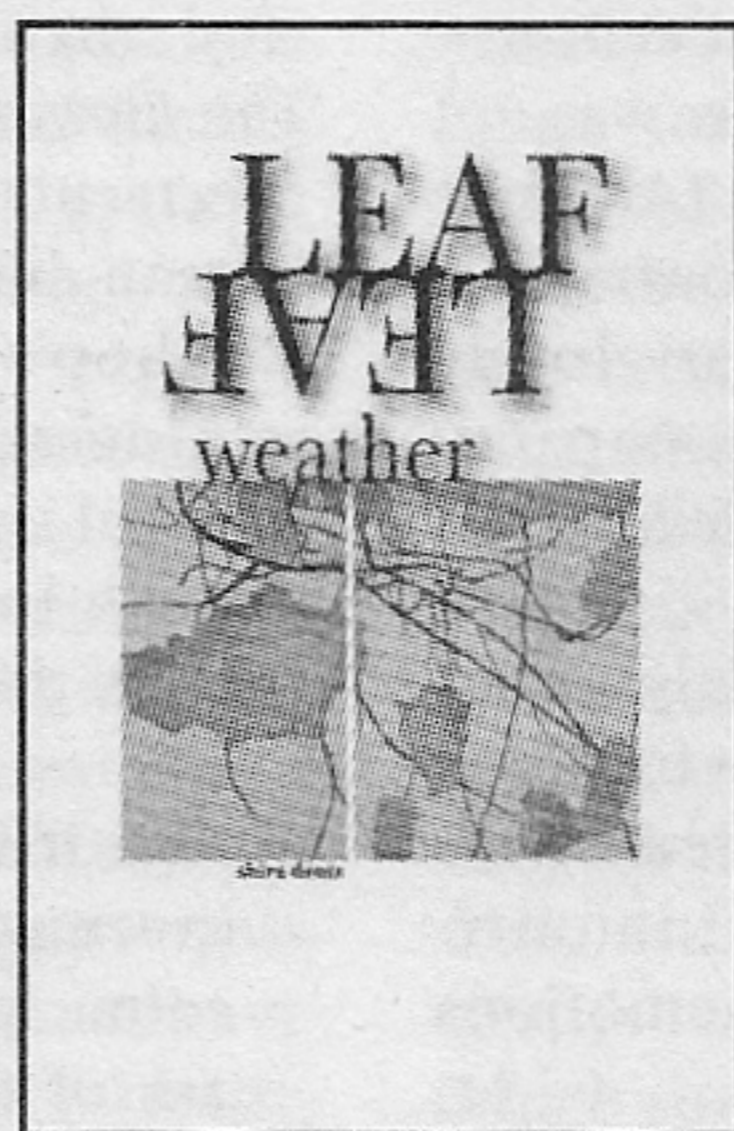
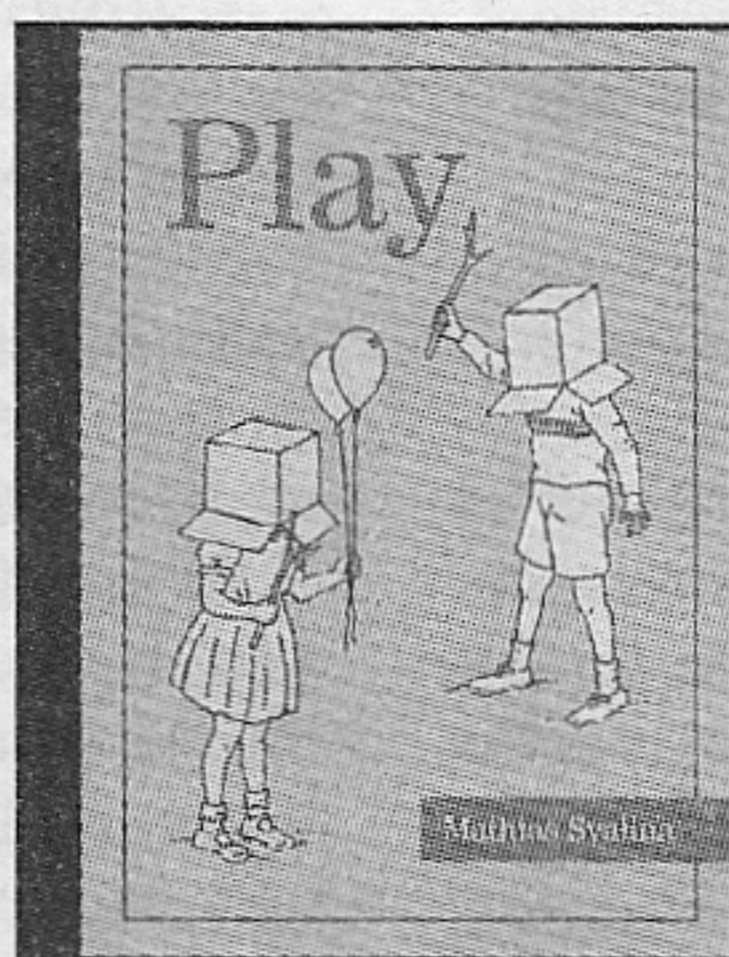
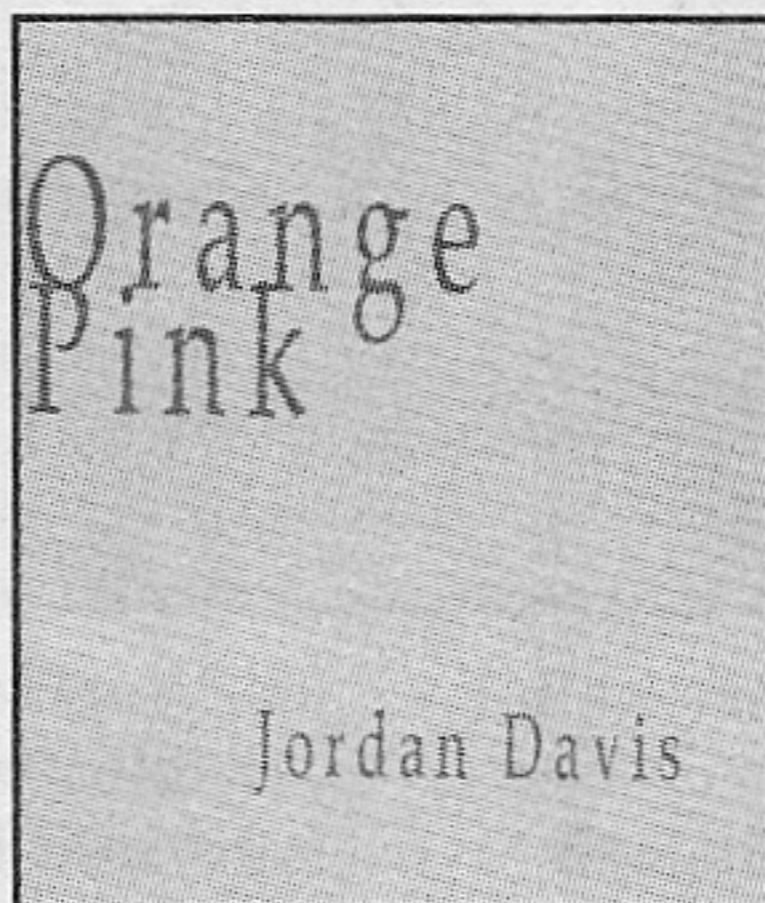


