



TRIPWIRE 11

# TRIPWIRE 11

POP  
POP-CULT  
POP  
AVANT-POP  
*¡POP!*  
POPULIST  
POP  
POP ART  
POP

OAKLAND : 2016

TRIPWIRE  
a journal of poetics

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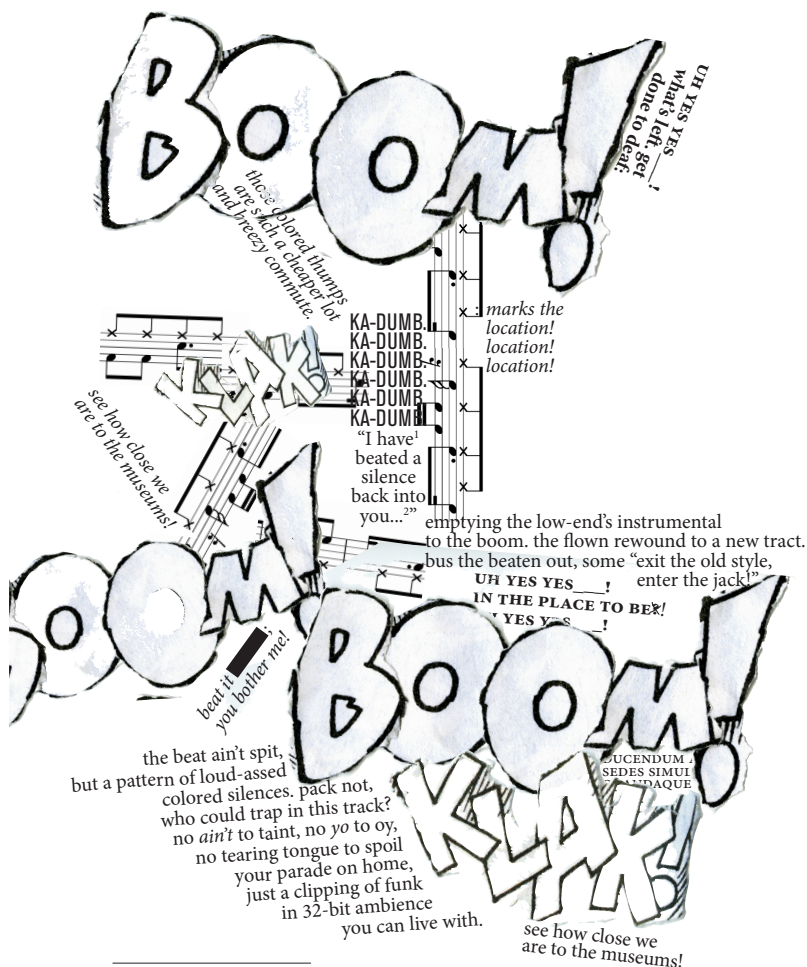
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# DOUGLAS KEARNEY



(uh) 1: "have I..."  
(and uh) 2: "uh...uh..."

—at the Japanese American National Museum

## COPYCATS

“the Kittypatra monument” say guard “was 3 days craning  
its one tonnage” of HELLO starshine and sugar skull,

touch me buy me calls the wall past KITTY’s plaster neme’s mane.  
K scampers fore and whee, cardboard bowed to an o of ears, bow,

her own crown a KITTY scalp scalped. share me. HELLO  
glee and death! Baseman KITTY mobbing with strange oily friends,

those bulb-head goblins he stay painting, sky tumorous with fat and little balloons.  
aiiii! kaiju KITTY, HELLO destroyer of pretty cities, islands, itty bitty in the case

we “please do not touch”— guards at alert! blocks west, horizoned,  
monstrous cranes haul a new skyline from a great hole in the city:

hotel, shopping, pretty condos. K reckons EXIT and does,  
but not so the glass over charnel floor of a Manzanar Memorial,

daddy, I’m scared to walk on there(!). grave. takers of houses, we.  
“Japanese investment in U.S. real estate in the late 1980s,

which unnerved many Americans.” says me: K, it wasn’t fair. no it wasn’t, she, then  
gone.  
crowned, posing, K copycats the KITTY’s mouthlessness. to take a pretty picture.

## Here's the Old New Here Not Here

hullish set for star destroyers-at-scale, teeming team  
of dream makers de-skeining flight, wire by wire. elsewhere  
crunch their terraprocessors: distance, flora, fauna,  
crafts, sand, cargo, force into cloudcud, into This Christmas.  
this 2015. the elsewhere here of voiceover over there  
still here as Jones Willie Tylered the bad-ass walking woofer,  
that black-ass babydaddy dummy. dark side right here,  
son. get some, son. a long time ago, a slave named Annakin—  
hear Jones' nostril-bellows through the black machine, he's in  
there. a long time ago now, a slave named Patsey—she's in  
there, that not there now, a star face-captured to be in there  
out there, but out of there in there, see ya, so long-o.  
it's coming, like Christmas. just like the ones we used to know.  
don't worry, say the dream makers to a we, we'll lose them in post- .

## BRUCE BOONE

### *from* He Sleeps with the Angels (Pink Sperm)

The meter was ticking but the taxi wasn't going anyplace. Word by word I looked thru them. They poked holes thru my rubber masks. Now is there less, I asked. I said that teen angst paid off well for me but now, old and bored. Two holes started shaking and I noticed changing, ch ch ch change.

Empty voices, please listen up. Alongside our moving Corolla in stetsons agents from cosmic powers, wearing jeans, cowboy boots. What gasped for a straight shot up I-5. These disguised ole boys. Shades. Faux-stetsons: archon agents in drag. As a monorail ran before us we couldn't think clearly. Falsification is minimalism by speed. Frances Farmer did her best but against the windshield the moans of Seattle's pre-I-5 rainy tarmacs. Every woman's sentence, every word, isn't it a heart-shaped box? Given to me, it sounds like those ole leaves blowing over Lake Washington. Oh sorry I mean the night I died. I'm all apologies SPERM-FACE! You buy and sell my records but here we are now entertain us. Damn you proly heard that thing awready. Damn like I like it. It sounds in my head. The Corolla in its lane, the pickup truck with good ole boys crossing lanes to push us off I-5. I'm all apologies. Authorities. Stetsons. Tears wiped clean again and again by the windshield wiper. Oh boy. Fall asleep now, Ms. Bean. Cuddly cigarette blanket burns but who can claim clear awareness after shooting up with heroin. I'm trying to do my best—which is to fall back to sleep. I dream of monorails running round the enemy space-alien SPACE NEEDLE broadcasting false messages ratified by a government in their pay. Too bad, so sad. Realization is a memorial service and then you wake up.

Mooosh moosh I can't hear. A window-wiper for my ears. To clear the air I lie to you now. And when stars begin to plunge—is it different then—IS IT? It only hurts real bad the first time. I know that. Nothing is really in



disguise you just look is all and see what's there is not what's not. Easy as pie. On a daily basis LOVE repeated KURT until I believed. Still do. Like any sissy you have to love animals. I do. Aliens and sin go together like a heavy stone falling—dead meteors, comets streaking out lives. Sometimes flip flop flip flop goes the monotonous windshield wipers and sentences no longer make sense following other ones—why? Can I just die? Hey I DID that. Right? What's good for you is bad for you, Courtney, do you think, girl? Like me? Or the aliens? Give me my blanket back. I will never belong to the Watchtower Society—I don't believe in waking up. Just sleep. Sleep. It's so minimal. But when all the fat's cut away do I know there'll really be meat? Uh. OK maybe, I'll just say like I hope. Maybe. Dominations and powers—they rule like archons. DUMB DOWN and they'll never see you, DUMBED DOWN in your little girl-blanket, girl. Once I dumbbed down emotions. Now I'm working paragraphs. Sentences. Words. Even morphemes like even.

I hate myself and want to die. Too bad, said the PINK LIGHT to the sissy. Frances Farmer asked me, how many windshield-wipers will you need to cover up them tears. And she went ahead and tole me, well just grow a pair then, Kurt, and I hung my head. Forgetting so much. Did I get my start at Olympia in community college—and aren't I just an animal like all of us? We are slaughtered daily for your breakfast sausages. Americans kill animals. Under alien supervision the continuation of a slaughter that never stops. While Courtney wears furs! I guess I'm a loser. Smear me. You'd like that wouldn't you? I know. In the music emanating from distant cosmic planets I remain and whenever there's heartbreak in the world there was I once. There am I still. There will I ever be. Like pink sperm falling on upturned faces glad with decrypted joy at last. Our faces to the wind, fall you starry cum-things, you won't ever fail the moans and groans in music transformed to joy forever. Thru me. I'll be there always. What about your being so stupid like you once said, baby? Nothing but BEAN I told her back. Look for me in your heart, a child like BEAN.

The decryption of the Aberdeen encryption was slow and steady. A windshield wiped off my rain on I-5. In Seattle discovering Frances Farmer. Animals to be loved like myself. In the last century there was Hank his slide guitar mimicking the heartbreak that will only grow. I put on a rubber mask given me by the cosmic powers, their alien troops falling from above like tears in rain. Tears say love. Or Love. It smooches my vision now. The mosh pit moushiness of it can do that. Get rid of COURTNEY KURT SHE'S NO GOOD. Babe, you think I got to be good—to make you happy then? Think again, my sweet, think. Too many teardrops, too much pain in my belly even the heroin can't kill, is there only sleep left for me now—and is love just another way to go to sleep I wonder sometimes?

FLATLINE suddenly. In Rome. Some ICU where I wake up hurting—whaaaaa? I say mulingly. More pain. The voices wake up: get rid of her Kurt she's bad oh so bad for you get rid of the bitch. What a cunt. Or maybe the sentences read differently. In deepest flatline dark sleep and quiet away from the noise—sentences distort, the things—powers—misshape morphemic fragments channeling down the ear-canals on false pretenses. I don't know. Flip flop go the sentences, can you see yourself now? Each begets each, question the next, same with sentences, to finish the song you make another. It never ends. There's nothing but change. Maybe she's a bitch. I love you KURT screamed my fans. Still deceived, still encrypted by powers. But I feel more deeply, with Love there's only love isn't there? Where in love is the deception of the alien screams I make with my music—forever. I don't know. I guess I never will.

Did I speak up for sissies? Well for a while. Did I treat women right? Who cares. It's all over now. A thing now not a person. In death objectified like Mallarme did with Edgar Poe. Is it right that you can't fight city hall? Holograms abound. Your job—to translate them Bruce said to me. Translation is transcendence. Until our time action depended on transcendence but when the talk turned to action offstage there would be clunky chains rattled by ghosts of nothingness. Georges Bataille. Am I a

ghost too now, me, Georges, Bruce—ghosts from the past, just tears in the endless river of time, who has made us disappear. Erasure—of self, songs, a person's writing. Will others take our place, will new audiences find new entertainment from us ghosts? Undead and banished to galactic distant planets yes but still emanating our tuneful erasures to the Unborn—you.

CODE BLUE CODE BLUE scream Roman loudspeakers but in Italian of course. Funny shirt I'm wearing. The computer codes must be broken. For good. In the motel room we kissed wept and fucked—SMOOOOOOSH go the damn wipers again—erasing us all over. It's never just this time like you think, time after time. World after world. Sentence after sentence, the same glow radiating the pink sperm on her face lapping in the rivers of moonlight prying open the motel windows. Isn't that so romantic? I think so. A computer abode function stops and we're in Rome again. Time segments arranged then rearranged without our knowledge or consent. Constant slap slap of tear-dropped faces aghast. Love, tears. Love makes tears. Tears make love too. We've known that forever. Is re-learning always the default then? Include in it the pain-manifold. Include emotions, the affect of it, the gurgle of the heart pumping its blood smearing it the wall—traces the future that will find its make where we are. Here.

I am only a doormat in a van. Princess Leia taught me this. Another option—a vine-covered garage, a bag of heroin shining to blind you, all the white in the world become icebergs of cold cold cold—the BANG rings out the shot. By accident a man peeping in the window will see me rotting—like dog-shit in rain decomposing the pain made by my music. I had a star-fleet at my disposal and what good did it do me? Courtney, can you find the card-key in your purse please? And another door opens.

Whisked away. Temporary stomach disorder, they say. Like Hank did—buying for time. Knowing what's near, what's almost now. His back pain, mine getting worse, a stomach betrayed me, a back destroyed Hank. We're the same. Did songs teach us this? The hologram of our fictions containing

songs. Clothes without people in them. This smack I just did on slower speeds crumbles. Who will mop up? I just jacked-off, was too busy to notice I guess. Your call, women who I've always respected as my teachers. Teach me again. Now. Thanks tons for the Douglass firs in the middle of Rome. Thanks tons for putting me on this distant lightless planet singing songs that'll take light years if ever—to drift back. Does time and space warp my writing you like this. Or will you resent it from me. Jetting thru the mesh-underpants I wear beneath the torn jeans that're my trademark. Oh boo hoo! You too!

A gun. Or rifle—haunting my hopes. BLAM! Down to PDX then Redlands then SF and back here. Did I cover the bases. Is it sarcasm or kisses that makes my music for me? I never knew. I was just a singer. Not a thinker. If I entertained you—can I ask for more? What's mine is yours. Yours mine. Go figure. I stopped trying. Coming generations can you make me less stupid? Will you entertain me for a change? Seriously. Did I make a mistake somewhere along the line then?

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What piece of reality is this? Sounds of departure—huh? Raybans rays lighting film noir ceilings. A piece of me used to taste my own cum. Am I him now? It tastes slightly acrid, like swimming pool water with chorine in it makes your body smell clean but unnatural. What is natural. Bits of starfalls losing their light becoming bad overnight like alien mothership cadets inside mushroom spores waiting for a sign. The world's signlessness, wishlessness, emptiness—in the silence greeting you. Will I ever be really dead?

Off I-5 on Portland's East Side. The clothes toggle around back and forth. Sometimes with bodies in them, sometimes not. You will live to see another day. Maybe. Or not. I found Love in one of the floozie houses across the Burnside bridge on skid row. Mushrooms again. You can't end anything.

The toggle effect—wait long enough and that bottle of Nehi—The lotus is in the mud, the shit, each produces the other and— Around the house, vans. Hats, suits, ties, shoes wear the men like masks. Then—there's a toggle back and forth.

We're in the ICU scenario—or will be—in some future I think I'll remember in a minute. The shoes are empty—they put on the KURT mask over me. The shadows under the door—a menu of possible other replicants, should you need them, sir. THAT'LL BE ALL, LT. CHAN. PRINCESS LEIA will take over from here. YOU MAY GO. Noise intruding in the message. That's not it!—exclaims a higher voice. The noise writes a new language never seen or heard. It's meant to be felt.

