

## *Krupskaya*

### **Jocelyn Saidenberg and Judith Goldman**

Jocelyn: I realize that the activities themselves, the making of books and the individuals and communities that create them, the energy that is made from those activities which supports writing and writers, is what matters most. And is what the press has to contribute. The books say a lot about our poetics, though hopefully not too proscriptively: we have always been interested in publishing writing that has political and social implications, which I imagine most imagine their own work has.

Judith: But there is also the issue of getting traction on the potential agency of or cultural work to be done by the writing published by Krupskaya beyond the boundaries of a self-identified community (al)ready to respond to it, care about it, take it up and interact with it. I think it's important not to script disconnection or unproductive antagonism as the experience of readers or hearers unfamiliar with avant-garde, politically motivated writing. The presumption that "nonlinear" or disjunctive poetics are necessarily elitist, or disenfranchising for those who aren't used to writing or reading in these ways obscures the array of reactions and engagements that really occur, perhaps especially with people who are open—at times in ways they didn't realize—to the staging of alternate means of (to use a convenient shorthand) "speaking truth to power," or rather, of speaking about how power is shored up, to those sickened by how the decision-making and resource-allocating apparatuses in our society are being operated and abused, and above all radically changed for the worse, by those in positions of authority.

One point of reference for me here is Michelle Tea's recent review of Krupskaya in the Bay Guardian [[http://www.sfbg.com/40/04/lit\\_hunt.html](http://www.sfbg.com/40/04/lit_hunt.html)], in which she mobilizes this version of the interface between "mainstream" audiences and experimental narrative in stating that the press publishes "nonlinear writings that often read like mystery itself, politically infused codes impossible to crack, best simply submitted to in the way one submits to a David Lynch film" and that "immersing yourself in Krupskaya's brightly designed volumes can feel like becoming lost in an endlessly replicating linguistic fun house." Tea's representation of the work we've published feels citational to me, and it also makes me want to ask, for those who do get something out of this writing, is it because they have the secret password? Or is it that we're buoyed up in this sea of nonsense, communing in a non-instrumentalizable wash of there being no there there?

Tea does then give a little, observing that, "as you sink deeper into the text, moods emerge, snaring you with their hypnotic rhythms, frequently whacking you over the head with unexpected humor." Ironically, this aestheticizing redux riffs off of a statement Tea quotes from Rodrigo Toscano's *To Leveling Swerve*: "Though you will understand very little of what is written here you will nonetheless grow obsessed with the very look and feel of these words." (NB:

Notwithstanding my multiple readings and copyediting of the ms, I had no recollection of this statement!) This outtake is by a long shot neither representative of Rodrigo's poetics, nor of what I know of his position on what he takes his work to accomplish (or die trying). On one hand, nonrepresentational writing does often foreground the materiality of language or the "other side" of sense—the "look and feel" of words stylized otherwise than the pro forma texts we hardly register as encountering, reduced to a cultural ambient we swim through, instead of faced off with as constitutive and continually re-constituting for us. On the other, many of the works Krupskaya has published are also performance writings that stage language- and communication effects that happen in the moment of reading or performance—often this writing is pointing to the more and less programmatic, hinged and unhinging responses it can solicit, and not in terms of laborious alternate sense-making or code-cracking procedures. My point I guess is that signifying a pre-established "community-ness" of experimental writers is not the point of the work that Krupskaya has supported and that the alternative to this hermetic model of audience is not, or not only, initiation through an appreciation of sensual textual features or apolitical (or seeming so because decontextualized) one-liners.

But what is most interesting to me about this review is that Michelle Tea herself, through her curating and networking, has done a lot to bring politically engaged, experimental writing to a larger audience and, importantly, in contexts where the audience can discuss and explore the buttons its pushing. I'm thinking of the recent reading at the SF Public Library that Jocelyn participated in...

Jocelyn: Michelle's Radar Reading Series at the SFPL, "a showcase of underground and emerging writers and performers," is a one the best in the city. Reading with Kim Addonizio, Patrick Califia and Keith Hennessy was an honor. The audience Q & A, what I usually dread as I never manage anything more than repeating the question and reading the line over in question, in this case, is what I will remember most. The communities do speak to each other, find connections amongst the work—topically and aesthetically, get excited about the differences. And really in fact really listen to each other when presented with the opportunity.

Judith: To note the obvious: disjunction—and this term I recognize as a cipher papering over complexity better served by incisive, descriptive critical work—in and of itself has no inherent agency to subvert. (I'm here talking about the agency specific to writing in our society as it creates, unmakes, re-forms the world.) It's a cliché, of course, but look at MTV—or at lots of current poetry, for that matter, that demonstrates how disjunctive procedures can be evacuated of their social/political generativity or force, or at least of an agency that would forward an oppositional agenda. (Again, vague language here, I'm aware of glossing over crucial complexities...) I guess what I want to say is that Krupskaya has fostered writing that is about finding and also creating potential points of engagement, work that is intertextual, intellectually rigorous, committed to staying alert and to registering alert—it is, right on the face of it, entangled with what is going on all around us in this neo-apocalypse—not hermetically sealed at

all. I think of my own writing as subversive only in relation to the sense-destroying subversions of communal meaningfulness and the very conditions of meaningfulness, of social life taking place now. My work is not pitched against a phantom linearity or clarity or expressiveness but against massive symbolic and physical destruction. And by against, I don't mean with the power to arrest, but with the urge to interrogate, expose, and facilitate imagining otherwise. These are the terms I start the conversation with.

**Judith Goldman** lives in the Bay Area where she is currently completing her PhD in English from Columbia University; a new book *Deathstar/rico-chet* will be out from O Books this coming spring.

Founding editor of KRUPSKAYA Books, **Jocelyn Saidenberg** is the author of *Mortal City*, *Cusp*, and *Negativity*, forthcoming from Atelos.