



Daniel Duffy
 Literary Magazine Report
 Fall 2009

Table of Contents

<i>Black Clock</i> Fact Sheet	3
Why I Chose <i>Black Clock</i>	4
Comparison of Issues Over Time	5
Story Reviews	6
Interview with Editor Steve Erickson	11

Fact Sheet

Print Magazine: *Black Clock*

Web Address: <http://www.blackclock.org>

Mail: Black Clock
California Institute of the Arts
24700 McBean Parkway
Valencia, CA 91355

E-mail: information and general inquiries: info@blackclock.org
grants, donations, and awards: advancements@blackclock.org
advertising: advertising@blackclock.org
distribution and sales: distribution@blackclock.org
events: events@blackclock.org
press and public relations: pr@blackclock.org

Founded: 2004

Founding Editor: Jon Wagner

Current Editor: Steve Erickson

Frequency: bi-annual

Circulation: 3,000

What They Publish: fiction, poetry, and creative essays

Submission Guidelines: *Black Clock* prefers writing that is “audacious rather than safe, visceral rather than academic, intellectually engaging rather than antiseptically cerebral, and not above fun.” One submission per reading period, submitted electronically. Manuscripts should be sent as attached, double-spaced Word documents with name, address, phone number, and e-mail on the first page. Reading the magazine before submitting is highly recommended.

Reading Period: Began November 1st 2009 and closes May 31st 2009 for Issue 11; check Web site for future cycles.

Average Response Time: No less than six months and up to one year.

Contributor Payment: Copies of the issue in which they appear.

Cost: Individual Issue: \$13. One Year Subscription: \$20. Two Year Subscription: \$35.

Not-For-Profit: Yes

CLMP: No

Why I Chose *Black Clock*

On the cover of *Black Clock 10*, a woman in a red dress with white polka dots stands in a dark room at night, smoking a cigarette. The only light in the room comes from the lights of the city streets, gleaming through the windows behind her. The woman is looking directly at you, the viewer of the magazine, seated in a chair to her left. She is attractive, with bare, silky arms and her hair pulled back from her high cheekbones. The expression on her face, half of which is cast in shadow, is questioning, and perhaps even a little frightened.

The topic of the tenth issue of California Institute of the Arts' literary journal, *Black Clock*, is noir, and "operates on the premise that Twenty-First Century noir is a mutated genre still bearing kinship with the original." I not only bought the issue the morning that I first saw it on the shelf at Quimby's Bookstore, I also read it cover to cover before the sun had set that evening. The writing in the issue stunned me with its intelligent experimentation, audacity, and startling wit. It didn't bother with standard conventions or banal subject matter. And it somehow managed to be ultra-hip without posturing.

Afraid that my love for noir was clouding my initial judgment of the bi-annual literary magazine as a whole, I perused the Internet to see if the themes of previous and upcoming issues of *Black Clock* were equally audacious. Not all of the ten published issues of the stylish magazine had themes, but those that did covered topics that were smart, engaging, and quite a bit cooler than the themes of any other regularly published dossier I had ever seen. And the tagline of the upcoming issue, which has since been released, made me wish it was already in my possession. *Black Clock 11* "is a tour of that which cannot be recovered" and contains "secret stories by characters who find themselves driven out of their own times by their own pursuits."

As a long-time fan of writing that is "audacious rather than safe, visceral rather than academic, intellectually engaging rather than antiseptically cerebral, and not above fun," I knew the moment I found *Black Clock* that I was beginning a love affair that may happily alter my reading habits for years to come.

