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THE PHONEMES

BY FRANCES RICHARD

Introduction by Ronaldo V. Wilson
Cover artwork by Renee Petropoulos
ISBN 13: 1-934254-32-5
ISBN 10: 1-934254-32-0
124 pp. | Perfect bound | \$15.00 US

National release date: February 2012

Distributed by Small Press Distribution
<http://www.spdbooks.org>

phoneme [ˈfəʊni:m]

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(Linguistics) *Linguistics* one of the set of speech sounds in any given language that serve to distinguish one word from another.

In **THE PHONEMES**, Frances Richard investigates perceptually distinct units of experience—sounds, energy surges, scraps of national and natural history—to create episodes of disruption and dissolution. A meteor drops, a redwood tree falls. A government, an airplane, a stock market, Adam and Eve, Odysseus, the author of a slave narrative, and a child watching "Sesame Street" slip from one state, or mode, of being into another. If such entities are composed of nearly weightless flakes of matter and/or sub-verbal increments of language, does the one-way gravity of falling and failing really take effect? On the other hand, if the basic units of significance are too small to read, how can writing communicate? **THE PHONEMES** plays with answering these questions by inserting into the poems typographic sound-effects, inventing a lexicon of marks in which, say, a field of tall grass, a humming refrigerator, a blue jay, or a car alarm can produce a legible notation.

THE PHONEMES is published as part of the TrenchArt: Recon Series, with an Introduction by Ronaldo V. Wilson and visual art by Renee Petropoulos. TrenchArt is an annual series of new literature, selected and edited to create a textual conversation between some of the most dynamic and exciting writing today—and tomorrow.

Frances Richard is the author of *See Through* (Four Way Books, 2003), and the chapbooks *Shaved Code* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2008) and *Anarch.* (Woodland Editions, 2008); a book also titled *Anarch.* is forthcoming in 2012 from Futurepoem Books in New York. She is co-author, with Jeffrey Kastner and Sina Najafi, of *Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's "Fake Estates"* (Cabinet Books, 2005), and is at work on a longer study of Gordon Matta-Clark and language-use. She writes frequently about contemporary art, teaches at Barnard College and the Rhode Island School of Design, and lives in Brooklyn.

PRAISE FOR THE PHONEMES

There isn't anyone else [*in the basement*] doing quite what these meteors are doing [*chopped area*] and no convenient [*source glitched*] genre or style that they fit into [*500,000 words elusively pinned*], which is [*on a porch*] automate car alarm [*innocent doggy life*] and why they are one of Intransitive's very favorite groups [*in the recycling area*], they twisted knobs until their machines produced a [*variety of emptinesses*] [*was drawn and a body*]... phoneme indeed!

– Robert Fitterman, poet

Frances Richard's *The Phonemes* constructs an interior score, a remap, a phonetic poetics of space on the page. Here she sculpts new lines of figurative typography, uncannily expressive, organic and subtle, ranging from a field of couplets splayed and navigated by emotional compass to spare, yet coherent fragments ineffably "over the rise." The key to interplay of sound and meaning is given repeatedly in different forms of "spectral analysis" of the political embedded in language's parts.

Sophisticated and surprising employment of collage and juxtaposition of 'the found' makes for a rarified and well-wrought leap forward in radical cross-disciplinary and cross-genre collage, ambitiously expanding the very nature of poetry's fields.

"FRANCES IS A STRONG SISTER!
RIGHT ON FRANCES!"



– Lee Ann Brown, poet

In *The Phonemes*, clearly, multiple stories occur: Each folded articulation of sense, perception, of history, volition, identity, and loss is rendered in this book's stunning stance, its gorgeous delivery, where language, symbol, sign, and picture meet to punctuate, forecast and project what's possible within and beyond the real of
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– from the introduction by Ronaldo V. Wilson