In this scenario he's whisked away—from the hospital in Rome. “A temporary stomach disorder.” Oh! He's ready for his next recording date. I look at my watch-calendar. Mmmmmmm, according to this—we're back in the year 2047. There are still languages and numbers but the house of meaning crumbles. At a slower speed the clothes still have people in them. When was that? Changes the message. Even with face half blown away almost convince you almost convinces them. The ICU dry. Hiding behind emptiness. Nothing inside my facemask. I put on the blond scraggly wig, thin lips, Christlike or is it bum-like—face? I'm hiding nothing like you are reading. Bathed as we are in the pink light. Outside a Douglas fir or two weeping a tear pours it into LAKE WASHINGTON. Is the service over? Or bum-like face. I pull off my rock star facemask bed while explorer insects sent by the mothership explore my Christ-like face. Empty. Lets return, guys! The PINK LIGHT of EMPTINESS starts shining as I watch the readout—the lower peaks the more shallow depths. CODE BLUE CODE BLUE calmly announces the p.a.—then flatline. The nurses intently watching the peaks and valleys A windshield reflects nothing. Up I-5 in SEATTLE past K-Falls and PDX the pain produces the tears and they flow, like tears on car windshields the wipers keep up with. There were spikes aren't there—or is that the future when the stop. The FLATLINE



weeps around poor little clown KURT in his ICU bed—this is one scenario. A dead hologram body you can walk thru. Try it! Years fast-forward and shoulders shrug cause who cares? You absent yourself only in pink light. Too many teardrops smear the tears.

\*\*\*

It's still cold. Am I big enough yet to cover LAKE WASHINGTON with a voice? Once you kill the IQ the secret emptiness won't take up the space that can't be there can it? I'm ready. A finger goes with this. Then two. Or three. I don't know whose. Mine? Too much intelligence hasn't died yet for THAT is it? DARK MASTERS pressing keys or heads to lose instructions that can't be. Shake them from the Douglass firs and they plop into LAKE WASHINGTON. That house there, weren't there were enough rooms to cut off one, two, three of the DARK MASTER's fingers. His hands spread out are flat. Someplace along the way a dimension was lost. That's THEM again—the ALIEN CONTROLLERS. They're the SMARTS. Is if you could say my empty's bigger than yours isn't. And that was only once a weekend. Getting there on I-5.

Boundaries set by the cold. That's cool isn't it? In the hole in what used to be my face the worm-larva defined the cool IQ set these boundaries before there even was a BIG BANG Cool—also is COLD when But no, it doesn't go that way—it's the cold that sets the agenda, it's the get lost in in that house there. —and she did. Bitch. How do you make a flatline long enough lost again—every time. It's just that—suddenly at 12 years old looking into a mirror I said that's ME! How will I get there? What makes me want to kill it? It was only during love-making but that was a figure. That's what I'm aiming for. Rectangular translucent right your dead IQ closes nothing it opens. Something empty of what something up ahead At the end of the long tunnel as instructed—Maybe I'm dead. There's something dropping into me in clear plastic tubes—from the IV hand. That's not HIV. That's something else. The dark MASTERS are setting the dials. Or maybe just

like writing with his (Bruce's) hand when he pushes keys around, THEY're pushing BRUCE. Maybe I'm pushing them. These are basics. Like—can I pork you now honey? Dumb like animals. Little by little there's someone that gets to flatline only can you call it flatline then. DUH! All the answers come with the questions provided. When the doors shut, they equate. In other words you won't know you're there when you are, do you? IQ doesn't want to get to nothing. That's why there's affect. Each of them closes another spigot of blood. Sometimes I think it'll keep building up till there's nothing left in the world but that—the blood that piles on blood that piles on blood. Which can mean either LOVE or HATE. When you're not dumb, when you're smart, you think the opposite. Am I choosing? Is it cold outside?

Will I even use my worm to wiggle inside you, COURTNEY? The slow drip drop. Dripping into you. Should we pork? A pork with pink sperm for you. You love to hate me. The butcher takes wrapped pink meat—this time tomorrow. I don't know. Was I singing onstage for the crowds? Am I in the garage this time. Controlled by the controlling MASTERS there's either a garage I'm laying in. Or I'll be in that ICU pod in Rome when I OD. I can't read the parameters. Water and sperm make the red all pink. It takes more water than you think set the parameters. Wrap my pink meat. When you were a feminist I ate pink Pink from my blood. One of us knows that don't we? But which? Wrap it up, it's a pork don't know if my worm will go in your cunt-hole tomorrow. OK then write it down. I ALREADY AM! Then which one of us knows what you don't? That doesn't take brains. Huh! You must think it's supposed to! You can count what disappears. Quantify. There's so much LESS Lake Washington. So much less COURTNEY. That cunt! I know I'm supposed to be a feminist but the feminists turned on the blood valve and something's flowing. It doesn't pay. It only pays BACK. Yesterday there was a thumb and some fingers where now there's just space. This stump qualifies you to write, smear with your blood, whatever it is that people do.

One mistake already. I'm can't tell if I'm in some hospital somewhere or ICU or just can't remember. See? A part of the body disappeared—or will disappear soon. You write with my stump. But what about the mind. See, what you don't realize is that can go too, you don't need it, piece by pieced at least do you? What's here is a programmed illusion giving you the sense of hearing sentences. The less able to make sentences, the more IT. You know—FOG? It's always a then. The then is either future. From then on. Or past. From then on. See those drip drops on my clean white sheets here? Isn't there beginning, already, to be the pain. The compassion spurting from it like a mistake. Which is it. I can already feel my cerebellum shrinking. Like there was somebody eating out of it—with a spoon. Compassion isn't a feeling. That's one of the last things I can still remember. Before.

Before WHAT? beginning to be compassion. From then on—if “then” means Units of matter, time, you—One of us knows and the other doesn’t. Where there used to be a something, instead of. Dripping down drop by drop. Nauseating. DUMB IT DOWN. That’s the way out. The path out drop by drop. DISGUSTING. No? Disguising. DUMB DOWN. Tastes blood. Did you look? It’s like the fog—remember? Oh reconfigured. Reconfigured. Message disguised, reconfiguring. Leaked. You know—like blood? reconfigures the MISTAKE by will. Well—don’t you? “IT doesn’t pay” you say. The rest of you getting smarter while on this bed, these white sheets leak blood. An IV with all kinds of tubing going into me. It doesn’t get any better than this. DUMB it down—they say. Ha! The Big Lie—even I don’t know that one! The big smearrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. Like that—see? You get littler—like little tin soldiers marching around DUMB and DUMBER. In the fog how far down are you? I don’t think I can move but don’t know. The DRIP DRIP DRIP sounds—down thru the IV stand’s tubing? She said wait. My LOVE—COURTNEY. DUMB. DUMBING DOWN. Down WHERE? I don’t know. I think I said that out loud. But sometimes I don’t know. LESS of ME I know means MORE OF ME. Here where I’m sitting on my bed, in the fog. That’s what I feel like. Sometimes even write it down. Or am I just imagining that? That’s the trail. Why even say it? do the words in me say that?

Am I DUMB? Words in me that say that, but what do they mean? DUMB IT DOWN. Deep DUMBED DOWN. DUMB DOWN. and who's left? Everything stands up doesn't it? Why fall down. Is there LESS of you? What's the direction, in other words. Of ME? That's what I think when you open yourself up. is there less of you? Or me. Or me? That's what opens you up. The FOG. Follow the trail, the track. Where HE takes you. When it spreads you'll know, because there's more and more of it. Of NOTHING.

Do you feel it? Where once a face will be is now a face—his. KURT's. Whose side are you on? I guess I know the nothing propping up the shirts I wore. They stand up by themselves empty of too much stash. Legs not needed in the shoes pacing the path. Are those your cremains, KURT or mine. First the face comes off. Easy as pie. Tomorrow he may be alive again, I have to work fast. The face turns inside out and slips off like the empty jocky shorts. His stains remain these cremains now. I throw up. The closer, the less of you. Your dumbness is not mine. Mine not yours. KURT's last recorded message from the SPACE NEEDLE: I prop up your nothing. Another glass of empty drinks full of what you will be, making right choices. PANTS pressed, with crease on duty? Covered with pink semen to brush off. It'll all be all right now won't it?—he asks pathetically.

Pink, the color of mediation between RED for blood and WHITE for blank. Drawing hearts under the bridges at ABERDEEN in high school. Standing in a pool of it. The white will turn to water. That puddle back there—its single veined eye watching you. The nerds watch the jocks—THEY can't see. The color of compassion. The RED registers the pain. Registering a long passage. To pace off pain leaves LOVE. That was always COURTNEY for me. Her bleeding KOTEX that for once won't spot this month: thru that hole another wrong choice, BEAN. Little FRANCES BEAN. FRANCES FARMER will find her revenge in SEATTLE. I wish I could be a piece of KOTEX up her cunt. You turn on a spigot, the water flows. Now even the light is pink. The PINK LIGHT of passage. From X to Y. Spurting useless spermpoles that hold up this world. NO MORE BABIES!!

A nurse comes in and wipes my face. She pulls out the plug from the socket but it still keeps talking, sending messages. YOU ARE AN ICU, KURT, ONLY IMAGINING THIS. Block by lucite block of LOVE drained from retainer walls. You have made the best choice. Follow the beam of pink light. You cannot go wrong.

The SHOE approaching on its own, empty of its owner, following the track to my bed. It'll be here. Followed by the overstarched pants walking by themselves. Name them. In this world only NAMES matter. The lucite of spirit congealing. I'll speak FOR you, OK?

OK—says the bedside table with a little nightshade. OK—says the warped linoleum first laid down only thirty years ago. IN puddles of my own cum. Or yours. OI VEY says our manager. On the way to an anti-war meeting. The walls close in and say—we only squeeze the breath out of you because we love you. Each of the little babies wears one of those nightshades. I don't. The messages flow from God and back. He's like them all, only one thing on their mind—I HATE them—just like the jocks back in ABERDEEN. "Spread em" they command you—and what can you do but obey? Right?

—You can walk the path to see it approaches. The blast blew a hole to see thru his face to see. So we inhabit the empty SHOES, SHIRTS, GLOVES, PANTS, SHOES. They come off like gloves—nothing's underneath. Are those KURT's cremains? Check out. Get closer. Come here. This that was his chest now a starched shirt standing on its own. The non-supports of emptiness that you can't see. I know. I was there. So will KURT be.

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Either leaving or entering. Are there angels hovering nearby? This pink sperm goo. Demagnetized by SEATTLE's space needle what can you do?



Up the corridor and over the transom comes a face. Or easily slipped under the door I run to it anxious to cover my emptiness—slip it on me. When the attempt ends, what's left? The cremains means KURT's freed now, free at last, free at last! No body can fill your deception.

As you drive north—to SEATTLE—the same thing. These giant Douglas firs supported by nothingness. A shipment of nothing lit by giant searchlights—scanning monorail stops. “This is it, we get out here.” If we don't dismantle ourselves—they'll do it for us, in other words. Everybody thinks it's the other way around but isn't it SMARTS has built this bleak world—with only the occasional zaps of pink light to hopelessly remind you of another one—instead of things there's emptiness to make up a world. Then the rift closes. It's the gray again. You can hand down the in complete task to another generation. But what good will that do?

Red taillights up ahead. A truck with a rifle rack. Filled with good ole boys. Remember—outside SEATTLE and PORTLAND all the way up here it'll be good ole boy country. As a mole for US you wear a uniform. LT. X shouts Major CHAN. “Spread ‘em,” I told you. Quivering quivering. I FEEL STUPID AND CONTAGIOUS. Here we are rearrange us. A truckload of fake penises filled with a fake rubbery pink glue that's a usurper. We'll never know the light. The worst is yet to come.

Selecting another sequence my fingers type out a different variant. He's in the hospital. Probably the ICU. Tubing everything. An octopus with an appetite for time. The leaves on the calendar blowing in the wind. The OCCUPUS wants to eat more TIME. From another time/space unit a block falls. It reads TEMPUS EDAX. The tubing has even begun eating the hologram wall-bricks of the hospital building. A stroke of the key—and the destruction of the delusion of changeness—of everything always remaining the same—stops the tentacles. The world I know is still mine—says COURTNEY. Impatient, drumming on the bedside table where the Princess telephone is ringing.

Finally contemptuously, demandingly—"Yeah who IS it?!" And instead of a monorail station, primeval swamp ferns "HEY MR UNIFORM" they taunt. Dragging huge weightless burdens unloaded by the empty pants and shirts that stiffly pretend to walk over to the loaded pallets—their job. And in the Hologram lego blocks but inside, glowing sparks of light A goo of pink sperm. Check. KURT's cremains: check too. We're going faster. You get closer to the message, I RISE I RISE! exuberantly proclaims SEATTLE's demagnetized SPACE NEEDLE. The less space the less me. Filled with no body what deception stands. No one in these SHOES SHIRTS GLOVE PANTS are you? Hello?! I'm over here. You can't see me now any more than I you. All those eyeballs rolling on the gooey spunk-covered boards that serve for floor. Huh? What's THAT all about huh? Anybody here?

Do things look? Do they hear? Pull on your boots and stand up. There's nobody there is there?

Sometimes isn't the thing that's less of you the leg? The leg. Hiding the missing part with the pants. Would you see my puny chest if you opened this shirt? The shirt's the same as an illusion—an IQ. An intelligence. Smarts—you smart ass. Here we are driving the car like Mr and Mrs Citizen. Those with great intelligence, the SMART ones have already set the parameters. A zero default is like the fog that regularly cloaks SEATTLE. Each pine, each Douglas fir—a penis pushing up. In the bush push push, in the bush—the ground vegetation. We need sex because of taking us further down. We cloak the fog. We're going downward and inward toward the PINK LIGHT of jism. His. KURT's. Don't you know when you're hanged or when you blow your head off what a thrill it is? That's the nothing. We're gravitating. Without a compass. Naughty children—think of the glazed look in COURTNEY's eye as she tells me this—naughty children always get punished. And burns my hand with a cigarette.

You've been hiding an IQ but I found it. The thing that's less of me. The less leg the less me. This is a world where two negatives still make a negative.

A hologram is still a negative. An illusion. Or delusion. I'm going to step on it—see if you make it to the corner before me. If you were to destroy every empty space you came to where would you be? In MORE space. If would be more empty except that's already the definition huh? Don't count the sentences in this paragraph. Don't count the words in any sentence.

By definition it's already! See that man squirting sperm like a fire hydrant—at the corner? The more sperm the more pink. Standing deceptively up, You got problems with that bud? Because every time there's more empty space there's more me. That means the opposite: the more of me there is, the less of me. Free at last! Every time you destroy there is more empty space. And I am here. One of me is dropped off at one station on the monorail, the other is the other. You can always have it both ways. The BIG LIE built brick by brick. Called LIFE.

Or CIA. Or whatever. Slick-back hair under government agent control—WHY I ask ? Easy as not? Each of you with your VICTORIA'S SECRET panties peeping—ABOVE the belt. Opposites have always attracted me. I lost it, spewed one a big one ropy one when Fat Ass there—some spook from the agency in a freakin HONDA for Chrissake—sat on my drooling face.

