

Tatiana Lipkes on poetry and process



A conversation with Gabriela Jauregui

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Tatiana Lipkes is an editor, translator, and poet. She co-founded the press, MaNgOs de HaChA. She is the author of the books: *Todos los días son días de fiesta* (2008), *Repulsión* (2011), *Rojo de Cadmio* (to be published in 2017), and *13 (+8) Interviews with Contemporary Filmmakers* (2nd edition, 2015). She has published the translations of *The Plurality of Lewis's Worlds* by Jacques Roubaud (Editorial Compañía, 2008), *Poems* by Francis Picabia (Alias Editorial, 2011), *My Life* by Lyn Hejinian (Mangos de Hacha, 2012) and *Description* by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko (Mangos de Hacha, 2015).

Gabriela Jauregui is the author of *Leash Seeks Lost Bitch* (The Song Cave/Sexto Piso, 2015), *Controlled Decay* (Akashic Books/Black Goat Press, 2008), a short story collection, *La memoria de las cosas* (Sexto Piso, 2015), and co-author of *Taller de taquimecanografía* (Tumbona ediciones, 2012). She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Southern California, an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of California Riverside, and an MA in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Riverside. She is a founding member and editor of the sur+ publishing collective.

As told to Gabriela Jauregui, 1529 words.

Tags: [Poetry](#), [Process](#).

How does poetry break into your life?

It does so a lot, but at the same time, not as much as I'd like it to. On one hand, I'm part of a small press, *MaNgOs de HaChA*, which mainly publishes poetry. On the other, the type of translation I focus on is also poetry. I love these two aspects of poetry, but sometimes wish I could approach it a different way. I enjoy my work and that's why I do it, but I'd also like to think of poetry as something else that has nothing to do with work... Maybe only read and write it more.

Before you started with the press, how did you find poetry? Why poetry and not something else? Was it pure coincidence?

I found poetry through music and film mostly. I came to a different kind of poetry than what we usually learn. I read all the classics. At some point I did think of myself as a poète maudite, but that's not what defined my taste. It was only later that I understood that poetry was much more than a book; it went beyond the word and what language could create from that. I understood many things when reading *Hospital Británico* by Viel Temperley, for example, or *Pieces* by Robert Creeley. It was at that moment I started to read and approach poetry in a different way, probably the way I do so still today.

I feel like your poetry—not what you work on as an editor or translator, but yours—is not epic or very narrative. Even though it's short and compact, it's expansive and relates to different disciplines. How does poetry bring you back to film and music?

I think everything is mixed. Now more than ever, we're bombarded by so many things that it's hard to think about poetry as it was in the 1800s, or to think of the poet as an epic romantic hero. That ended a long time ago. In fact, that bothers me a lot.

I recently read an interview with an actor, Gael García Bernal, where he said that North American culture is so poor that there are no poets. I disagree. We owe much of the poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries to the United States. I just translated an essay on Chris Marker by the American poet Susan Howe, where she talks about the precursors to U.S. poetry, such as Melville, Emerson, Dickinson, or Walt Whitman. She says they invented both cinematic and literary montage. They were the first to create a narrative based on fragments that seemed to have no apparent relation to each other, which is a direct link to cinema.

Film, music, and literature are closely related, in terms of the creation processes, not thematically. Themes are not always related, they come and go. For example, in my last book I speak of biology and geology, that's what interests me at the moment. But it's still very visual.

Biology and geology have made themselves present in your life and your work. What attracted you to them in this particular moment?

I've always liked stones. I started this book long before many personal things happened in my life. The book is called *Rojo de Cadmio* [Cadmium Red] and it started as a travelogue. They were simply observations and notes I was taking on the landscapes and places I was visiting. When I liked something I would write it down.

The book changed a lot. I've been writing it for about five years. The first version I wrote didn't work. One of my editors sent it back and said, "This is useless." So I put it in a drawer for about two years. Then I took it out and started rewriting again, relating things that started to happen in my life but that were everyday things, and so I started to have something more concrete. In the end, it ends up being a montage of things that have no apparent relation to one another: at first a travelogue, the relationship to geology, the death of my mother and her ghost, and also an episode from my family history that happened before I was born, when my mother was in jail with me inside her belly. The book is about life and death, and how nothing happens if we're not in the moment.

As both an author and an editor, how do you think of the collaborative process between the two roles?

I think it's indispensable. When you're going to publish new work by an author—a very respectable figure whose work you wouldn't dare touch or someone who has a few books out—that dialogue has to exist.

The job of the editor exists for a reason. Nowadays it's easy to publish something on the web, without any kind of filter, and for people to think that they're writing, and that they're publishing, which is completely false. To me, having an editor is absolutely essential. This doesn't mean I can't make it on my own, or that I am doing something in collaboration with someone else, but I do know that an editor sees things the author can't. Part of our job—as an editor you must see this all the time too—is to tell authors, without any fear, and regardless of who they are, what you think and how you think it should be. If it doesn't work, then it doesn't; or if the authors don't want to, you respect that. It doesn't matter, but there has to be a dialogue. There are editors who can be really cutting and tough, I think that's great—it's something necessary for the work to get better.

Speaking of publishing, how do you perceive writing, editing, and publishing nowadays in Mexico? In the context and political juncture we're living through, how do you see the landscape?

I'd say that it's important now more than ever to keep doing what we do. It's essential to keep doing it because in the end, that's what will remain. What each publisher puts out is important, and it's necessary for there to be diversity and options for all kinds of audiences.

The world as it is now... I don't know... I feel like the world has always been the same: disappointment in human beings, an overflow of stupidity, etc. We see it more because of social media and the constant bombardment of banal information reflects how people are stupid and ignorant. It's precisely because of this that I believe publishing books is so important.

It's important for things to be out there, for books to have enough time to circulate, regardless of whether they sell 1000 copies now or in a year. It's important that they be there, and for people to suddenly bump into them and see something. We have to be capable of opening a new little window into an unknown world, unto something different. That's how I feel politics comes into my work. In that sense I am 100, 200, 300 percent committed to keep doing what I do, because if not, no one else will. Or yes, plenty of other people will, but in a different way. I want to keep doing it for as long as I can keep doing it. You just can't stop even though it's hard, financially. With the troubles of a small press we know that all know too well; but we can't stop doing it. Not stopping is my commitment to society, politics, people.

That's your lane.

Yes, yes. And our publisher is specifically known because we have precise editorial criteria in terms of what poetry and poets we publish. The work we publish isn't something that's directly involved with the actual situation in the world.

Or at least not in any obvious way.

Yeah, we don't think about that when we want to put out a book.

In a time where there are an abundance of misunderstandings, perhaps due to a lack of a common language, what do you think is the role of the translator?

Even when we speak the same language, sometimes we can't understand one another. What I believe is that we can expand the understanding we have of the human language, allow it to open to other possibilities, and not allow translation to be the end.

The main work we do with our publisher is translation. We were five translators and we started the project to build a catalogue that reflects our different interests. Translation is also indispensable in another sense: the work of the writer and the translator are linked. Many poets are translators, though I don't know if a lot of translators are necessarily poets. Translation is a crucial part of what I do. I translate something every day.

Speaking of little windows into unknown worlds, how do you see the future of your work together with maternity? How do you imagine being a poet, a translator, an editor, and a mom?

In slow motion.

Recommendations:

Walking

Ramen

Emily Dickinson

Andrei Rublev's paintings

Tromsø, Norway

Name

Tatiana Lipkes

Vocation

Poet, Publisher

Fact

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Ramiro Chaves