An Interview with Kate Greenstreet:
Experiments in Intersections and Understanding
Conducted by Lamey Guddet

Kate Greenstreet's second book, The Last 4 Things, is just out from Ahsahta Press. Her first, case sensitive, was published by Ahsahta in 2006. She is also the author of three chapbooks; the most recent is This is why I hurt you (Lame House Press, 2008). Her newest work is in current or forthcoming issues of jubilat, Court Green, VOLT, Fence, and the Denver Quarterly.

LE: First of all, why did you choose to pursue writing as a career?

KG: I didn't really. I chose to pursue painting as a career. I was a painter for a decade. But it never really was much of a career, as I never made any money. What happened was I started putting a lot of writing into my paintings. I did entire series of five by five foot paintings covered in typeface. If you can imagine, it got to be a little labor intensive. At some point I said, gee, maybe I should start writing again, let my paintings be wordless and type into a computer like a normal person. So I did. I became obsessively interested in it and I wrote my first manuscript. This all happened after I was fifty. I did some writing in my twenties, but nobody could understand it.

LE: Do you feel you turned to painting because it was easier for people to grasp?

KG: Yes. People can always sort of understand painting because they automatically interpret visual images. But many people are not used to the idea that you can bring your own interpretation to writing. People I knew felt threatened or put off because it wasn't immediately apparent to them what was going on in my work. This may have been because I wasn't reading it out loud. Even now I find if someone hears what I'm doing, they understand it in a different way. And that's one of the reasons why I'm off on this crazy tour.

LE: That's a good reason.

KG: It's a great reason. Once you do your work, you want somebody to read it or hear it. Many poets write books, good books, but nobody knows about them.

LE: Writers' work doesn't stop with publication.

KG: It can't. So you tour. You go to all these different places. And sometimes you feel that you're reaching people. But sometimes you read and not much happens. You have to be focused on the idea that if you reach one person you've done what you came to do.

LE: I think rejection is something that writers struggle with too often. A lot of my friends and peers are experiencing that right now. I'm sure you must have experienced it, too.

KG: I did. When I began writing again I put a manuscript together and started sending it out. But nothing happened. I decided to collect 500 rejections before I called it quits. Sometime in the 300s, things started to change. The first manuscript never got published, because I wrote a new book, case sensi-
tive, which was picked up. But eventually, all the poems from the first manuscript were published in a chapbook. So, in the end, everything had its life.

LE: One of the things that struck me about your most recent book, The Last 4 Things, is that you've included a DVD with two short films. As both a writer and a graphic designer, how important do you think it is to bring different aspects of the arts together, as far as increasing readership and understanding?

KG: It's very important. But that's one thing I'm still trying to find out. For instance, does the inclusion of the DVD help people with the book? I'd like to reach people who aren't necessarily poets. I'm hoping that the movie will help.

LE: case sensitive is a sort of poetic mystery story, as far as I can tell. But as a reader it's hard for me to tackle your work. I come away with so many questions, and I know I'm not fully grasping it. But I wonder, when people come to you with questions about your work, do you always have answers?

KG: No. Once in a while I make up answers on the spot. It's surprising, the things that people ask—things I never thought of. I really enjoy it when people generate their own answers and tell me what they think. More than anything, I'm intuitive. I come to writing from being an artist, not from being an academic.

LE: It seems to me that you've found a method of bringing together your creativity and obvious intellect. Especially in case sensitive. With all of the notes you've included it's evident you're well-read and draw from many different sources. Yet your writing is still so free. It isn't bogged down. It's accessible.

KG: I wanted to have notes in case sensitive because I thought that the character would want to include them. I thought of my character traveling across the country with these books in her backseat. There's a fine line between my characters and myself. I personally like notes and I like to know where things come from because it turns me on to other books I might like to read. But in the new book I didn't include any notes. I just put material in italics and quotations.

LE: Why aren't there notes in The Last 4 Things?

KG: I just thought I'd try it a different way. And also, I felt that notes would be cumbersome and they didn't fit the project. It was an intuitive feeling.

LE: Would you say that the character in The Last 4 Things wouldn't use notes?

KG: Exactly. I felt that the character was in a different state of mind. In "56 Days" I was trying to show that the person was writing things for themselves, not for anyone else's eyes. So there was no need for notes. And the form of the first part was so interior that notes didn't seem to fit.

LE: When do you anticipate your third book coming out?

KG: It would be nice if it could come out in about three years. I'd like to stay with my publisher, if possible. They only publish about seven books a year.
LE: While reading *case sensitive*, I remember thinking that your writing is challenging. But at the same time you write in such a stop-and-go style. It might be dense, but it doesn't strike me that way because it's so immediately broken.

KG: I did that on purpose. I myself am intimidated by giant books of prose. I want to read things that are a little more broken so that when I look at the page, I feel like there's room for me there. I feel like it's penetrable.

LE: I think it's more natural, more conducive to our thought process, when writing is structured in that way. This is very cliché, but when I think about the world, the world strikes me as being impenetrable. If everything around me were a piece of writing it would be a long, one thousand page text. However, when I'm trying to make sense of the world, my thought process is not that way. It's broken and fragmented. For me, your poetry was like a dictation of an internal process, trying to make sense of a huge external text.

KG: That's the perfect interpretation. It is. I'm completely serious! You've got it! Thanks for getting it!