Comparison of Issues Over Time

Submitting Writers	Issue 11	Issue 10	Issue 9	Issue 8	Issue 7
Gender: Male : Female	12 : 10	12 : 8	15 : 3	13 : 11	10 : 19
Appearance: First : Repeat	14 : 8	10 : 10	5 : 13	12 : 12	11 : 18
Background: Established : Emerging	17 : 5	17 : 3	17 : 1	23 : 1	26 : 3
Affiliation: CalArts : Other	3 : 19	0 : 20	6 : 12	2 : 22	6 : 23

Editor Steve Erickson solicits about fifteen writers per issue, “maybe more, allowing for a few who will decline for one reason or another.” The writers are usually an equal mix of males and females. Looking at several issues of the magazine over time, it is easy to spot a few writers that Erickson has taken a shining to, but he is nevertheless conscious of the fact, and publishes several authors making their first appearance in each issue. Also, although Erickson obviously has an impressive entourage of supporters at his disposal, *Black Clock* consistently publishes at least one emerging writer per issue, and that trend is set to continue into the future. “If we’re not discovering new writers, then the magazine is a failure as far as I’m concerned,” Erickson says. “Purely tactically, we started with lots of famous ‘star’ writers and are generally evolving to more and more newly-discovered voices.”

Other heartening news is that, though *Black Clock* is published by California Institute of the Arts in association with the M.F.A. Writing Program, the emerging writers published in the magazine aren’t always affiliated with the school. Two out of three emerging writers in Issue 7 were affiliated with the school, but those in Issues 8, 9, and 10 were not, and only two out of the five emerging writers in Issue 11 were affiliated with CalArts.

Story Reviews

Issue 11, Fall 2009/Winter 2010

Extra Ticket by Josh Denslow is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. The first person narrator is an eighteen year-old who has just lost his best friend Franklin, who everyone called Lin which “fit him because Lin threw like a girl. And if his shoe came untied during a game, his mom ran out onto the field and tied it for him.” Lin choked on a popcorn kernel and died alone in his bedroom the night before the narrator is telling the story, just two hours after the narrator left him to go home. “I even forgot my cell phone there,” the narrator says. The narrator recalls his last visit to his best friend’s house and the subsequent morning when he learned of Lin’s death. Lin’s girlfriend, Marcy, had cheated on him, but Lin had already bought her a ticket to the concert that he and the narrator were going to attend the following night. Eventually the narrator, uncomfortable with the way his best friend was crying, just said, “Let’s ditch her,” and walked out. “And now I’ll never see him again,” the narrator says. The following morning, the narrator realizes he left his phone at Lin’s when Marcy shows up to his house, saying that she’s been trying to call him and Lin. Then the phone rings, and when the narrator’s mother comes upstairs to tell him that Lin is dead, he is in the bathroom jerking off. The narrator is in shock and doesn’t know what to say to his mother, so he says, “He’s going to miss that concert tonight.” He then leaves, though he knows that his parents want to console him, because he decides that he needs to get his cell phone from Lin’s house. At Lin’s house, through the curtains, he sees Lin’s mother “just sitting there, her arms dangling at her sides, like her body was left there while the rest of her went off to do something else.” Lin’s mother looks up, right at the narrator, and the narrator at first begins to flee, then feels her eyes on him and turns back to the house. He goes inside and sits with the mother in Lin’s room while she talks. He moves next to her and cries when she puts her arm around him, and he hears his cell phone ring in the closet, but says “I’m not ready to get up.”

Even more impressive than Denslow’s attention to the details and the narrator’s observations in this story that only a very sharp-eyed teenage boy could pick up on (“The smell of burning charcoal fills my lungs along with the smell of over-ripened fruit. As if someone was barbecuing Hubba Bubba.”) is the author’s ability to capture that teenage boy’s voice in his writing. The language and pacing of the narrator in *Extra Ticket*, coupled with the narrator’s memories – of “the time I hit a homerun when the bases were loaded and then, because of an error Lin made, we lost the game,” or of the time Lin’s mom “began shaking the pan vigorously and her breast sort of poked out of the top of her nightgown,” or of any of a handful of other outrageous images – make the reader forget that this isn’t really a boy telling the story, and make the final scene, when the narrator finally lets go, that much more heart-wrenching.