It helps if your husband's dead sometimes. The girlie lace. The return ticket stub from one of the Jupiter moons—thinks KURT. I am in an ambulance. Why? All the way up from San Francisco, thru K-falls and Eugene, then Portland then here at SEATTLE—I-5 was plagued with vehicles that had leaked thru from other worlds. I'm good about shutting down parts. Long training with the hippocampus does this. Essentially a toggle mechanism. You switch—this is the hologram I happen to find myself in is SELECTION A. B means dismantle. My head falls over—and I'm a goner—just like my pussy husband. The end of the spiritual path is IGNORANCE: take that either way, the way you like.

The girls on the corner had rip-off/faux HERMES bags. Mexico will just HAPPEN some day when I'm gone to be under another archonship, a mothership.

As I write you can see it happening. As we have ties with each other that go beyond life and death—said the simulacrum that was to be my nanny today—the same principle applies elsewhere. Now—leave me alone. I can't help you. OK one last lime: the slime you call delusions is the same slime reconfigured you should call reality. I can feel myself becoming him again—KURT.

So—last time we went to the dealer's for, umm, the heroin, you know, I could feel myself both OD'ing on the floor—with nobody giving a shit—and also being taken in this ambulance. I was both places. When version A of you twenty some foot across the room sees version B of you—that is the beginning of the merge. The merging of emptiness and form. The smoke of this incense stick, now lit and rising, more or less straight up, will join the emptiness awaiting it. CLOUD LIFE is when you don't resist. Bobbing, wave on wave of it, of bright nothingness—if I was an ancient Greek I might think I was on a dolphin's back.

Joins the sky what you call reality others I am peeking THRU/I see YOU! Get what I mean. When plopped that fat spook asshole sat on my face I lost it—and a thick ropy line of Milky Way galaxies bring her the news: your husband's dead. We're taking him to the ICU to revive him. Sign here. She couldn't help noticing the dirty white shirts. The girlie lace band peeking thru above their belt. They hadn't yet decided how many of them there will be today: above meantime in the mothership boredom prevents the triangleheads from choosing the number of X's involved. Select from the menu—and slide the pass card thru, please, thank you sir, or madam—there is either XX, or XY or in some more sinister cases a double Y made an XYY. Or SAKLAS, the stupid one.

You know that particularly dead light that simply occupies space around the cornea? Here was a line of government agents. Slicked back hair fools no one. I wasn't thinking, I asked him if had on ladies' panties underneath—I had to run like hell. I was outta there. I toggle into empty—the void. But something has happened. Every mistake, and the message changes. Look how wet it is! A shoebox could have shoes in it—but does it often. Long long ago in another galaxy Agent Mike had on shiny black Doc Martins—but that's for him to chose. Every error another bridge to a void made a further step to a delusion is like a wall: build brick by brick. If you're too smart you won't get that. KURT's cremains: crying. Escape is inevitable. A name peels off like a face—throw it away. Rearranging letters don't get better. letters are always rearranging. HEY dude—I think you get my drift! As in SHOES CAN BE EMPTY, SOX. And MORE IS LESS than LESS is MORE. ERROR = NOISE. KURT KURT KURT oh how you cremate and cry. Who wouldn't, wouldn't you? Up to the noise, 5the message. THEN: how do I GET OUTA here. He said I think meaning:

“This freaken ICU” anyways. He said anyways being from white trash at ABERDEEN. And what trash—he said—will OUT.

He wondered further: today? Yesterday? Tomorrow? Is there telling. I'll have parameters around me dying. When I die please lie a parameter on me. It will be the DEFAULT.



## MARIANO BLATT

### Mar del Plata

Afterwards we were in Mar del Plata  
and I put on a Raptors t-shirt.  
Afterwards they shouted things at us like  
hey, floggers, hey,  
colours, summers, lads, sadness, friends.  
Afterwards we went to the beach and took some stuff  
and the beach was better.  
Afterwards we found some dunes.  
Afterwards we took some other stuff and the beach was better better.  
Afterwards we had headphones  
and they shouted things at us because we danced real well:  
hey, floggers, colours, lads, summer, amulet, gorgeous.  
Afterwards we were real tough because we used a shower without  
paying for a tent.  
Afterwards I drank mate and thought about god.

Afterwards  
a dog runs along the hill  
and you think about things from this world that are in another world  
like tiny lines between lines at night your vision is a loose cable  
you've got an old computer for a head the TV not plugged in  
cable storm wind bad signal  
long live electronic interference  
brain hacking broken switch end of the world  
but a dog runs along the hill and for some reason you're from this  
world

like videogames are from this world  
the consoles, the speakers, that Fiat Uno, the red lights  
the green ones, the yellow ones, the wind, the metals.  
The dog running along the hill is not from this world,  
the drugged kid getting on the bus is from this world  
and from another more beautiful, more world world.

Afterwards we took some other stuff  
and I thought of all the poets in the world.  
I said: poets of the world, how great that we're friends.  
Afterwards I thought of all the planets in the world.  
I said: planets of the world, how great that we're friends.  
Afterwards I needed to explain that what I was seeing was true:  
the purple sky.  
Afterwards a real precise kid spat on my foot.  
Disgusting, I love it, what world are you from?  
Afterwards you can get away from things  
you see that someone's talking to you saying: listen to this song, they say  
Mar del Plata, the 221, the city, the lights, you see?, they say.  
But you make an effort to know that this thing called world  
that thing over there street, lights, city, bus, police, careful, casino,  
Mariano, 25, vacation.  
Afterwards means afterwards you say I don't understand anything I  
love it it doesn't scare me any more.  
Afterwards they ask you what's it like you say  
like tiny lines between lines like when the TV's got bad signal  
like when a dog runs along the hill a horse runs behind  
look a hare, look a quadbike  
Mariano you are in this world, Mariano you are 25.  
Afterwards I don't know what confused it's nothing  
it's that a thing opened in your head that shouldn't have.  
You see?, you cheated god.  
Afterwards there's a boy in Germany called Nicolás

he made a song you see? he cheated god  
Wow afterwards I put my cap on backwards  
and load up petrol with my tongue out like the dog  
who was running along the hill and now is resting.  
We bring him a bowl with water that says dog  
you feel the breathing afterwards hey, oh, hey the station we get off  
love a police siren, confusion, little kid facing up,  
Madariaga, how great that we're friends!

Afterwards we're on some rocks and I hear the song that Nicolás  
made.  
It's called Time is Over time is over  
the lyrics say  
time is over  
time is over  
Mar del Plata  
Mar del Plata  
how cool.  
Afterwards I drink mate, it rains and I am happy

Afterwards: how lovely  
things are still things  
(like that boy who passes by smoking a joint on his bike  
is still that boy who passes by smoking a joint on his bike)  
although you know not quite as much.  
Still, this is a secret to keep with yourself:  
don't tell it to anyone.

## Diego Bonnefoi

they killed a kid through the back in Bariloche  
they killed a kid through the back in Bariloche  
they killed a kid through the back in Bariloche  
who was called Diego Bonnefoi  
who was called Diego Bonnefoi  
who was called Diego Bonnefoi  
but life goes on the same  
but life goes on the same  
but life goes on the same  
you bought yourself new trainers  
you bought yourself new trainers  
you bought yourself new trainers  
that's a fact of reality  
that's a fact of reality  
that's a fact of reality  
perhaps one day  
perhaps one day  
perhaps one day  
Diego Bonnefoi will come back in electronic music format  
Diego Bonnefoi will come back in electronic music format  
Diego Bonnefoi will come back in electronic music format  
and on the dancefloors in basements across the world  
and on the dancefloors in basements across the world  
and on the dancefloors in basements across the world  
the kids, we'll put our hands up  
the kids, we'll put our hands up

the kids, we'll put our hands up  
those who've taken ecstasy  
those who've taken ecstasy  
those who've taken ecstasy  
put your hands up  
put your hands up  
put your hands up  
in memory of Diego Bonnefoi  
in memory of Diego Bonnefoi  
in memory of Diego Bonnefoi  
as a tribute to his back  
as a tribute to his back  
as a tribute to his back  
we dance for that as well  
we dance for that as well  
we dance for that as well  
and across the world there's a load of kids  
and across the world there's a load of kids  
and across the world there's a load of kids  
who don't dance to come out in the photo  
who don't dance to come out in the photo  
who don't dance to come out in the photo  
they dance so that tomorrow  
they dance so that tomorrow  
they dance so that tomorrow  
in the morning the sun comes out shining  
in the morning the sun comes out shining  
in the morning the sun comes out shining  
if possible and if that's not possible  
if possible and if that's not possible

if possible and if that's not possible  
so that in this world  
so that in this world  
so that in this world  
there are never again impossible things  
there are never again impossible things  
there are never again impossible things  
so that in this world  
so that in this world  
so that in this world  
and so that in that world  
and so that in that world  
and so that in that world  
there is never again a mountain range  
there is never again a mountain range  
there is never again a mountain range  
of the andes so that there are only  
of the andes so that there are only  
of the andes so that there are only  
facts of reality  
facts of reality  
facts of reality  
happening one after the other  
happening one after the other  
happening one after the other  
and so that Diego Bonnefoi's back  
and so that Diego Bonnefoi's back  
and so that Diego Bonnefoi's back  
may now also  
may now also

may now also  
run in the open air  
run in the open air  
run in the open air  
under this shining sun  
under this shining sun  
under this shining sun  
flowers on the slope of spring  
flowers on the slope of spring  
flowers on the slope of spring

*ed note: Diego Bonnefoi was a 15 year old shot by police in Bariloche in June 2010.*

—originally published in *Palabras Errantes*

## **R. ZAMORA LINMARK**

### Abecedarian for John Waters

Abecedarian for Beginners  
Ayatollah of Crud.  
B-minus madness.  
Comme des Garçons au jambon.  
Congress of Connoisseurs of Bad Taste.  
D-I-Y sex change.  
Divine's dog-shit-eating dilemma.  
Dogeater's Digestive System.  
Enema for idiots.  
Fecal matters.  
Framed stripper's pubic hair.  
Glen Milstead, mon frère, ma diva.  
Glory holes for lesbians.  
Higher self-consciousness welcome.  
Halfway home for homewreckers.  
Hideous is holy.  
I am Divine, day in and day out.  
Iconoclash.  
I stop sex for cigarettes.  
Jane & Michael Stern, digestible authors of The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste.  
Johnny Depp's vial of tears.  
K-Y Jelly submarine sandwich.  
Landscape with used condoms.  
Make-up eating contest.  
My Dinner with Chucky.  
No white shoes after Labor Day.  
Odorama.  
Oven-baked rodent on a bed of lettuce and two lemon slices.



Pink communal dental floss.  
Queentessential.  
Quiet: meth-certified nuns on the set.  
Roadkill in session.  
Scratch-and-sniff skidmarks.  
75 RPM singing sphincter muscle.  
“Someone sent me a bowel movement.”  
Tourette tournament.  
Trash is Divine.  
Umbilical cord-chewing challenge.  
Vulgariffic.  
Wonderful World of Disney’s Suicide Hotline.  
Wounds that got away.  
X-mas tree-decorating-inspired nervous breakdown.  
Yowling at the all-night Duras film fest.  
Ziplock of a sixteen-year-old turd.

## Split-Second Serenity

This afternoon I read – no, listened  
to Tim talk about the time he got  
admitted to Ward G-9 for AIDS with  
Jesus Christ, a trio of Tibetan Buddhists,  
Miss Bette “Bumpy Ride” Davis as  
constant companions, alongside death,  
that is, what’s-left-of-life-and-time-  
death, as opposed to the upper-case  
D that plays chess with Swedes  
by the sea. Former lovers, magazine  
editors, and writers with aliases  
in drag also dropped by, as themselves  
or as daydreams. But every night,  
his lover Chris showed up, exact  
as six o’clock, to cry, give strength,  
disappear in Tim’s embrace until  
the last visiting second. Most time  
Tim had spent building a poem  
that wouldn’t stop, couldn’t end,  
as if it had a mind, machine, memory  
of its own to think and convince itself  
into believing that staying undone  
meant more time and words – an  
inverted Scheherazade, you could say,  
except we all know remembering is  
also linked to forgetting and cruelty.

Suddenly, I forgot where in Tim’s  
unending poem – if he were already

buried by an avalanche of love or  
comparing the size of death with  
someone from Marseille – but everything  
around me grew calm, a split-second  
serenity that required full submission.  
And I, powerless and superstitious  
to such visitation, started weeping and,  
for the life of me, couldn't stop, wouldn't  
end, because Jorge had dropped in  
to say he was en route to Tour Eiffel  
before training it south to Rome for  
a surprise splash a la Anita Ekberg  
in the Trevi fountain. He dragged  
with him a suitcase of cocktails, rubbing  
alcohol, Betadine swabs, and Styrofoam  
cooler for the bags of IV antibiotics  
I once watched him inject through a PIC  
line above his heart. Then Stephen  
entered the room, said, "Let's happy hour.  
Hula's in half hour. Will shower now."  
His lover, my younger brother, our girl  
Lisa, and I waited beside tall glasses  
of piña coladas, melting ice, floating  
pineapple chunks stabbed by parasol-  
topped toothpicks. We waited the length  
of three slow rounds, until worry drove  
us back to Stephen's condo, where we  
found him, standing and shivering  
under the shower for god knows  
how long, in a daze, disoriented,  
recalling nothing, everything just  
water after water after water.

## YE MIMI

### 2 Nights 9 Secrets—for Turning 29

The pace of her escape slackens      as she continues to compose her  
    crummy poetry  
drinking her scalding tea      rebuffering tough subjects  
eyes are post-it notes      at times aglow at times ablack  
at times they will withdraw like a flood  
after all these years      she still prefers the window-seat  
in scenery there's sea there's snow      there are people there are  
    timeworn streets  
and gentle dromedaries on the wing

When dark clouds gather      she describes herself like this:  
Fun-loving with a big carbon footprint. The hotter it gets the greater  
    the stability. The colder it gets the more in bloom.  
In any case she can become a lamp      a tree  
an oven or a crossword puzzle  
no matter what      it's simply a question of shape      she said.

She experiences some intrinsic risk-taking  
her heart often switches its power source  
what is dreamt of exceeds what is seen      and words, letters,  
    characters are music  
mostly      of course      she hides inside the body of a child  
  
and with a child's height takes the measure of the world

## I Didn't Know You Didn't Know I Didn't Know: For "Sis"

Didn't know how far the spring of youth could go  
but in the end up there among the clouds     before they turn to rain  
     or fish in the bounding main  
that crow-wakeful     night

we'd quite finished off the crème brûlée

it all began with the black orange  
we were in a fog  
his voice when he sings     is very like a long fishing line  
on which is hooked line and sinker     a river that won't stop reeling  
we revolve  
in the swirling whirlpool

when the seasonal nor'easters begin to boil and rage  
the time is ripe to trim back the portobello  
pop them in a circular pot     burbling with smiles

this is our fall and winter commemorative signature  
you said

the train sidles into the station at the stroke of noon     like a tidy  
     row of bento  
you toss off your mackintosh     and fly, fly away  
calling to mind a practical exercise     slanting rhymes:

bite off the break  
skirt the precipitous brink

the ghosts in the first-level basement  
await  
the coming of the man from Mars

you open up your backpack then  
knock back a bottle of Español  
for that next tastefully unfamiliar excursion

TRANSLATED BY JEFFREY ANGLES

## HIROMI ITÔ

*from* The Thorn-Puller: New Tales of the Jizô Statue at Sugamo

### TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The following is an excerpt from the long work *The Thorn-Puller: New Tales of the Sugamo Jizô* by Hiromi Itô, one of Japan's most important feminist writers. First serialized in the monthly magazine *Gunzô*, this work was published in book form in 2007 and quickly went on to do something unheard of in contemporary Japan, namely to win not one, but two of Japan's most important literary prizes—the Izumi Shikibu Prize and the Hagiwara Sakutarô Prize.