"Grace / to be born and live as variously as possible," wrote Frank O'Hara in his seminal poem from the mid-'50s, "In Memory of My Feelings," lines later immortalized on his gravestone. Half a century later, in our own digital age, so much time in front of the computer has turned this variousness into the merciless and clumsy muck of multi-tasking. Don't most salaried positions come with the expectation of containing multitudes? Leave it to Jordan Davis to bring some joy back into the quotidian fray. From *Orange to Pink* (fewer & further press, \$7), a single poem composed of thirty-five stanzas of roughly 10-14 lines each, begins with the speaker recounting a humorous yet nearly epiphanic work-a-day scene: "When I started up the computer / Yesterday in the afternoon / My word processor gave me a tip— / Things that go away on their own / Can come back on their own / Then the computer suddenly stopped working." For a reader, the experiential footing here does indeed quickly dissolve, as Davis begins to elide syntactical norms, melding narrative moments with imagistic statements, verb clusters, and tweaked reportage. By the second stanza, we're already dizzily spinning ("Quantify life, lay blame clearance / And by March there's how the car / Exactly barcoded its agrarian / Manager brainwashing action something / The buildings are dark and nails / I am sitting in my office"); yet what's gone away—the ease with which one might parse the work—comes back in the form of the speaker's recognizable situation. Again and again, Davis performs this prestidigitation by way of inserting a self that offers readers a tangible break from the glut of experience this very same speaker articulates: "Among the continuing coming and going / Wavy plausible heartbreaking hello."