A Path of Shells by Chris Abani is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting. A third person, omniscient narrator sets up a bizarre scene on Lake Mead, the lake that was formed when the Hoover Dam was constructed on the border between Nevada and Arizona. Ranger Green is on patrol, driving around the lake, when he comes upon an empty Honda and sees a man out in the water in a restricted part of the lake. The man looks as

though he's drowning a baby, and Green orders him to come to shore. He doesn't come at first, but concedes when Green informs him that he's called in the police. As the man emerges from the water, Green sees that he has another man attached to his side – a grotesque appendage, “little more than a head with two arms projecting out of a chest only eight inches long.” The man, whose name is Water, and his appendage, Fire, are conjoined twins. Water is muscular, lean, and “beautiful,” which makes Fire “all the more shocking and alien.” Because of this, though he speaks up several times, Fire is essentially ignored by Green. Green notices that the twins' Honda reads “King Kong: African Witchdoctor.” The twins explain that they tour the country performing magic tricks. Weeks before, they had walked across Lake Mead, pausing in the center to sink down to the wreck of the B-29 Bomber that crashed there in 1948. Now, they have returned in search for Methuselah, the oldest tree in the world. Deputy Salazar arrives on the scene and tells it like it is: “What the hell are you?” he asks. Salazar confiscates a notebook from Water's jacket and also gets his driver's license, and back in his squad car he reads a couple of entries in the notebook concerning “Disposing of a Body” and “Vanishing.” He also finds, after running Water's identification, that there is an open warrant out for the twins' arrest. Before taking them in to jail, Salazar stops with them at Vegas County Hospital to get checked out. It is Halloween, and everyone thinks the twins are in costume. Salazar tells the nurse that he wants a psych consult for the twins: “My assessment is they're a risk to themselves.” Alone with the twins, the nurse then tries to rip Fire off of Water, until she realizes it isn't a costume. Water strokes Fire's bald head and Fire rolls his eyes and mutters, “Bigot.”

This story is beyond bizarre and avoids any sort of a conventional structure, but is nevertheless a pleasure to read because of the attention Abani gives to place and appearances. Lake Mead is set up beautifully in the beginning of the story, with the “wind through the needle-leaved shrubs, the occasional birdcall and the crunch of the shells under the wheels of the truck.” The historic undertones that Abani provides about the area surrounding the Hoover Dam also add a feeling of mysticism to the already absurd setting: after the grotesque description of Water's appendage, Fire (“bald, and a large skin cowl, like turkey wattle, drooped down one side of his head”), Abani uses Water's “stoic, perhaps even otherworldly” vantage point to show the reader the Hoover Dam, Black Canyon, and the Valley of Fire. Abani masterfully contrasts all of these beautiful sights with the one ugly thing in the story, Fire, who is repeatedly ignored by everyone, and who, it is hinted at, even his brother Water wants to rid himself of – a cruel but unsettlingly welcome idea to seemingly every character in the story except Fire himself.

Issue 10, Spring/Summer 2009

The Double-Goer by Howard A. Rodman is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting. A third person, omniscient narrator tells the story of a man named Ahab, who we are led to believe is Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick*. Ahab's landlord, Cowling, is trying to collect the ship captain's overdue rent, and Ahab tells Cowling that they must go collect his large bank draught from the Customs House. On their way back, the two men come across a Polish immigrant, Adnopo, in possession of a rare gold coin. Adnopo is actually Ahab's partner in crime, and helps Ahab conduct an elaborate scheme to rob Cowling. Ahab then bids adieu to his partner and goes out to find himself a prostitute. Through his reflections on his past, we learn that he is not Captain Ahab, but that he made his living for years playing the part of the legendary character in a stage show. The show was famous, but went

under when a diligent reviewer pointed out that the real Captain Ahab was missing his right leg, whereas the Ahab doing the stage production was missing his left. Ahab's prostitute saw the show once and loved it, and she has very passionate, intimate sex with him. But before orgasm, a large, spectral man dressed in a long, black coat bursts into the room and beats Ahab to death with his own fake leg. As the murderer leaves, the prostitute notices that he has the same gait as her now-dead customer, but that instead of planting with right and dragging the left, the large man does the opposite. This man, the real Ahab, then runs to a jetty and takes a skiff home to his ship. "There was a man making sport of him, a man living by pretense, who purloined his name and history as means of livelihood. This had to end and now it had ended."