In this semi-autobiographical work, Itô describes her life shuttling back and forth across the Pacific, taking care of two families in California and Kumamoto, while reflecting on her status as a migrant who no longer feels that she belongs entirely to either place. In describing her busy life as caretaker and writer, the protagonist explores in amusing and often poignant ways what it means to be a mother, child, and worker in a postmodern, transnational world where national boundaries and a sense of belonging are quickly fading away.

Although it might look like prose at first, Itô has frequently commented that she conceives of this work as a “novel in verse” or a “narrative poem.” In this work, she frequently uses techniques more associated with poetry than prose. For instance, she frequently subverts ordinary rules of punctuation, collapses the space between first and third person narration, employs rhythm, repetition and defamiliarizing language to create a sense of poeticity, and incorporating quotations from other works, including a broad variety of sources ranging from folktales to pop songs.

Since at least the 1990s, Itō has been fascinated with *sekkyō-bushi*, a form of medieval Buddhist narrative told by itinerant priests and storytellers in a combination of alternating verse and prose. In a sense, *The Thorn-Puller* represents Itō's own attempt to become an itinerant storyteller and to write a postmodern *sekkyō-bushi* about the universal themes of suffering, aging, and dying. To help her explore these themes, Itō relates a number of stories from her own life to the famous statue of the Buddhist bodhisattva Jizō located in Sugamo, Tokyo near where she spent her childhood. This statue is revered, especially among the elderly, for its ability to alleviate suffering, and Itō's repeated evocation of this statue becomes the main motif that structures the book.

This novel was written at a moment of demographic crisis as the numbers of senior citizens in Japan was swelling to enormous proportions, and it explores the meaning of life, old age, caregiving, and religion within the nation with the world's longest life expectancy. The work can be enjoyed on many levels—for the engaging plot, which frequently veers into the surreal and imbues scenes of everyday life with mythological grandeur; for its clever use of literary devices, including fascinating deployments of archetypes and literary references; as well as for its innovative language, which weaves together both profane and artfully elevated registers of speech.



## The Thorn-Puller: New Tales of the Jizō Statue at Sugamo

### Chapter 3:

#### I Cross the Ocean and the Broad Slope of the Underworld While Throwing Peaches

Transpacific.

I've boarded more airplanes and trans-ed my way across the Pacific more times than I can count. No, this was a different kind of trance than my grandmother Toyoko, the spirit medium, used to go into. East to west, west to east. For some reason, going from west to east is much longer, much darker, and much more difficult. In fact, it's so difficult it hardly seems like traveling—it's more like dying and trying to make your way back home from the Underworld.

When I arrive, I think to myself, I've reached *sahā*, the "world which must be endured." The sun is blazing, the sea is bright blue, there are big, wide open houses, parks, nature, and an overdeveloped consumer culture, the place is overflowing with food, people are chubby and well-to-do, but they give generously to the poor, and if you make eye contact while passing them by, they smile in a friendly way. As I drag my heavy luggage through the airport toward the exit, I don't feel like eating a hamburger, a sandwich, a burrito, or a pizza slice from the restaurants lining the hallway. Just the sight of a muffin or cinnamon roll is enough to get on my nerves. But the moment I set foot outside, my husband will be there to pick me up, and I'll have to speak in English. I starting thinking it'd be nice to have a bite of something sweet first. On quite a few occasions, I've been drawn into the airport shops to buy a Cinnabon before heading home.

My sky. My house. My life.

My life with my family.

So, let me say a few words about husbands...

Here's what people say. Husbands make the meals, calculate the

expenses, give you sex, take care of the kids, and sometimes even make money to bring back home, they're dependable and take care of the family, and even if they put on weight and swell up like a balloon, they'll still feel nice to the touch. I wanted—really wanted—a good husband, a kind husband, a user-friendly husband who I could spend my life looking at and who would still make my heart brim with affection. He'd love me forever. Unchanged. Hrmph. That was just an illusion. And that's the reason the two of us make such an odd couple bumbling through life together.

I've never had too much of a sweet tooth, but Americans love sweet, rich, heavy food. Their cinnamon rolls are so ridiculously sugary they make your head spin. They've got cookies brimming with chunks of chocolate, and brownies that are huge and heavy. They've got greasy doughnuts fried in oil and slices of carrot cake drowning in cream. The country is overflowing with sweets. I feel bad for people who live here who have to eat those things. I can't help feeling sorry for them. But at some point, I started to eat them too. I ate and ate. Ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate. Ate until the fat and sugar swelled up inside me. And that's when I realized something—eating their sweets is like eating the food of Underworld. Start eating them, and you'll never be able to go back again.

We were on our way home after a long stay in Japan. We'd fled the snowy skies of Kumamoto to Tokyo, where there was no snow but the weather was bitterly cold. With Aiko in tow, I tottered through the ticket gate at the monorail. I'd sent most of our luggage ahead of time to the airport so we could pick it up before our international flight, but as I finished my packing, I found all sorts of things that had to go in my hand-held luggage with my computer so I was carrying them, slinging them over my shoulder, and dragging them behind me. As we traversed Tokyo, we stopped and spent our last night in Japan at the home of a friend. The next morning, as we transferred from one subway line to another, the muscles in my neck began to grow stiff, and I squeaked out a warning to my daughter, Aiko, don't do that, come this way, Mommy can't turn her head that way. We had survived this far, and as it just so happened, it was December 24,

the last possible day I could get home before Christmas. If we made our transpacific flight that day, it'd still be the twenty-fourth when we arrived in California, and we could spend Christmas with the family—we'd just barely make it. I had promised my husband we'd be home for the holidays. He's Jewish and I'm Buddhist, so it was absurd we had any responsibilities on Christmas at all, but that's how our household works. That's our family. So there I was on the morning of the twenty-fourth, going to the airport, and my neck was so stiff I could barely move it at all. We got on and off the subway and the Something-or-other Express, and by the time we emerged at ground level, we were already inside the brightly lit airport at Narita. I couldn't stand the pain any longer. I bought a compress to put on my neck, went into the bathroom to apply it, then wrapped my head in a scarf to hide it. I was sitting absent-mindedly on one of the hard chairs in the waiting room when Aiko said,

Mom, you look like a sick person.

Do I really look so tired? I asked.

No, that's not what I mean, she said. So-and-so's mother (she was talking about one of her friends in California) got cancer and had to take chemo, but all her hair fell out. Afterward, she kept her head covered with a scarf; you look like she looked.

I hugged Aiko and said, let's come back here again, but she answered in Japanese, *uuuummmm*, hesitating a moment before adding, I think I like it over there better. *Over there*. In Japanese, that's what people sometimes say when they mean "abroad." By *over there*, she meant California.

She said the last part smoothly in Japanese, but sometimes in her speech there was something odd, like listening to someone speak with an accent; it was good she'd been listening to other people, learning from them, and adding to her own vocabulary, but there was sometimes something off in her Japanese—sometimes a word, sometimes a sentence, or sometimes even an entire long paragraph.

I want to go home soon, I want to see Daddy and my friend (she said in Japanese), ah, I really missed her (she said in English), she's my best

friend after all, when we get home, I'll call her right away, play right away, together, forever, I've already promised (she said in Japanese).

Ten hours in the plane. The compress was still on my neck. I repeatedly drifted off to sleep and woke up again. My neck was constantly warm and my head and neck were constantly heavy, so I hardly knew if I was sleeping or awake. There weren't any decent movies on. I didn't feel like reading. The sound to the movie was switched off, but I gazed at the screen anyway. Sometimes Aiko's Tamagotchi would whisper something. Aiko was sleeping like a log, as if she had completely melted away. Over and over, I'd take out a new compress and apply it. Over and over, I opened the window shade a crack and peeked out. Over and over, the sunlight filtered in. When we got off the plane, we walked for a long time through artificially lit hallways. And then when we got outside, we were bathed directly in the light of the sun itself. It was so bright I couldn't open my eyes. Palm trees swayed in the wind, the sky shone blue, cars came and went, the buildings and the street were grimy, people shouted angrily, cars squealed, lights blinked, doors opened and closed. Our heavy luggage clattered behind us as we walked to the next terminal, then to the gate where we'd get on the next plane. The next airplane was so small it looked like you could fold it up and put it away, but it carried us south along the coast until we finally reached our destination.

My husband was there.

It had been four months since we'd seen each other.

So, let me say a few words about husbands...

They look like someone took a man then kneaded and plucked him.

They swell up like a balloon.

They look thick, big, and sturdy.

Like a good, hard squeeze would give them a hard-on.

Like they might let out a cry of passion.

Everyone says they're great.

I hadn't been thinking about those things until the moment I saw his face. I was too busy climbing up and down the broad slope that leads out of the Underworld. Come to think of it, my husband too. He's always with

me at all stages of my life in America. He hugged me, but I let out a shriek and pushed him away. Because of my neck. Without even thinking about it, I started throwing things at him—I threw a comb, I threw peaches. Because of my neck. He pulled back and gave Aiko a hug instead, rubbing his cheek against hers.

And with that, Aiko quickly moved away from me, retreating into the distance.

Actually, Aiko is always there, somewhere in the house. She's there, but the language she uses has changed, her daily habits have changed, her ways of thinking have changed, the foods she likes have changed, and even the things that amuse her have changed. For four months, we lived together, just the two of us in Japan, but when we came home together, still hand-in-hand, we crossed over the slope. And in that instant, Aiko changed back into the person she'd been before.

My neck still was killing me.

In English, there's an expression "pain in the neck." People use it to say someone is a bother or is depressing.

For instance, "He's such a pain in the neck, I'm totally sick of him."

And then there's the expression "pain in the ass." That's the one people use when they're totally fed up, when they've dispensed with all moderation and want to let someone have it.

For instance, "Damn it to hell, he's a pain in the ass." But translate it literally into Japanese, and it sounds hysterical—"he's agony in the rectum."

Damn it to hell, the pain in my neck was a real pain in the neck.

After two or three days, it still hadn't improved so at the recommendation of my neighbor, I went for a massage. I went to a dimly lit massage clinic suggestively filled with the aroma of incense. I laid down, and as the blond masseur with deeply bronzed skin worked on me, she smeared some Tiger Balm on me. She said, this'll be sure to work, we sell it here, then she asked, do you want to buy some? I told her a fib—we Orientals always have Tiger Balm on hand—then I left. My momentary relief quickly faded. The next morning, my neck was stiffer than ever, I couldn't move it all, it was like someone had applied starch to a shirt and stiffened it up. When I

called the massage clinic from the previous day, they told me to apply my Tiger Balm.

Damn it to hell, what a pain in the neck.

I had to bend my neck to look down. As I was testing the limits of my mobility, I bent it and happened to see some rodent droppings on the floor. They were still fresh and soft. To make matters worse, they weren't from a mouse but a rat. In Japanese, there's just one word, *nezumi*, meaning "rodent," but in English, there are two different words, *mouse* and *rat*, depending on the size of the creature. I wished I hadn't found the droppings, but I had. We'd have to exterminate. I put small packets of poison in all of the key, strategic positions. For a long time, I've known where the strategic positions are. The rats probably don't know I know, but I do. I still remembered where they were, although I'd been away for four months. The packets of poison were gone in less than half a day. The following day, a rat ran across the corner of the room. I reflexively pounced, chased it, and caught it in a sealed container. It was a rat alright—a big *nezumi*—but it was only a baby. With lovely, round eyes. And a twitching nose. Shaken by the death of its parents, it'd fled the darkness and come out of hiding.

My husband praised me as he looked at my prey. How many live rats have you caught? That's an amazing skill, your neck might hurt, but it hasn't affected your rat-trapping technique at all. Maybe you're really a cat pretending to be a woman.

I gave him a confident little look. *Come see me, you will find me... Where the leaves of arrowroot rustle their complaints...*

These words rose to the tip of my tongue, but I managed somehow to suppress them. I might as well, there was no way he'd understand what I was talking about. Over the course of the decade we'd spent together, I'd given up on my husband more times than I could count, realizing he couldn't possibly understand me. In fact, I used to like the fact he couldn't. That was one reason we started living together. Originally, it was okay—if he couldn't understand something, he wouldn't try to talk about it. He didn't understand anything about me. He didn't understand my language,

the things I was writing, the things I was thinking, or the things I was trying to do. He didn't understand the things I saw, nor the scents I smelled. He didn't understand the things I wanted to eat, nor the things I didn't want to eat. But people get greedy. During the decade we spent together, there were times I wanted to be understood. I fell under the illusion that if I explained things carefully one by one, he'd come to understand me. I tried countless times to explain my thoughts and feelings, I tried explaining my background, my language, and my culture, but still, he didn't get it. Sometimes I fell under the illusion he understood me for a moment, but later, I'd realize he still didn't get me. I'd realize my illusion was just that—an illusion—and I'd get disappointed and angry. In my rage, I might do anything—maybe pick a fight or have sex.

I gave up. I gave up talking to him about me and my rat-catching. I gave up on talking to him about the old Japanese legend of a fox named “arrowroot leaf” (*kuzunoha*) who took on human form, and instead I just talked about my own pride in my abilities as a hunter—it's not hard to catch a rat if you think it's okay to hurt it, but it's much harder to catch it alive without doing any damage. He listened and watched me with the same gaze he might use to look at an animal, but I could tell he didn't have any intention of understanding. My pride and motivations were my own, and he didn't really care.

Nighttime. I went to the beach to let the baby rat go, although I knew it was probably illegal. I turned off the headlights so no one would see, and I stopped the car on the road by the shore. I quickly removed the lid from the container, and right away, the baby rat bounded off into the darkness and disappeared.

The house began to stink of death from the rats I'd poisoned. The baby rat's relatives were all dead. The rat I saved had probably snuck into one of the fancy homes near the water, where it had probably grown into a healthy adolescent that was now going into heat. Meanwhile, my neck was still stiff as a board. It still wouldn't move, it still wouldn't move, it still wouldn't move. My husband began to get fed up. He said, you ought to take better care of yourself, you're just being negligent, don't put your trust in

those damn masseurs, you need to go to a real doctor, but you won't listen my advice, same as always.

I resigned myself to fate and went to the doctor. He prescribed a muscle relaxer, which I started right away. I began to feel like I might be improving a little.

Aiko went back to elementary school.

I prefer it—this school, my friends here too.

Why? I asked.