Imagine Italo Calvino, Max Jacob, and Henri Michaux collaborating on a small book of instructions for each of the sometimes innocuous, sometimes ominous scenes depicted in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's famous painting *Children's Games*. The result would be a linguistically concise collision of absurdist parable and social commentary, wonderfully frightening and strangely cathartic. Lucky for us, Mathias Svalina's *Play* (The Cupboard, \$5) is just such a book. Modeled after the numerous, mid-century instruction manuals often found on the bookshelves at any Salvation Army store, Svalina's chapbook includes instructions for nearly thirty theoretical children's games. A small sample of their titles gives a sense of the darker side of camaraderie the book explores: "Freight Train Tag"; "Voting Day"; "Bury the Shards of the Broken Light Bulb Where No One Will Ever Find Them"; "Jiggle the Handle." Each piece here



starts simply enough, assigning roles to the various players (e.g. "One child is the Stomach. The other children are the Aches"), before delineating the rules, which soon become wild, impossible scenarios: "The children fall asleep repeating their names to themselves. They discover new names inside their names. The new names are the names their ghosts will have. They knot little nooses of dental floss around the names & tie them to their pinkies." Although the instructions occasionally include an explanation for determining the end of the game, more often they veer into the territory of the prose poem *par excellence*, as in "Crossing the Brook," which ends thusly: "Those that fall into the brooks must run home to change their stockings. But they are so far from home & the driver of the white bus will not speak to them. There is a light in the forest. Is that a distant fire or the buttery windows of a warm farmhouse? It is difficult to tell from here, where the sleet has just begun to fall."

What writer hasn't had the experience of burning through too many hours indoors, shuffling between notebook and computer screen, and finally, once the imaginative impulse gives way to ash, venturing out into the world only to be struck by the luscious, rich, visual exuberance that was, of course, there all the while? It is this sudden awe at the otherwise everyday that Shira Dentz captures in *Leaf Weather* (Tilt Press, \$8). Here, the morphing elisions and collapsed syntax of Barbara Guest's "Nebraska" meet the wide-eyed, inchoate wonder of Joseph Ceravolo's verse ("I with the silence / a nut to climb of not"), creating in Dentz's work a humming, propulsive poetry, aligned with Stein's notion of repetition as insistence rather than redundancy: "who cares if i can't be alive in / want love when i park the intellect. the car radio. i still want love when i park / the sky tinfoil wind blowing dashes of rain the lines to open. if i can't be alive / in want the car radio." An anxious desire swirls around her poems, dropping anchor here and

there in the natural world ("yesterday biked a trail in a forest with / deer it would be perfect, once again, with a man") to show that emotion, while ephemeral, is nonetheless a primary lens through which we view things, even sans ideas; in other words, rose-colored glasses aren't a prerequisite to appreciating the beauty of the rose ("i know blue gray muscular sky steams from nature but from a kettle / some nice banter banter banter // then floral logical frames"). Within such a tense and tantalizing matrix, occasional moments of extreme clarity stun the reader with their directness: "I want a specific kind of cookie, / the kind that becomes almost nothing when you bite into it." ♦