This story has a little bit of everything, and turns brilliantly on deception. The crucial ruse in the story is executed from the very beginning, as Rodman tricks his readers into thinking his story is a modern day continuation of *Moby Dick*. The real genius of the story, however, lies in how Rodman peppers that overarching dishonesty with several smaller, intertwining plotlines in order to create an entire world of deception that highlights the fraudulent Ahab's trickery, so when the real Captain Ahab appears, his violent retribution is that much sweeter for everyone.

Farewell, My Zombie by Francesca Lia Block is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting. The first person, female narrator, Jan Merritt, is a self-employed private investigator who misses her son, Max. One day, a girl named Coco Hart comes into the office, and says she came to Jane because her father is a zombie, and she saw Jane in an interview where she said her son was taken by zombies. Coco's dad came back from the hospital after his stroke, walking stiff and shuffling about, and he had greenish skin and didn't have a pulse. She also thought he was eating human flesh. Jane goes to visit Coco's Republican dad at his car dealership, and agrees with Coco that her father is a zombie, just like Jane's ex-husband's new wife, Kimmy, is a zombie, and John McCain and Sarah Palin are zombies. We find out that Jane is not really a private investigator, but that her ex-husband, Daniel, rented the office for her to give her something to do after Max died, "kind of like playing office when you're a kid." Coco eventually asks Jane about her son, and Jane says, "Everyone thought it was a brain tumor, but it wasn't like that. It wasn't like that at all. They wanted him, and they got him." Then Coco asks "Do you think, maybe, you just might not want to look at what really happened?" and Jane freaks out, telling her to leave. Jane later apologizes, though, and admits she may be wrong about everything. She says, "If any zombie, or cancer, or whatever you want to call it, threatens Coco or any kids I know, I am going to kick that motherfucker zombie's ass."

This story is more about dealing with loss than anything else, and it accomplishes the conveyance of that debilitating feeling quite well. Through Jane's comments about the people she feels are zombies, the reader gets the sense that, after Max died, Jane came to blame his death on everything wrong with the world, be it war, environmental degradation, unequal rights, or faulty health care. For Jane, all of those issues boiled down over time to become a single, imaginary thing: the zombie. In Coco, Jane has found a person to relate to, and through Coco, it is possible that Jane has finally snapped out of her delirium, and found herself able to say "Farewell."

Room 721 by Janet Fitch is a plainspoken, realistic story in a domestic setting. The first person, female narrator is a Russian immigrant who is a housekeeper at the Alexandria in Los Angeles. That morning she saved an Englishman in room 721 who had overdosed, a needle still stuck in his arm as he lay on the floor of the bathroom. She goes out for some “disgusting but cheap” vegetarian food (“the cabbage soup is why I come”), then walks down Third Street and is swept into a movie palace with the crowd. She sits in the balcony so she can smoke. A young man, two seats away, sits at the end of a group of young men. “He is beautiful,” she thinks. “This is what I was hoping for. The simplicity of beauty, the sun without a shadow, without a stain.” This boy, who the narrator decides is probably “the last virgin” in the group, moves over to sit next to her. She can’t believe her good fortune. As the movie begins, she decides she is “tired of thinking,” and she gives in to the herd mentality of the room, even going so far as to picture the boy next to her as the boy in the movie, going off to war. After the movie, she is formally introduced to “young Achilles and his fair Achaians,” and they go to a party. At the party, she is horrified by the conversation, and finds respite from it by dancing. Eventually, they all pile back into the car, and the narrator has them drop her off at the Alexandria. She disappoints the boy, kissing him goodnight and going into the hotel alone. She goes to room 721, the room where she found the overdosed man, Mr. Norton, that morning. He is not angry or even surprised, and welcomes her, drunk, into his room. “This morning, he was dying in the white tiled bathroom, a medical syringe in his arm,” she thinks, “and tonight, he will save me in return.” She is impressed with his intelligence and his “exquisite nonchalance.” She notices, to her delight, a soft, much read edition of *Claudine a l’ecole* (“So this is the literature of famous English seers.”), and as she starts to read it out loud, he begins undressing her. They fuck as she reads the book out loud. “So thin,” she says, “but where he had seemed sad and Christlike this afternoon on the bathroom floor, now he is like a wild, animated rope, uncanny and more than a little demonic.” She is thoroughly impressed with herself, with the fact that she is “intact enough” to still have preferences.