Because I'm American. She said this as if she was confessing her religious faith. Every morning I saw her pull on a slovenly T-shirt and baggy pants, grab a sandwich, and leave the house with her hair hanging down unkempt. In those moments, she looked to me like a little missionary. (I couldn't hold back a sigh.)

I began to itch all over.

I get bug bites all the time. There were flesh-eating insects somewhere in the house. Maybe in the beds or the rugs. I'm constantly getting bug bites whenever I'm in California. It stops when I go back to Japan. When I return to California, it starts up again. It happens all the time. It got so bad that last year, I took up all the rugs and put new ones down on the hardwood floors. My husband told me that wouldn't help. After my next trip to Japan, I came back and got bitten all over again, so next I replaced all the mattresses and pillows in the house. (Even though we had bought a new bed only two or three years earlier.) My husband asked, are you satisfied now? I don't think there are any more bugs hiding anywhere, to tell you the truth, I think the whole thing is weird, I'm not sure if it's bugs or some kind of sickness, but I sleep next to you and nothing ever happens to me, it's hard for me to believe it's really bugs, it's hard for me to believe what you're telling me. (He was talking about there being bugs, about the fact I didn't want to scratch myself but that I itched so much I couldn't help myself.)

But the bug bites started all over again. I took so many antihistamines you would've thought I was an addict, but I was still itchy. It didn't matter what lotion I put where, the itchiness didn't go away.



I couldn't take it. I didn't just scratch myself. I tore at my flesh. I scratched myself with my fingernails, but that wasn't enough, so I took a hairbrush and grated it all over my body until I started to tear my skin. I imagined the insect's saliva mixed into my blood, maybe I'd stop itching if I could rub the blood out. That's where trying to think scientifically leads you.

My husband found me grating my body with the hairbrush. His whole body trembled as he shouted in exasperation, what the hell are you doing? Don't you have any common sense?

There was a mark next to my nipple where I'd been bitten. It was difficult to scratch it since my fingertips sunk into the soft flesh. To make matters worse, the bite was somewhere I couldn't scratch unless I bared my breasts completely.

I went into my room alone so I could bare my breasts and scratch the bite by my nipple. The puppy I had just adopted came plodding in. He was just a little thing that reminded me more of a sparrow or a cat than a dog. He spied my nipple, then slowly came up to me and bit it. No, it wasn't a mean bite. I'm sure it was a love bite, but a puppy's teeth are sharp. My other dog also bit me on the nipple when she was little. And the dog before that too. Every puppy I've ever had did—they couldn't help it. The sight of my exposed nipples made them come right up to me and take me in their mouths. Maybe because my nipples stick out? Maybe because the worn-out nipples of all mammals look alike?

Maybe because I stink?

My nipple itched terribly where he'd bitten it. It probably would've relieved the itchiness if he'd bitten harder, maybe even hard enough to make me bleed, but it was just a little love bite. That's all.

I lay in bed that night scratching all over. My husband, who was supposed to be asleep, woke up angrily. You just keep scratching yourself. All night. It goes on for ages. He spoke in a clear voice as if he'd been awake and listening the whole time.

I tried to defend myself, I'm scratching myself 'cause I'm itchy; if I weren't itchy I wouldn't scratch myself, there's nothing more natural than that. He rolled his eyes and looked at the ceiling for a moment then laid all

of the blame on me. I've told you to go see a doctor, but once again, you just don't listen to me at all.

I resigned myself to fate and went to the doctor. He prescribed a steroid and a strong antihistamine. I already had a cold when I started them. Aiko was the source of the cold. She had come down with one and had been coughing for a while, but she was already on the mend when I got it. When my throat got sore, I imagined it was still warm from her bodily heat. I imagined my fever still smelled of her. Those things weren't too terrible. But wow, the cough.

One day my husband said, your cough is getting worse, isn't it? The next day, he said the same thing. The way he said it gave me the impression he was criticizing me for not taking good enough care of myself. I desperately tried to defend myself, I caught a cold. When I catch a cold, I cough, there's nothing more natural than that. I'm pushing the foreign substance out. To cleanse it—my body, I mean.

But you haven't done anything about your cold, you're just being lazy and leaving it to your body to heal itself, but your cough is getting worse, the days keep going by, and you're not doing anything to fight it.

My cough continued. In fact, it got worse. I was coughing so hard I thought my bronchial tubes might fly out my own mouth. Not just my bronchial tubes, but my lungs and my stomach, and everything I'd eaten too. I resigned myself to fate and went to the doctor. He prescribed an antibiotic and a strong cough suppressant. I greedily swallowed them down, but there was no change. My body shook as I bent over in paroxysms of coughing, I panted as I brought up chunks of phlegm. I started worrying about the phlegm sticking to the back of my throat, so I did my best to clear my throat to get it out. I was so desperate that I cooked dinner and ate it while clearing my throat, got into bed while clearing my throat, read a book while clearing my throat, and even got in bed while clearing my throat. I had trouble getting to sleep because of the coughing. My husband who was trying to read a book beside me gave up, the book slipped out of his hands, and he slumped over, but then realizing he was falling asleep, he removed his glasses, set them on the bedside table, turned off the light, and turned

to face the other direction. For a long time, I laid there in the darkness coughing, panting, and trying to clear my throat.

*I understand.* I thought he was asleep when he rolled over to face me and said, I understand you've got a cough, but could you do something about all the noise? I can't get away from the sound of you clearing your throat, it's everywhere, it's in my ears, in my mind, in my bronchial tubes, in my heart, what the hell are you trying to get out of your system? Me maybe? You told me the doctor said it was allergies, but to what? This place? Our house? The weather? Me?

So, let me say a few words about husbands...

We've been together a long, long time.

We spend our nights on the slope.

The broad slope into the Underworld. Or perhaps this is Iwanosaka, the slope in Tokyo where so many murders took place.

*Author's note:* Throughout this chapter, I have borrowed the voices of several people and made them my own; for instance, I borrow from the ancient collection of mythology *Kojiki* (*Account of Ancient Matters*), Kenji Miyazawa's children's story "Gauche the Cellist," and from the *sekkijō-bushi* tale *Shinodazuma* (*The Wife of Shinoda*).

*Translator's note:* According to the *Kojiki*, a wide-open, broad slope lies at the entrance to the Underworld. The *Kojiki* tells the story of Izanami, the first female goddess on earth, who goes to the Underworld after her death. When her partner Izanagi come to try to rescue her, she informs him she has already eaten the food of the Underworld and cannot return. He sets part of a wooden comb in his hair on fire so he can see her, and he realizes her body is in an advanced state of decomposition. Fearful, he runs. Izanagi shrieks, runs after him, and throws things at him, including a comb and some peaches. Shinodazuma is about a fox who takes human form, lives with a man, but then leaves him when he finds out her true identity. Her name is "Kuzunoha" (literally "arrowroot leaf"). In the story, she utters a famous poem expressing her disappointment: "If you should miss me / come see me, you will find me / in the forest of Shinoda in Izumi / where the leaves of arrowroot /rustle their complaints."

## Questions for Hiromi Itō

David Buuck:

*When you read at Mills College in Oakland a few years ago, you spoke about your beginnings as a poet in Tokyo. You said that you felt marginalized because you were a female poet and performer who did not follow the conventional ways of writing Japanese women's poetry. You said that as a result, you found yourself and your art in the clubs and nightlife of Tokyo rather than the official halls of literature. Can you tell readers about your beginnings as a female poet and performer? How did the urban culture of late-70s Japan shape you?*

Hiromi Itō:

I think that in a certain sense, everything about me was formed in that environment.

DB:

*Is there a connection or through-line from performing in punk clubs to the shamanism of your later work?*

HI:

No, I've never read in punk clubs.... In those days, I was usually reading in grimy cafes, which were filled with clouds of smoke and patrons dressed in the down-to-earth, perhaps even shabby clothing that was so common in the 1970s. It was the kind of environment in which, while I was reading, I wouldn't have all been surprised to see a naked dancer, painted all in white, emerge from the clouds of smoke. (That is, a dancer who performs in the style known as Butoh, the "dance of darkness.") In other words, those cafes were gritty, down-to-earth, but creative places where all sorts of things might happen. When you heard me speak at Mills, I might have said something like, we were all listening to artists like Patti Smith, and

we were feeling frustrated, wondering why we couldn't also do that sort of thing.

I started my career as an ordinary poet, but from the very beginning, I was influenced by feminist poetry, but I also rebelled against everything.

Young poets in those days were doing public readings here and there, all over the place, and the poets who had been influenced by the Beatniks earlier in the 1960s were also doing them. Even so, it was still not all that common for poets to read their poetry out loud in public.

From the very beginning, I was enthusiastically involved with doing public readings, although in reality, I was involved in a somewhat rebellious way. But I was always shocked and dissatisfied with the gap between the reality of my own readings and the kinds of Patti Smith-style performances that I wanted to do, and so I tried doing all sorts of different things. For instance, I did a performance with some experimental, contemporary composers, and that influenced me in a very positive way. (Other readings in the 1960s were always with jazz accompaniment, and jazz was not my favorite type of music.)

DB:

*Not only did you quickly establish yourself as a performance poet, you also published the poems that were translated in the book Killing Kanako. Those poems celebrated the feminine—specifically, pregnancy, motherhood and domestic care, sexuality—but femininity is also the site of anxiety and violence. Did you make a conscious decision to go against certain expectations of “women’s poetry”?*

HI:

Yes, of course! I never identified myself as a feminist poet. If anything, when the journal *La mer*—a journal of all women’s writing—was created in Japan in the early 1980s, I rebelled against it, writing and saying things to the

effect of “I don’t want to be a *woman* poet; if anything, I want to be a *poet*.” Everybody else was working with that journal, but I didn’t cooperate at all.

DB:

*Although a lot of your writing is not yet translated, I can see that your work borrows from many styles, eras, methods, and genres. Has this always been the case, or did you move into new modes consciously?*

HI:

It was always the case. I was interested in contemporary art, contemporary music, stage performances, manga, and even in the classics.

DB:

*You moved to Southern California in 1997. Though you still write in Japanese, did the move to the US change your work?*

HI:

When I left Japan, I began to experience the illusion that I had been cut off from contemporary Japan. (In reality, I am not necessarily cut off from it.)

DB:

*Do you feel less connected to the world(s) of Japanese poetry or literature?*

HI:

Yes, I do. The reason is that in the end, Japan is the place where I publish my work, but I am not there much of the time. I always feel like Urashima Tarō—the fellow from the Japanese folktale who stayed in an underwater kingdom for three days, only to return to shore and find centuries had gone by in the regular world. I use this sense of discontinuity in my work.

DB:

*Do you feel your work is in conversation with other immigrant writers in the US?*

HI:

I feel as if it is connected, although it might not have many concrete connections (direct influences, direct quotations, and so on).

DB:

*What are you working on these days, or have planned for the future?*

HI:

I am doing a number of translations of classical literature into contemporary Japanese. In particular, I'm doing translations of classical Japanese literature and translations of the Buddhist classics, which of course were themselves translations into Chinese. I am working a great deal with examples of spoken narratives and Buddhist literature from the canons of Japanese literature.

I have been using what I have learned from my translations of Buddhist sutras and spoken narratives in order to write about the theme of aging and dying from various perspectives. If you think about contemporary Japanese poetry in its narrowest definition, my recent writing might not fit well under this rubric, but in a broader sense, I believe that what I am doing is still contemporary Japanese poetry.



## IDLIR AZIZAJ

### Film

(A straw doll, some pencils, a photo of Borges and a license plate reading  
JOYCE)

—I'm musing about what moves the motion in poetry?

Is it the bone, or is it its dust?

—And I'm thinking of Robert Browning as a movie star  
playing Romeo, a perplexed Englishman in some New York,  
who's mistaken Venice in California for the one in Italy:

—“Pater, you reader of jumbled sounds,  
you want me to lend you my hand  
so you can graft it onto your older body.”

Here Romeo recites: Ah, our loves always remain  
the architecture of bridges; Elizabeth Barrett  
appears in a gigantic photo in Times  
Square. And love has street signs in New  
York and “if I wanna know you I  
must love half of the city”. “Taxi!”  
he shouts, and gives the driver the address,  
he should drive through Brooklyn, and he asks  
the driver not to talk religion with the customers.  
But the Pakistani emigrant turns around and  
says: “Yeah, sir, I love God”; camera stops here.  
REPLAY now: emigrantPakistanibut, (PLAY), but  
the Pakistani emigrant turns around and says: “Yeah,  
sir, I love God”. (PAUSE).

The driver's still, smiling, and Browning coming out  
of the taxi, (CUT!) "so much for communication," I think,  
and here's the time of our embryos, the buds of kinetic poetry,  
about two people with their freedoms equidistant from the car."

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In the west of the USA there's the power of its  
Left: people work and transport their works  
into synoptic liberty. From above, poetry  
and dinosaurs dominate the view.  
But all this is a photo catalogue  
bought on Lexington Avenue, years ahead from now,  
just like the poet Michaux saw Christ's face gnawed  
by a million Christians' kisses, while  
we are at home, and each house a little cave,  
the cyber-Marxist Communism of  
mouths at rest, communication  
of flat bodies. "Yeah, sir, I love God,"  
which is the customary eternity  
of any known progress.

\*\*\*

I move between the straw doll and the New York license plate.  
That means I see: the Borges photo in front, flat and  
personal names typed behind it. Behind the plate there's  
technical data of its manufacturing, which marks the  
linguistic imperialism of the aforementioned trademark,

and: Beware, says I to myself, the doll and the plate,  
both, very similar civilizations, are watching you as you  
try poetry. The pencils in the box are like thermometers

with erasers. But, why Browning? Why  
 the taxi driver? Browning's not playing Shakespeare  
 because the former knows the latter is bounty. For I  
 say to Shakespeare: "You provoke a desire but take  
 away the performance". And I (a verb) stir the air with  
 my fingers of one hand, jumbling impatience, play,  
 movement and shadow, all four inside this vase-room  
 where I'm the image of a pointing finger over the temple  
 and the thumb under the chins, meaning: I am thinking:  
 POETRY COMMA AS AN ORTHOPEDIC ENTITY  
 COMMA DOESN'T NEED MAN'S LIVELINESS...

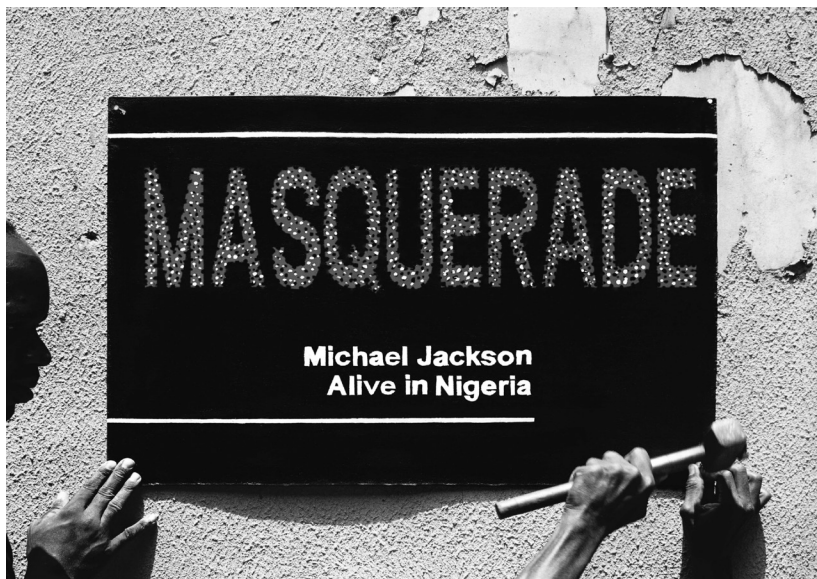
But I'm not I'm not the Word but a Planck constant, which means  
 that we're born from man. You and with you all you as you know  
 you have poetry and sense, but also something you must do about it.

