapbooks published by Second Story Books between 1998 and 2002. I started Second Story Books after co-editing *Proliferation* magazine with Jay Schwartz and Chris Vitiello for five years. *Proliferation* was our attempt to locate ourselves amidst the multiple, decentered practices of new writing that were our legacy and our context then, work informed by New York School, New Narrative, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, aleatory, visual, post-colonialist, feminist and a few dozen other practices.

In the course of editing *Proliferation* I found I was most interested in work that explored *narrative*, the representation of events in language.

Apparently, by all appearances, events are taking place. We engage with life as if events are taking place, have taken place, will continue to—as if we exist in time, with changes occurring in time. Narrative, the representation of events, of changes taking place in the experiential realm, permeates our understanding of and engagement with time.

Narrative exists in the tension between disbelief and its suspension. The seduction of narrative is that it creates an experience of events in time, but that we are aware, in the midst of this experience, that what we are experiencing is a representation. Narrative is not a window onto the world, a transcription of an interior monologue, or a faithful account of things as they happened, though it may assume any of these guises or others. Narrative is a language event, through which we experience events taking place in time.

As participants in narrative, we have the power and the pleasure of being in more than one place at one time—or, of being at more than one time in one place. We engage with the events of narrative as changes taking place in time. And, we engage with the narrative as a language artifact, we encounter the operations of the text and the ways in which the text creates representations.

It's this multiple engagement, this simultaneity of representational and experiential time, that makes for the complex possibilities of narrative writing.

Is narrative an engagement *with* events, or an enactment *of* events? Is our understanding of time, of events taking place in time, separable from our use of narrative to represent events in time? Or, are all of our understandings of time, of events in time, ultimately instances of narrative?

How we understand the operations and assumptions of narrative is fundamental to how we define “reality”, how we decide what is relevant or significant—how we decide what anything means.

The writers collected here are in one way or another invested in the high stakes of portraying events in language. They're attentive to the malleable boundary between experience and representation, and to the consequences of their activities along that boundary.

These works enact strategies for self-reflexively examining the assumptions and consequences of narrative choices, and implicate readers in doing the same:

Renee Gladman (*Not Right Now*) makes a continual migration between “I” and “you” and “we” through a narration that fixes and unfixes its location in relation to self, other, and world in an unsettling rhythm.

Lauren Gudath (*The Television Documentary*) exploits the false stability and imperfect authority of documentary to examine the irrational, noncommunal origins of language.

Brenda Coultas (*A Summer Newsreel*) acts as a poet-archivist, gathering and interpreting artifacts of various pasts and examining the implications of her own acts of interpretation.

Jacques Debrot (*Confuzion Comix*) imitates scholarly authorial personas in works that satirize consumerist habits of writing and reading.

Avery Burns (*A Duelling Primer*) creates precise, intricate instructions and descriptions for locating “you” in space, in specific relation to an other who is opponent but also mirror.

Kristin Prevallet (*Red*) mimics the crisp, brusque sentences of crime fiction while eschewing plot machinery in favor of ambiguity about the nature of narration and of event itself.

Gregory Brooker (*Spirit's Measure*) experiments with a compositional method that has prophetic origins but is here used in a secular Williams-esque collage of American language.

Camille Roy (*Craquer*) generates a loose-limbed yet exacting memoir of family and class identity that proceeds through relentless analysis of her own motives and strategies in telling this story.

My piece (*The Boy Who Could Fly*) is an effort to bring together far-flung versions of heroic tragedy, to see how overlapping accounts refract or collapse in on one another.

Taken together, these works make a lumpy exquisite corpse, a mismatched set whose contingencies and peculiarities begin to suggest how many more possible ways there could be to understand *event*.

Mary Burger
December 2005