Fitch has formed the narrator in this story into a true hero; a character so convincing in thought and action that the reader finds himself literally cheering for her after only reading the first few paragraphs of the story. She is fiercely intelligent, funny, and just independent enough to make her need for random sex seem less desperate and more becoming, even though we know there are rough patches beneath the seemingly smooth veneer. Fitch peppers the narrator’s thoroughly entertaining story with so many poignant and hilarious observations about the metropolitan single life (“The stink of food especially in one’s single room, so underscores life’s dreariness”) that it is impossible to lose interest in her plight for even a moment, even when she herself is bored to tears, such as when she is out with “young Achilles and his fair Achaians” and she realizes that “their interests lie in the endurance of the body, the triumph of ego over corpus.” “I don’t work very hard to understand,” she says, which makes her rendezvous with the Englishman, who she does understand and wants to work to understand, that much more rewarding.

The Invisible Box by Brian Evenson is a plainspoken, surreal story in a domestic setting. The third person, limited omniscient narrator tells the story of a young woman who got drunk and had horrible sex with a mime. The mime didn’t take off his face paint or his beret, and during intercourse he felt out an invisible box surrounding their bed where he was straddling her, “running his flattened palms along the box’s ceiling just before penetrating her.”

She wakes up the next morning extremely hung over, and doesn't think about the mime all day, but feels the invisible box still around her when she goes to bed that night. She has nightmares of his face, floating above her, and can't sleep but for a few fitful minutes until the sun comes up, when she can no longer feel the box around her. This goes on for days, and no matter where she goes in her apartment, she can still sense the presence of the box, there around her bed, waiting for her. She decides to go see a psychiatrist, but stops attending sessions when he tells her "you need to give in to your inner mime." She then decides that she either needs to kill that mime, or bring him back to her place and fuck him again, and get him to take the box away when he leaves. She begins thinking with "two different parts of her head at once," thinking of killing the mime and fucking him again, and she begins to go out into the city at night when she can't sleep, half-dressed, looking for him. She notices "that strange moment when her thinking split and she seemed to fall into the gap between, and by the time she managed to clamber out she was alone on the street, looking for a mime, only a mime would do." Evenson then addresses the reader, writing "perhaps it is best to leave her here" and "let's smile and, lying, tell ourselves yes, everything is alright, yes, shhh, yes, she's finally asleep."

Though this story simply falls off a sort of exploratory precipice at the end, it succeeds in establishing the suffocating limitations of a terrifying nightmare – the story itself is an invisible box that is placed over the reader by the author, who serves as the mime. If the fear in the story is realized, that fear can envelop the reader for days on end, just like the invisible box envelops the woman in the story. In this way, Evenson sets up *The Invisible Box* as a sort of experiment, and the argument could be made that every story ever written tries to execute the same experiment: does this story succeed in forming an invisible box of some kind of emotion around its readers, whether that emotion be fear, doubt, anxiety, or any of the more pleasant and welcome sort? Whether *The Invisible Box* was originally intended as this extended metaphor or not, Evenson succeeded, using no dialogue and little actual character action, to create an anxious, horrifying little world in only a few pages of solid writing.