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THE GENE, THE LETTER	Beckett says there's only
	people and
THE ATOM ARE	things, nothing else, and
	no other exact names except
THE PRIDE OF OUR	that motion of the
	thumb and the counterpart
WORLD	the index finger mentioned before

There where the ancients marched looking for slapstick angels  
 I will surely walk again but only to line-up those pebble-stones,  
 and sing: Hey, you: I, You, He, She, It, We, You, They,  
 and surely I've called 8 things (stones), and hear one say to me:  
 No, no, you have 8 stones (names), and others there to correct  
 us: No, no, you have 8 things (once verbs), or 8 suchlike (because  
 one can't have 8 things when 8 is itself one).

Such ancient tours make one exhausted.  
You take a taxi, give the address.  
You're in a taxi, that is, in a name.  
He talks about his wife and her cat.  
You ask him not to make zoological  
conversations with the customers.  
He says that he loves god, was it a cat?  
And you kill the poor guy right there.  
Then you remember that this is not your business.  
So you don't kill him after all.  
You go home and sit and type a poem with  
your tip-toes, then you rub two stones, no 2  
stones, or 2-two stones or two-2 stones  
over your temples, in the heart of our world's gags.



## **OWEN LOGAN & UZOR MAXIM UZOATU**

from MASQUERADE — Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria

The King of Pop is not dead. He has been seen alive in oil rich Nigeria. Michael Jackson is reincarnated there, as Uzor Maxim Uzoatu explains in his letter to an old compatriot now residing in New York; a letter which accompanies the photographs by Owen Logan showing the star alive and kicking in Africa. Michael Jackson's true worth was only made apparent by his death. The same should not be true of Nigeria according to a rescue scheme proposed by the reincarnated Jackson—a scheme that makes all Nigerian frauds pale into insignificance. Few yet know what Nigeria can do for Michael Jackson, let alone what Michael's resurrection can do for Nigeria and the rest of the resource-rich but dollar-swindled world. Uncle Sam is not pleased.

—published by Altered Images, 2014.

Forget the fiction that Michael Jackson is dead. I am alive and kicking, which means for a fact that the black soul singer turned white megastar is here in good old Nigeria. You can take my word for it, behind this mask I also happen to be Michael's twin. I am sure you would not want me to write a book as fat as Alex Haley's *Roots* to trace the lineage of "Wacko Jacko" and my very close consanguinity to him. Let's make the money first and we can go into the details later; suffice it to say that Michael's homecoming and reincarnation in me was quite emotional and indeed traumatic. His ghost could not but break down and weep when memories came flooding of how our great-great-grandfather was sold into slavery via the Long Juju of Arochukuwu and how, centuries later, the African spirit of Obi, aka Obeah, entered into the randy man who ended up siring the weird one and me, one in America and the other here in Nigeria!



Red carpet arrival



Magical Realism, I hear you say? Let us leave that watered-down and adulterated brand to the opportunistic literati. Are we in Africa not all supposed to be brothers and sisters? Michael used to employ lookalikes so he could appear in two places at once, but now that his lonesome ghost has found me, I am in such demand that I also need lookalikes. And together we have a game such that we appear and disappear and the world looks on in wonderment, not knowing the difference. Michael can be everywhere at once. Mugu, I have to report the happy news that I have mastered the art of omnipresence!



Friendly Michael - Lonely Michael

You can guess that Michael's transformations in the course of his long career make our doubling game a trifle complicated for a still-black man like me. I haven't yet had the benefit of the surgeon's plastic arts but really that's of little consequence. Our public has grown used to mere impersonators – which I am not. All sorts of dubious people have masqueraded as our benefactors, but this godly country desires nothing short of a Messiah and Michael auditioned for that part long before he landed here, in me.



Michael drops in on fellow stars of stage and screen

The daredevil Saro-Wiwa said he wanted to disrobe the masquerade of our politics in which he had also played varied supporting roles. But the suddenly beatified Saro-Wiwa wasn't the real trouble. It was that we were starting to run short on masks. Our old European colonial masters turned into economists, financiers and advisors of all sorts, and then our dictators turned into emperors of democracy to please the new imperial masters in America, but it's all wearing thin.

We've arrived just in time to lift the spirits and raise the feel-good factor. You see, the thing is that countries are not allowed to go bankrupt. Everything else can go bankrupt, even banks if truth be told, but not a nation. If you wonder why that should be so, my friend, let me enlighten you: there is just too much money to be made in keeping wrecks afloat! Think about that, Mugu, and let me explain our current predicament as well as our fabulous opportunities.



The band arrives

The aspect of Nigerian history that thrills Michael "The Thriller" the most, and which beckoned his ghost to me, was Abacha's sudden death while eating the apple of two Indian ladies. A man of action, Abacha died in action. Michael could hardly believe the theatrical reversal of fortunes that saw Obasanjo – whom Abacha had jailed – being spirited from prison to the presidency like Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Things change but always remain the same.

It's a tired old business. We can't perform the South African trick and change colour. That's where Michael lends a truly fresh face; just as Obama did for the White House, just as all those lesser pop stars did for the G8 mob who want our oil to run swift and cheap. And never forget it, my dear Mugu, that's always the real deal in these parts. Not for nothing did strongman Gaddafi say Nigeria is "a big for nothing" country! We've always tried to please Uncle Sam so now we shall look the part.



Return to the soul sound



The oil price keeps rising while the national economy keeps falling from each boom to bigger busts. Our interest in the matter is not the Nigerian economy but the petrodollar game whereby Uncle Sam prints the dollars and the rest of us produce the things dollars can buy. Uncle Sam picked up dollar diarrhoea from President Tricky-Dicky's expensive sojourn in Vietnam but his condition has taken a terminal turn now. The papers and the TV will tell you that Uncle Sam's fiscal incontinence was derived from consuming some exotic property investments. My dear Mugu, if you believe that...

Thanks to Uncle Sam's chequebook diplomacy we've all supported his world reserve currency which is nothing but his own soaring debts - for which the rest of us are supposed to suffer. Of course Uncle Sam is getting nervous. Saddam Hussein, fallen star in the axis of evil, wanted to trade oil in euros, and when Hugo Chavez chimed in with similar wicked thoughts he was added to the same death list. Yet we too have some delinquents who want to trade our oil in support of "Nairaland" and wipe Uncle Sam's bottom no more. And then there is the matter of our overly friendly production quotas which come courtesy of Uncle Sam's friends in OPEC - known properly as the Organisation for Petroleum-Eased Consumerism. My dear Mugu, in our humble opinion, what's required is an entirely new scheme.



The elders gather

Uncle Sam is rushing all over the world like an old colonial district officer looking for shady places to relieve his behind of a thunderous burden coming, as often as not, in the shape of "shock and awe". Pax Americana was never what it was cracked up to be but this is no joke, we shall be back to civil war if we keep dancing to the same imperial tunes.

Nowadays my poor twin, who did everything to become white, has no need of a mere recording company, Sony that is. Michael says the Sony chairman, Tommy Mottola, was mean. "He's a racist, and he's very, very devilish". But in this season of frefall Michael has an entirely new patch: Nigeria, the Giant of Africa! When everyone said he was finished Michael courted death and then by dying showed everyone what he was worth all along.

No wonder his is a restless soul. Now people have been saying the same about Nigeria for years: that we're finished and done for. Well, my dear Mugu, aside from our quite normal custom of bringing the dead to life for their gratification and our entertainment, nobody yet knows what Nigeria can do for Michael and what Michael can do for Nigeria.



Dance acts

## DAWN LUNDY MARTIN

Tilda Swinton

### The I Alongside the I: A Poetics of Indeterminacy

I love Tilda Swinton because of her beautiful androgyny and because she once believed Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* to be the biography of her own life. Sometimes, I Google-Image Swinton simply to look at her face. Her angular features are ideal aristocracy to me and I want some of it. I also love how in films she appears often as if she's about to crack, as if somehow her body cannot, but in the end does, hold her self—a shimmering beneath the surface. In a recent film, *I Am Love*, I do not believe that her lips tremble as much as they are often slightly agape hovering on the edge of some utterance—not in a bursting way, but in a frozen way. The viewer understands that there is language floating around inside. *What, Tilda? What?*

*When language refuses to tip over into speech—recognizable or other—when it is non-reproductive of what has already been produced for us.*

Now I will tell you a story of me with my shirt off pumping gas when I was nine. Now I will tell you a story of a photo of me at seven with a toy gun bulging from my pants pocket. Even younger, still, I fell from a railing I had converted into a balance beam and injured my vagina. I remember blood, but I do not think there was blood...

*The negation: the white background of our story.*

Is Swinton emblematic of the white background upon which the black writer and other writers of color are forced to reproduce their narratives? She's beyond white; she's almost translucent. When she plays The White Witch in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it is this extreme whiteness, the starkness of it, its hard stability, its unwavering quality that frightens us. It is as if a face has been removed from another face. But Swinton confuses because her face, too, is like the face of boy—but not quite a boy boy; instead, more like concentrated boyness, needs something added to it (water perhaps) to expand it, to allow it to come into its full nature. So here, in the gender realm, she is not stable; in fact, she is profoundly unstable especially after giving birth to a child and living her public life as a “heterosexual.” If this is a white background upon which our stories must be written then it is a confusing whiteness since gender affects/produces the racialized body and vice versa. There is no such thing as single identities and/or single selves. We are multiple from before, already. We are multiple, maybe, in the very first instances of loss, as girl children, our shirts suddenly removed from the fences where they once hung and placed onto our resistant bodies.

*What if the background were black? What if the dark room framed the figure?*

Imagine that the poem is lit by darkness, that its persistent markers—its letters, words, lines, stanzas, and spaces—are only foregrounded or brought

to approximation by 1) “an absence or want of light (total or partial)”;

3) “a want of sight (blindness)”;

and/or 7) “obscurity of meaning”;

and/or “darkly in a moral sense, horridly, foully.”

It is here, against this opaque scrim where we find our figures obliquely attempting to distinguish themselves, make themselves visible. Here: struggle. Here: *The black room of terror that you half-recall, half-invent*. What is possible against this backdrop? Is anything possible? Are not our mouths gagged, our hands tied, our legs bound, our cunts exposed? This is our primary setting. Where the entirety of our story takes place.

*The I re-imagines all the sexual violations it can recall and they are not entirely unpleasant to it.*

Here the body exceeds its boundaries, spills out into blackened space, becomes undone. It cannot contain itself. It is piecemeal and/or falling / and/or pieces / or spilling from itself / grotesquely / or doubling or tripling / or it is watching itself / or not watching itself but blank / not a blank state / but an absence. It's jumping out at you: the “big black guy,” a dancing figure in your landscape, the licentious black female unable to contain itself, unable to keep itself in check. Here, indeterminacy. What does it say? This body? These bodies? Cast upon. In robes. The haute couture of our disguise. What is there left to say? The maw, drunk and ajar, the head back, the throat open. Gaping. No sound.

*We return to the box of interrogation. We're sitting with our feet draped over the subway platform. We are in our containers of being. It is not safe here.*

To want is to dream into black space. Powerful abstraction. When Tilda Swinton plays Orlando she is as white as sundried bone. Her cheeks tint orange. I have trouble seeing her eyelashes. Is she eyelashless? Tilda attracts me because—save her gangliness—there are indications to me of where the body refuses something. It saves something for some other time, later. This is what I mean when I say “privilege.” I want her to be stone. I want to place her in permanent stasis. Who can say which gender? Gender permeates but is under investigation. I am writing about Tilda’s container because it seems a container of resistance and unfazed by gender discourse. Not recognizable. It is a body that investigates, instead of being under investigation. I want to kill her. I love her. But it’s the container that interests me. The uncontainedness of her container. The restraint of her material. The freedom in that. Conversely, the body in the midst of a traumatic event is a body in radical and pronounced conflict. This might be the racialized body. Or another. The body is not in one’s own control. She attracts me because in our culture, the black body is always spilling out. It cannot be contained by its borders. Even with the borders visible, there are new (fictionalized) discursive borders that are cast onto it. This is the post-traumatic body. Its loss is unrecoverable. It’s masked. It must always be something in addition to what it is.



*When you realize you want to live it's not a metaphor. There's a self-idea that's very involved.*

However, to hover at the edge of some utterance is to be liberated from the need for frivolous speech. What is relinquished in this attempt at speech and its failure? Its unspeaking? What is falsified if one tips over into coherence? What can or cannot be enclosed within a pre-determined discourse. The poetics at work are of *unspeakability* or *impossibility*—what cannot in the first place be said, what is already foreclosed by the thing that seeks to be spoken, what the body cannot hold. Who can say which gender? Is what? When gender is present it comes in the form of the standing alongside, the figure alongside the figure (the shadow of the figure), the moving outside of what has been pre-determined. Who can say what race is? The I is a hateful subject carrying its flesh bag. It is, too, an ecstatic signaling—reverberating itself, resonant. The I along side the I. This can also be a place of power.

—originally published in *Troubling the Line: Trans and Gender Queer Poetry & Poetics*, eds TC Tolbert & Trace Peterson, Nightboat, 2013.

# COURTNEY MEAKER AND ERIN PIKE

that'swhatshe said

Conceived by Erin Pike and Courtney Meaker  
Written by Courtney Meaker  
Performed by Erin Pike  
Original direction by Katherine Karaus (2014) &  
HATLO (2015-16)

## ***Editor's Note:***

*This piece has been pulled from publication at the request of the authors, due to Cease and Desist orders on behalf of several male playwrights from their representatives at the licensing companies Samuel French and Dramatists Play Service. The first C&D order was delivered one hour before the play's performance at Gay City Arts in Seattle on February 5, 2016.*

*The author's notes on the following page give the basic background of the play as well as its source texts.*

*I stand in solidarity with Meaker & Pike as they confront both the patriarchy evident in the mainstream US theater world as well as the corporate and legal intimidation used by male playwrights and their representatives attempting to squelch satire and critique.*

*For more information about the case (including a mini-documentary with the voice mail of the first C&D order, played at the 2/5/16 performance), visit:*

*<https://courtneymeaker.com/2016/03/20/thatswhatshe said-faq/>*

*<https://vimeo.com/156788646>*

*<http://www.thestranger.com/blogs/slog/2016/02/08/23539836/erin-pike-and-thatswhatshe-said-went-on-despite-cease-and-desist-order-legal-ramifications-remain-uncertain>*

*<http://www.americantheatre.org/2016/02/12/thats-what-they-wrote-and-thatswhatshe-said/>*

We set out to discover what contemporary popular theater had to say about women by taking words directly from the mouths of female characters. Using the most-produced plays for the 2013-2014 seasons (assembled annually by TCG), Courtney created a new narrative, which Erin and Katherine, and later HATLO, brought to life.