Interview with Editor Steve Erickson

Steve Erickson is the editor of *Black Clock*. He has written for *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *Details*, *Elle*, *San Francisco*, *Bookforum*, *Frieze*, *Conjunctions*, *Tin House*, *Salon*, the *L.A. Weekly*, the *Los Angeles Reader*, the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, and the *New York Times Magazine*, as well as several other literary journals and magazines, and his work has been widely anthologized. He is the author of eight novels: *Days Between Stations* (1985), *Rubicon Beach* (1986), *Tours of the Black Clock* (1989), *Arc d'X* (1993), *Amnesiascope* (1996), *The Sea Came in at Midnight* (1999), *Our Ecstatic Days* (2005) and *Zeroville* (2007). He has also written two books about American politics and popular culture, *Leap Year* (1989) and *American Nomad* (1997). He's received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and in 2007 was awarded a fellowship by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. He's a teacher at CalArts and the film critic for *Los Angeles*, and he lives with his wife, artist and director Lori Precious, and their children.

Daniel Duffy: In a great interview with Angela Stubbs of *Bookslut* back in 2007, you said "I do believe publishing is in transition, the center is collapsing, you have a vibrant and increasingly literate cyberspace, and the inmates are taking over the ground floor of the asylum, with the asylum bosses trapped upstairs." How is life on the ground floor treating you nowadays? It's getting a little crowded, I'm sure, but everyone seems to be getting along well enough, right? Are the bosses still upstairs? Is there still running water? Has anyone been shanked?

Steve Erickson: The water seems to be rationed out, and I think the bosses are hiding — I don't hear much through the vents. It doesn't matter anyway. The trend pretty much is irrevocable — it's generational. Cyberpublishing is what the next wave of writers and editors understands, in a way I can't pretend to. The larger question is whether this is just a new delivery system for the same old literature or whether it opens up as well the creative possibilities that mainstream publishing has squelched over the last quarter century as it's become more like the movie business, with a taste (if that's the word) for blockbusters and an incomprehension of anything else.

D.D: Your editorial statement says that *Black Clock* "revels in the kind of constructive anarchy that follows from allowing writers the chance to publish free of editorial impositions." What does that mean, exactly? What is the editorial process at *Black Clock*, and what impositions do you, as the editor of the magazine, strive to avoid?

S.E: I realize my "statement" runs the risk of sounding grandiose. Actually, for six years I've tried to avoid "mission [or] editorial statements," to the despair of both my staff and those who put up the money for the magazine and place stock in such things. *Black Clock's* editorial process is either serendipitous or ad hoc, depending on what pejorative you want to use, except for the fact that from the beginning the plan has been to build the magazine around writers.

D.D: You consistently publish work from some really heavy hitters — in the past you've featured work from Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, Richard Powers, Jonathan Lethem, Rick Moody, Samuel Delany, Joanna Scott, Miranda July, Aimee Bender, Brian Evenson, Michael Ventura...the list goes on and on. How many authors do you solicit per issue? Is there a certain criteria involved with you soliciting an author, or is it just a matter of personal taste?

S.E: I approach about fifteen writers per issue, maybe more, allowing for a few who will decline for one reason or another. It kind of astonishes me how many say yes, given that we pay virtually nothing and the circulation isn't huge — that speaks to some regard for the magazine, I think, as well as just the natural generosity of so many of these people. In the new issue (11), for instance, there's Richard Powers, who I assume has opportunities to publish

elsewhere. I operate on the assumption that I don't know everything and that I don't even necessarily have to love everything the magazine publishes (we might not publish much if I did), and that sometimes it's enough if I'm convinced there are smart readers with interesting taste who will love it. If there's a piece that the rest of the staff loves that I don't, I'm open to the possibility I might just not be getting it and should publish it anyway. On the other hand, if there's something I love that the rest of the staff doesn't, I'm still going to publish it.

D.D: *Black Clock* publishes a lot of experimental fiction – your editorial statement describes the work featured as “audacious rather than safe, visceral rather than academic, intellectually engaging rather than antiseptically cerebral, and not above fun.” A lot of editors say that they can tell they are going to publish a story from simply reading the first line, but that's got to be a lot harder with more experimental work. Still, I just flipped through several issues of *Black Clock*, reading only first lines, and they were all pretty solid. Are you a first line guy? Have you ever had any specific instances where you've accepted or rejected a story after reading the first line?

S.E: You know, I hear the word “experimental” — which has been used about my own work now and then — and I reach for my revolver. To me, experimental work is about the experiment — it's by definition about the form — and that's not interesting to me. I'm enough of a traditionalist to believe that the form, however radical it may be, still must serve the old verities (as that old experimentalist, Faulkner, called them) of character and story. So I hope that's what I was saying, or trying to, in my dreaded Editorial Statement. I don't know that I've ever known a story was going to work from the first sentence, but if I'm reading a new writer, it's usually true that from, say, the first paragraph, I can tell whether someone has a voice or a vision.

D.D: I imagine that emerging writers submitting to *Black Clock* have usually done their research, and that you don't get many lackluster, first-person narratives about “my stupid ex-boyfriend” or “my parent's divorce” or “my life is so horrible because I'm eighteen and I'm living in a dorm room.” Still, as an editor of a literary magazine, I'm sure you have some story themes that instantly turn you off. What are some examples of stories that you never want to see again?

S.E: Well, the plight of living in a dorm room does sound like a non-starter. But I would like to think I'm still open to a really brilliant stupid-ex-boyfriend story. I mean, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Great Gatsby* are basically stupid-ex-girlfriend stories, right?

D.D: You are a prolific novelist, essayist, and critic, as well as a columnist and a teacher at the CalArts. *Black Clock* is obviously very important to you, as you have so much more going on, and yet you still find the time for it. How do you balance the workload of the magazine, a project that doesn't draw income, with the rest of your life? What is an average day in the life of Steve Erickson like? Do you still find time to write a little every day, even when school is in session?

S.E: It's hard and not getting easier, and you haven't even mentioned parenthood, which sucks the oxygen out of the schedule like nothing else. Thirty minutes out of bed, I'm literally behind in my day, and the disheartening thing is that it's the writing — or the writing I care most about, anyway — that gets pushed aside, because it isn't something I can just squeeze in a half hour here and a half hour there.

D.D: A recurring theme in several of your books is the underestimated artist striving for recognition. Was this a prime motivation in your getting involved with *Black Clock*? Do you revel in the opportunity that you have as an

editor to find some underestimated emerging writer and give him his first chance to see his work printed in a national publication?

S.E.: Oh sure. If we're not discovering new writers, then the magazine is a failure as far as I'm concerned. Purely tactically, we started with lots of famous "star" writers and are generally evolving to more and more newly-discovered voices. Now we seem to publish every issue at least one or two things that come to us unsolicited — I think about a third of the writers in the new issue haven't published anywhere else to speak of. I suppose I've become sensitive to charges that we're some sort of elitist cabal dismissive of outsiders. In the beginning, when there literally were four of us putting out the magazine, it was strictly a manpower/workload issue.

D.D.: In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* regarding *Black Clock* back in 2004, you said: "As the publishing business gets more like Hollywood, I want more good writers to have a place to go." In today's recessionary Hollywood, studio executives are becoming increasingly hesitant to cast actors who will demand upward of \$15 million and a hefty portion of the film's revenue to appear in a movie. Instead, they're favoring big concepts with low-paid actors. Does that translate in some way to the publishing business? In other words, do you foresee a time in the future when some of the emerging writers whose work you've featured in *Black Clock* will be offered deals from the big publishing houses who simply can't afford the J.K. Rowling and the Dan Browns of the world anymore? Is the recession going to make publishing houses take more chances on emerging writers?