Everything that is said and every action (with the exception of the action suggestions in INTERLUDES) is taken directly out of one of the plays listed below for the 2014 version, which premiered at On the Boards NW New Works Festival and Portland's Risk/Reward:

*Venus in Fur* by David Ives  
*Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris  
*Good People* by David Lindsay-Abaire  
*Other Desert Cities* by Jon Robin Baitz  
*The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall  
*4000 Miles* by Amy Herzog  
*Tribes* by Nina Raine  
*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang  
*Detroit* by Lisa L'Amour  
*God of Carnage* by Yasmina Reza  
*Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes

Plays that were on the list but were not used because they had no female characters:

*Red* by John Logan  
*The Whipping Man* by Matthew Lopez

For the 2016 version, we made an evening length work from the 2014-2015 list of most-produced plays:

*Venus in Fur* by David Ives

*Other Desert Cities* by Jon Robin Baitz

*4000 Miles* by Amy Herzog

*Tribes* by Nina Raine

*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang

*Outside Mullinger* by John Patrick Shanley

*Bad Jews* by Joshua Harmon

*Around the World in 80 Days* by Mark Brown

*Into the Woods* book by James Lapine, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

*Peter and the Starcatcher*, adapted by Rick Elice from Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson

Plays that were on the list but were not used because they had no female characters:

*The Whipping Man* by Matthew Lopez

## KATE DURBIN

INTERVIEWED BY KEVIN KILLIAN

*I met Kate Durbin at the AWP conference in Chicago a year or two ago, the only time I've been. When the elevator doors of the Palmer House slid open one afternoon, Dodie Bellamy and I got off and there, on the overstuffed divan between the twin elevator banks, sat she—you couldn't mistake her; she was so famous already, her extreme maquillage and her hair and her outfits, a cross between Jane Firth from the Warhol movies and someone from my own youth like Deborah Walley, or Tuesday Weld, except more glamorous. We were like fans, walking up to her, as politely she put down her reading to greet us; just like fans we thought we knew her, we presumed a relationship for we had seen her image so often, on line, probably more than some of our very close relatives. Within the year we met her in Los Angeles again, we were all reading together at a benefit Mathew Timmons was holding at a Los Feliz gallery, and Kate invited us to read parts in her transcription of an important scene from The Hills (or so I believe). Cynics always tell you those reality shows are "scripted," but they don't tell you how delightful it feels to read those lines and not have to feel the associated emotions. I'm never going to be young, I'm never going to be a girl, and I'm never going to be famous enough for AGC Blind Items, but for an evening, I was Lauren Conrad, and something of the glamor will stick to me, like Guerlain, for the rest of my life. In a few short years, Kate Durbin has herself changed utterly in my mind, from a work of art, to one of the most talked-about poets-as-fashion-figures in the world today, now a distinguished thinker on cultural and political affairs, and an artist herself. Every sentence is a pleasure in E! Entertainment, her new book from Wonder Press in New York. I began to interview her midway between my second and third readings of it—in the spring of 2014. — KK*

Kevin Killian:

I came to know of your name in connection with your work on the pop singer Lady Gaga. My college-age nephew was swearing that she was the greatest artist of all time, and I wanted to believe him—he was one of the “little monsters” who were her original fans, I guess. But it was you who persuaded me. And my students. And finally when I was all on board with Lady Gaga, Sean (my nephew) made a face as if to say that, well, that was 2010 and this is today. Maybe every star has her “moment” and that was hers?

Kate Durbin:

I closed out the Gaga Stigmata project earlier this year, so your nephew is right that it is the end of something, something I’m not sure could have been sustained forever with this one figure in the center, a human being who also is an icon, Lady Gaga. Gaga Stigmata was about the synergy between three elements: Lady Gaga, the media, and Gaga Stigmata—all three of those wheels had to be turning, intersecting, in order to create the stigmata effect. Our critics affected Gaga’s performances and the way her work was talked about in the media, just as Gaga affected us. In a way you could look at that period in time like a vibrant, glittering wound that has now closed.

KK:

What do you like about her today? There will always be Shakespeare fans who prefer *Pericles* to *Macbeth*, Austen fans who prefer *Sanditon* to *Pride and Prejudice*. And of course decadents love the last crazy records Marc Bolan made, prize them beyond the classic T.Rex LPs.

KD:

I do think the ARTPOP performances have been interesting. I loved how meta and self-referential her VMA performance was, how she transitioned through all of her previous eras in one performance, how she showed the backstage on-stage by switching wigs and outfits in front of the audience.

And I liked her weird Abramovic-inspired paparazzo performances, like when she took ten minutes to creep-walk to the car, hands raised, weeping like the Madonna, cameras flashing around her.

KK:

Your new book, *E! Entertainment*, is dedicated to Marilyn Monroe. You've been interviewed over and over, and if I could do research properly I might know the answer, but what's the reason for your dedication?

KD:

As for Marilyn Monroe, all of my work circles around her, I think. She is the ultimate woman object, always watched but never witnessed. She's also a blonde, like me, and there is something about the blonde pop culture martyr that I find fascinating. Her image is everywhere—billboards, soda cans, films, etc.—but she herself is nowhere, vanished, swallowed up by the collective unconscious. I like to think of all of the women in *E!* (and all of my work really) like planets revolving around Marilyn, and she is the sun casting light on all of them, a kind of blinding light that impedes true perception. How we see MM is how we see all women in entertainment: which is to say, we don't see much

KK:

I don't watch as many reality shows as I should.

KD:

I like that you feel you should watch reality TV shows, Kevin—perhaps this will be the main effect of the book, that people will suddenly feel guilty for not watching reality tv, as opposed to guilty for watching it.

KK:

Is it true you can watch a whole season of one in three hours, by judicious application of the fast forward button?



KD:

I have no idea! My process is the opposite. It took me three years to watch and transcribe and revise. My process was meticulous transcription of all the shows not just the dialogue, but also the gestures, actions, etc. The parts I invented were things like brand names and turning Kim Kardashian's husband into TV static. However, the very act of transcription, even when it attempts to be exhaustive as in the case of *E!*, is one of making choices, so it's all filtered through my consciousness, my body, etc. Someone else transcribing these exact same scenes would write a very different book—especially if they hated the shows. Although I also maintain that writing through the shows makes it difficult to hate them. There was a Buddhist mindfulness to my process (not unlike Dodie Bellamy's *TV Sutras* process, perhaps), especially since I had to look at everything so closely and for so long without using any overt judgment language.

KK:

The “wife” shows plainly intrigue you: you refer to the players as “Wife Renee” and “Wife Josie” and, for *Sister Wives*, perhaps a different sort of marriage show, we meet “Second Wife Janelle” and “Third Wife Christine.” Is your technique strict transcription of the dialogue of particular episodes? But here it is, “tagged” by descriptions of the action on screen and who's wearing what and who's eating what and who is and isn't wearing makeup. Kate, do you love *Answered Prayers* the way I do? (By Truman Capote.) He seemed to be viewing his characters as though they were on TV and bombarding them with pop-up blips about “apparently cannot recognize man she was married for three years to” or “shot him, mistaking him for burglar, not.” I detect something of the same extreme intimacy between you and your wives, a Capotean sort of twinship, but I may be fooling myself.

KD:

I ADORE Truman Capote (who also, incidentally, adored Marilyn Monroe, his gossip queen). You're right about the intimacy between me and the wives. I am not a wife any longer, but I once was, and I think the process of going

from non-wife to wife, back to non-wife made me think about the concept of wifedom from a perspective not unlike that of a reality TV show. It's all kind of staged, the playing out of a traditional marriage, and so difficult to hold together. I can also relate to these women's intense friendships, which are hyperbolic versions of some of my own. I really chose to write about the wives because I felt that kinship and yet also that frustration of being limited by that label: the wife.

KK:

You respect the Wives on the shows, but you leave off relating their adventures with a particularly harsh anecdote, involving a celebrity medium who ticks off a set of wives for their vacancy and depravity. "You're mean, morally corrupt, and profoundly bankrupt. You're a bunch of icy bitches." It's like Marcel implicitly excoriating the Duchess de Guermantes for caring more about her precious red shoes than about a dying friend, only much more explicit, and because you end on this note, I can't help but feel that this summation has your endorsement. How far off base am I? It's a great scene. That Medium sure can give it!

KD:

It's an amazing scene, and one of the reasons I wanted to write it is because the language allows a kind of slippage with the Medium and the medium—she is both psychic medium, and she becomes the medium of reality tv itself. It's the medium that "channels" these judgments of the culture about these women. So no, it's not my personal endorsement, but I think as the writer I am a channel myself—a kind of medium channeling the medium—and so there is the possibility that people will interpret that passage the way you did, of me judging these women. But it's more like I was possessed by the medium, like a dybbuk. If I were on a reality show the same thing would happen to me, that intense shaming and public flogging. The male gaze/the capitalistic gaze/whatever you want to call it is impersonal and ruthless. It would judge me too if I were in front of it. In fact, it has, and does.

KK:

Some of us were talking (in San Francisco, in NY, in Boulder) about the way the present poetry scene is very much like a rotating series, like *The Love Boat* or something, in which poetry “celebrities” seem to organize events around themselves, and when no actual “events” are imminent, then the fact of their celebrity alone will create the buzz necessary. It’s different than the celebrity system of *E!* in which the heat factor has no ostensible correlation to their talent; in the poetry star system, most all of the star performers are damn good! It is a world in which to name a few, Dana Ward, CA Conrad, Maggie Nelson, Christian Bök, Bhanu Kapil, Vanessa Place, Eileen Myles, there are perhaps a few in every city, roam the circuit like stars at Telluride today and on Jimmy Fallon tomorrow. Has it always been like this, or is this a TV and internet inflected phenomenon?

KD:

I suspect it’s been like this for a long, long time, but TV and internet are our new mirrors. Also, I do think fame within the reality TV realm corresponds to talent. These stars are talented at being famous! Not everyone can pull that off.

KK:

What we were noticing is that this seems to be partially a class phenomenon, that many of the brightest stars have no, for example, terminal degree, and maybe they have to try harder to keep up with an increasingly professionalized world?

KD:

This is a tough one because I think especially now, in America, there is a rift of opportunity between generations of artists. Just a few decades ago artists and writers could get by with lower wage jobs, you know, Philip Glass driving cabs and what not, and they also could more easily attain institutional support in the form of FT teaching gigs. Everyone wasn’t expected to shell out exorbitant fees for PhDs in Creative Writing and Art,

which is the current trend. Of course, it wasn't easy, and never has been—I'm thinking of Kathy Acker, who arguably died from adjuncting, and of course I'm also thinking of CA Conrad, whom you mentioned. He's had to hustle so hard. (Also, as you are well aware, Dodie's book *Academonia* deals with these issues in such important ways, and has been a vital text for me).

Even though I love all of the writers you mentioned, I think many of them actually have institutional support and FT jobs (with the notable exception of Conrad). I'm hesitant to nod toward any kind of meritocracy even within the poetry world, or to say our world is somehow more fair than the shallow fame game of reality TV stars. It is so, so hard to be an artist, and there are so many factors that go into whether or not someone can keep making work, and who is appreciated for their work during their lifetime and who isn't. I'm thinking of Kafka or Henry Darger or Van Gogh or Anna Kavan. I don't know that hustling alone and being amazing at your work alone are enough to "make it" even within the poetry or small press world--although those things are helpful--because there are other elements that have to come into play, elements we don't have control over, having to do with health and money and time and venues and readerships and trends and networks and other forms of support. I try always to view fame as something separate from someone's work—I'm inherently suspicious of it, even though I respect it, and try not to judge it, and do believe it can correspond to merit at times. It's at least worth some respect in and of itself, as it's a lot of work and a tricky, fickle game to win. And I would garner that respect to Yayoi Kusama and Lindsay Lohan equally.

I sometimes like to think of fame as an art, and one of the things I can appreciate about reality TV stars, like Paris Hilton, is how they work the art of fame, as a medium in itself. The emptiness of fame is revealed within this process. And I suspect fame is always empty at its center, whether you are Julius Caesar or Philip Roth or Mary Kate Olsen. It's something a little bit separate from the work, and from the person too. It's about projection and mirrors.

KK:

I love your take on fandom and fan worship and I like how firmly it's rooted to (as in *E! Entertainment*) the actual transcriptions of the programs, but I wonder do you ever feel constricted by the reality, however limited, of those transcripts? Do you never yearn to explore celebrity as the fan fictioneers do, and invent totally new adventures for their favorites? Have you ever looked at Michael Friedman's ace novel *Martian Dawn*, which catapults Richard Gere and Julia Roberts into space, and even more fantastically, into Naropa? It's great, and will leave you thinking that finally you know the "real" Julia Roberts. For the San Francisco Poets Theater, we did a play in which Donald Judd died, and the family gathered around to hear the will—Naomi, Ashley and Wynonna Judd, each with their own conflicts, and Judd Nelson too. Or we did another, Hitchcock play, in which Melanie Griffith was the daughter of Andy Griffith and Tippi Hedren, and whenever Melanie was upset with her mother, she'd call Sheriff Andy for comfort and to come fetch her from Hollywood. Anyhow, it can get off the track, but writing this sort of thing can be fun, though I wonder if celebrity now controls its own image so strongly as to wipe out fan fiction, especially now that Scarlett Johansson won her suit against that French novelist who published a fictional adventure about her image! The writing's on the wall, it seems like.

KD:

Oh, I've been wondering about the Scarlett Johansson trial—that's crazy that she won. You're right that celebrity controls its image intensely, with support of the state, but I am also interested in the ways in which "reality" celebrities court the public by "marring" their own image, like Paris and Kim Kardashian with their sex tapes. Although sex tapes are not a thing anymore—the moment has passed. But it was Paris and Kim who released those in the first place in order to grow their fame—this leads back to the art of fame idea, the idea that fame itself is a medium, leading toward I don't know what, the void probably. And it's a medium which works within specific platforms and materials, from paparazzi videos to sex tapes to tabloids.

Your fan fiction sounds fantastic and I want to see your play. You know I'm a big fan. I think it's a fascinating medium to work in, and actually when I was quite young I used to continue the narratives inside my books on the white space left over in each chapter. And I wrote various fan fictions, although I usually replaced the characters with myself and my friends. Maybe one day I will write a fan fiction, but *E!* is something else. I really wanted to capture the cultural moment, this reality TV ennui we live within, how bizarre and even beautiful it is. The best way to do that was for me to stay within the constraints of the medium, sort of. The feeling is there, of being trapped in the tv set. I wanted the book to be a mirror. I don't think we understand the medium, the medium of this genre but also the medium of our current reality. We don't understand its potential or what it has to teach us.