S.E.: Well, the interesting thing about Hollywood is that at some point it began to view a \$25 million movie as more of a risk than a \$250 million movie, and that's what's happened with publishing. A \$25,000 advance is considered riskier than a book getting a \$250,000 advance, because publishers feel they know how to market the second and have no idea how to market the first. The result is that, unlike a couple of decades ago when my first novels were being published, not even the best and savviest and most powerful editors have the autonomy to buy a book. The paperback department has to sign off on it, the marketing department has to sign off on it, the publicity department. The system now is constructed to give itself as many chances as possible to say no, because no is always safer than yes. I don't know whether any of the new writers we've published will command such advances or not. I should add that, while I'm not a big fan of the Harry Potter books — my kid wound up a bit bored by them — I don't begrudge Rowling her advances. Her books earn them in sales and she got a whole new generation to read, so more power to her.

D.D.: You studied film at UCLA and have written about film for *Los Angeles* magazine since 2001. How fun was it for you to devote Issue 10 of *Black Clock* to the topic of noir? Was that your idea? And do you get to pick the topic of each issue of the magazine, or is it a more democratic process, shared amongst the editorial staff?

S.E.: When *Black Clock* started, I vowed to avoid themes, as such, and you still never see one announced on the cover of the magazine, unless the illustration — such as in the case of the issue you're talking about — somehow conveys it. The new issue barely has a theme at all, and when we do have one, as much as anything it's just because it provides an organizing principle editorially. The noir issue is a good example of how things sometimes happen with this magazine. Robert Polito had submitted a piece for the previous issue (9) about politics and the election, and it didn't seem to me to have as much to do with politics as Robert thought it did. And I might well have published it anyway, because it might have been one of those examples of publishing something that was only very tangentially

connected to whatever our unstated theme was, except that in his story there was a line about “the birth of noir,” or something like that, and there and then in my head the noir issue was born. Like I said before: serendipitous or ad hoc. Usually the ideas are mine but not always. The underlying theme of issue 8, travel, was editor-at-large Anthony Miller’s idea. The twelfth issue that will come out next spring, sports, is the brainstorm of our senior editor, Bruce Bauman, with a lot of help from our other editor-at-large, David Ulin. Sometimes I have to be mindful of how things might look. A couple years ago I wanted to do an issue about movies but I had a novel about the movies coming out around that time and I didn’t want my decisions about the magazine to look self-promotional. So I put off a movie issue. Maybe in another year or so.

D.D: The tenth issue of *Black Clock* was the first one I laid my hands on, and I instantly felt like I was showing up late to a really great party. Did I show up at ten o’clock to a party that’s only going until midnight, or is this thing going to be raging until dawn, and maybe even into the following day? As we approach 2010, what do you foresee in the future for your magazine?

S.E: Well, I hope the party goes on all weekend, of course, not just into tomorrow. But I accept, maybe more than anyone else working for the magazine, that this thing is existential and probably will end sometime. For the California Institute of the Arts that publishes *Black Clock* and, more to the point, invests in it, the payoff is unquantifiable — the magazine certainly isn’t earning its way in terms of hard dollars and cents. But I don’t think there’s too much question that *Black Clock* has raised the profile of the institute and its writing program, and the publishers must see it that way too, at least so far. I think I’ve been clear from the beginning that at the point they believe the magazine is no longer worth it, that’s their call and I’ll understand and accept it whether I agree with it or not.

D.D: Any final thoughts or advice for emerging writers looking to submit not only to *Black Clock*, but to any other literary journal, magazine, or press out there right now?

S.E: I don’t think my advice to any writer interested in *Black Clock* is different from that to any other aspiring writer, which is that you’ve got to be in it for the long haul. It took me years to get published, and since then it’s taken me years to get to this point — whatever or wherever this point is. Write write write, submit submit submit, get-rejected get-rejected get-rejected. Tenacity will make its own luck. Plan on conquering the world one reader at a time.