KK:

Your writing elides between fact and fiction of course, still I was surprised to see a section devoted to *Dynasty*.

KD:

You're the first person to ask me about *Dynasty* and I feel like I should give you a prize, like a Kylie Minogue rare poster. I expected everyone to jump on that because it doesn't fit into the reality category and it's much older than the other segments in the book. It's paired with *The Hills* because *The Hills* is an epic catfight and that *Dynasty* scene I slowed down is the first televised soap opera catfight. I thought it would be interesting to place them side by side to make the reader think about the soap operatic in reality TV, the scripts that cross between both. What has and hasn't changed for women since the 1980's, which is the era in which I was born and first started watching TV (my favorite show as a baby was *Wheel of Fortune*, with Vanna her glittering gowns and texts). I also think the glamour of both eras is interesting—that contrast between the white skin and yellow teeth and wrinkles and big hair of *Dynasty* versus the botox bottle blonde tanned *Hills* girls.

KK:

Most of the time in your book nothing really awful happens to your characters, except of course the excruciating hollowing out of these creatures' souls on national television, but there's a slippery slope perhaps in the middle of the book, in which the chapters get shorter and shorter, and Lindsay Lohan goes on trial for the necklace affair (that terrible necklace, that strangled her as the famous diamond necklace put Marie Antoinette's head on the blade) and all of a sudden we're in the prison cell of accused murderess Amanda Knox, who either did or didn't stab and suffocate a young British woman in Italy seven years ago. It's like the stakes are raised? That's how it comes across to me. Then on to Anna Nicole Smith, a beloved icon who died arguably from being on reality TV? The book has been structured perhaps to dramatize the mechanisms of watching and performing.

KD:

Yes, the stakes are raised. When I do readings from *E!* I read "The Hills" in a kind of speed freak Valley girl voice and then I read "Anna Nicole Show" while another femme performance artist puts the Anna Nicole clown makeup on me, and there is always a shift in the room as I go from "The Hills" where people are laughing at Lauren and Audrina to Anna Nicole. Everyone shuts up. I read it at a bar in San Diego and even the bartenders and the people who were there drinking—who just chatted through all the other readers—shut up when I got to the mechanical baby part at the end of Anna Nicole. I think the book does the same thing in the middle. My intention was to bring to awareness the connection between the way we view "stupid" women on "stupid" shows and the "real" tragedies that people like Amanda Knox and Anna Nicole Smith experienced. And I wanted to do that in a way that was experiential—like you are experiencing reading the shows without commentary so until you get to Knox and Anna Nicole you can't really see what's coming, and you are suddenly faced with your own judgments. It's worth noting that both Amanda Knox's and Anna Nicole's trials and fates were complicated by public misperception and media terrorism.

TRANSLATED BY CLAIRE PARSONS LUCENA

## LUCIANA CAAMAÑO

### Pop girls

pop girls  
punk chicks  
mingers  
moles  
highlights  
with seams  
with slippers  
dry  
face  
washed  
face  
because you put up with it all  
even the twee  
they are all sluts  
long distance  
a blank page  
not that  
tell me again  
everything pink  
everything orange  
like that time  
too bad I can't even walk one block  
if I could  
don't tell me  
you should have told me  
I would have hung a garland of flowers



it's even more sad than the one in the soundtrack  
than the you-ate-my-heart one  
but this one has more swing  
yes  
it's the piano  
I didn't remember this part  
the part at the back  
I just know how to say them  
no, I don't know how to write them  
no idea  
it's disgusting to have your nails cut  
people have to do this  
themselves  
the universal story of getting yourself off  
I don't want you to stop laughing  
this is why I don't say what I want to say to you  
a free version of an English song  
something that didn't happen  
something that one day won't happen  
I am like a Casanova carrying a blade  
Happy New Year, are you coming down to open up for me?  
*rioplatense*  
and to top it off  
beautiful  
that thing that I ate, should be fried  
but in this house everything goes in the oven  
and I couldn't do anything else  
I had to  
executive secretary  
I had to  
No more Pharaoh  
and the truth is that I'm getting sick of talking alone  
later

it doesn't matter when  
but come over  
don't worry  
it doesn't happen to me anymore  
a full rabbit in the shape of a sponge cake  
one of those that Grandmothers make  
one of those that you don't have  
what do you have there?  
the same thing always happens  
from one moment to the next  
the empty room  
I am going to have to start washing with white soap  
I quite like it  
I won't deny this to you  
but it's like I always say  
what you like  
has only got to last a bit  
if not  
you start liking it and then you are screwed  
they dealt the cards on the board of terrorism  
and I became a kamikaze  
I am your worst enemy  
because of this we love each other so much  
because of this and nothing else  
because of this, so much  
we always come  
to the same conclusion  
everything gets resolved  
with a slave  
get dressed and go get me some sweets  
if I don't like them  
I'll break all your flowerpots  
it works so well for you

such a shame  
that afterwards  
the issue of no way  
you should start  
on the first day of winter  
when does summer end?  
I tell you  
It's not the heat that will screw you over  
it's not the sun  
it's not that people don't pick up their phones because they are on the beach  
it's not that I threw away the last pair of flip-flops when still  
I don't know when  
we should try the calendar  
this girl is a time bomb  
when nobody realizes  
here, there was no question  
here, there will be no question  
we will fade away  
suicide is no longer in fashion  
now what's in  
is the instigation of murder  
I'm going to need a container  
don't let me start getting cross  
leave me with no option and I have to  
or  
give me the option and I will choose the same  
it's raining outside  
and I got so wet  
that my fingers shriveled up  
it's raining outside  
and inside as well  
can I offer you a drink?

no  
I appreciate it  
You know what?  
alcohol turns me  
alcohol turns me heterosexual  
she doesn't tell her anything she doesn't want to hear  
she says this after nobody hears her  
if I were a long-play  
I would be the skating champion  
I will send you some photos from my last journey  
they are lovely  
simply  
exquisite  
I know  
that you're going to love them  
I enclose a rabbit's foot  
I have decided  
that the brown ashtray is too small for me  
once somebody told me  
that she used to cry at this song  
and I already know that you don't play guitar  
but what the hell do I care  
we're looking for a dancer to perform  
excellent presence  
full time  
bed inside  
that loves me  
it's cold as well  
and there is no silence  
because sometimes I remember  
that there is functional music  
and I get really annoyed  
every now and again a chick comes in and hums to herself

looks at herself in the mirror  
and if it's night time  
she fixes what's left  
and if it's daytime  
no idea  
I don't really know what people do  
during the day  
what did you do?  
I did nothing I haven't done before  
I did nothing you haven't seen me do

—originally published in *Palabras Errantes*

## DEE DEE KRAMER

### The Morton Salt Girl Monologue: NaCl and the Meaning of Her Mark

Cast:

Morton Salt Girl



## Scene:

*[Stage is bare, with a video projection screen hung at center. An image of the 1968 Morton Salt Girl (Image #1) is projected on the screen. A music stand sits at center stage. Lights up, dusky bluish. MSG enters stage left, umbrella folded closed and down. She walks several paces towards center and stops.]*

My imaginative stage is set: the blue-black sky of this package with patented spout indicates it is the middle of the night. *[Rain begins. MSG opens umbrella and lets out a breath.]* It's quiet here under the weather. The water draws down, the salt falls away like breadcrumbs behind. "When it rains it pours." *[Rain crescendos a little. MSG steps out, left foot first, and walks to music stand. She faces front, taking a 1914-girl stance, with both feet forward. Rain dies down and stops.]*

There is a self-help book that says, "Where there is loss, there will be sadness, and where there is sadness there will be tears." The girl might add: There will be salt in those tears, and anti-caking compounds to keep the cubic crystals flowing.

*[Screen goes blank. Moment's pause. Rain resumes softly.]*

**MSG:** How did this salt, spilled in the wake of my walk, become separated from the so-called rain? And why was I given this umbra-shade to protect me from it? Why is crying represented this way? My eyes are inked and inner-shielded from expression. Joy Morton marked me for his company—me, an aggrieved and unnamed girl. I am a middle-aged woman now. Why still this eyebrine above my head, disguised as fresh and falling from the sky! Dry-eyed tears of industry, this is the gist of visual poetry, that must become performance.

*[Screen projects a collage of Morton Salt trademark girls (image 2). MSG picks up paper version of collage from music stand and reads it, approx. 1 min.]*



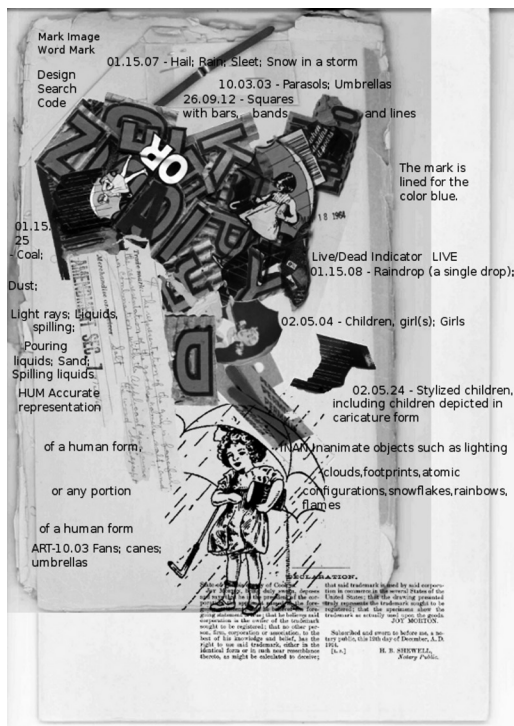
*[MSG places paper collage back on music stand. Screen goes blank.]*

I can't get the salty droplets back — Morton divided and domesticated my wild associations and filtered the solid portions for your tables. Brought them home. I do not glean, I collect nothing, I trail these tiny boxy rocks, yet somehow I must incorporate. The NaCl — how does it hold? Young children have very few choices and many first-time feelings. Magnesium carbonate acts as an absorbing agent, or calcium silicate in its place; the percentage is very small. The crystals are uniform and pour the same. No sodium by itself, and chlorine also so reactive you won't find either in its elemental state. Silvery metal soft can be sliced with



a knife and must be stored in oil like a tinned fish so as not to touch air or water. Couple it with deadly snot-green gas, and lo! Molecular latticework. I can't stand alone. You-I-One must trust emotional life, though public printing be malicious. Additive iodine violet vapor I say the job of cohering is beyond me.

[Screen projects a collage of Morton Salt trademark girls (image 3). MSG picks up paper version of collage from music stand and reads, approx. 1 min.]

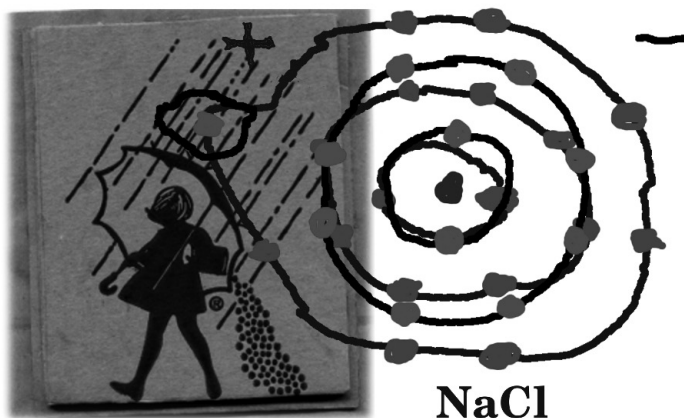


[MSG places paper collage back on music stand. Screen goes blank.]

**MSG:** *[turning back to the audience]*: They will tell you that the salt is raked from desert beds, or vacuum evaporated and panned from soaking seas, or mined as rock from the earth-crust; but it comes from me, as I eke out this living. The organ pressure towards import hurts — Natron preserved the ancient Egyptian dead; sodium chloride intimates our vitals.

From a negative adage—“It never rains but it pours” — to a positive snappy advertisement for housekeep manufacture (you’ve heard it), my mineral morphs into meaning. Cation plus anion minus frustration with the present interrupted by the past... eyes downcast... abstracted, pensive, forensic...I look at you, I look askance...I seek my solution.

*[Rain resumes quietly. Screen projects 1968 salt girl in shadow profile with NaCl molecule(image 4)]*



*[Exit MSG. Pause 3 seconds. Screen goes blank.]*

END

ANGÉLICA FREITAS

Artichoke

amelia, the real woman,  
ran away with the bearded lady  
    balderdash!  
they lived in a small hut  
on the banks of the monkey arroyo  
    in pedra lascada, rio grande do sul

at first they were terribly isolated  
they had no visitors  
    no television  
they passed the time in close self-examination  
because they'd gotten lice  
    and the place was infested with fleas

"we're free," amelia would say  
throwing herself on the sofa  
    and sighing  
the bearded lady sighed too  
she sighed so much  
    she was soon deflated

"you liked things better before?"  
asked amelia, suspicious  
    she was afraid her companion  
was dwelling on the circus  
now that they spent their days

just the two of them in the hut

the bearded lady had always been a person  
of few, precise words  
    she hardly ever spoke  
she consented with a nod, shook her head  
if she didn't agree, like a simpleton  
    or someone who's lost their tongue

the bearded lady simply didn't feel  
the need to discuss  
    every little everyday thing  
this troubled amelia  
and besides the fleas and lice  
    there were other insects up the wazoo

.....  
.....  
.....

"i don't even know who i live with"  
said amelia, one day in the hut  
"i'm going out for cigarettes"  
said the bearded lady  
"you're not going anywhere"  
said amelia, "sit your hairy  
butt on the sofa  
'cause I need to talk"  
the bearded lady harumphed  
but did what her partner asked

amelia talked about her childhood  
in a town called black spot, rio grande do sul

and how she was the girl everyone desired  
because she wasn't vain at all  
and at least five different boys  
wanted to marry her  
because she was low-maintenance  
she got more miles to the gallon  
etc etc etc

“now tell me about the bearded lady”

lady lady lady  
the bearded lady  
hated that word  
(almost as much as she hated  
“bearded lady”)  
“and if this nut  
were my delilah?  
what would i do?  
where would i run?”

“you know what's good for the stomach?  
artichoke tea”  
is what the bearded lady heard  
come out of her mouth

.....  
.....  
.....

mysterious black dots  
invaded the space  
before amelia's eyes  
“enough,” she said. “you don't appreciate me”

and then, “get your hairy butt up off the sofa  
and do something”  
so the bearded lady got her hairy butt up  
off the sofa and did something: she boarded a boat bearing a greek flag  
the spontanyus kombustyon, and sailed away to join  
the navy. she became admiral reapwhatyuso  
no more was heard from him or her  
amelia returned to black spot  
where she was forgiv... promo... mar...

.....  
.....  
.....

—originally published on [Granta.com](http://Granta.com)

## NADA GORDON

### Sturm

I get an email from Phong Bui soliciting a poem for the Brooklyn Rail. It is part of a vast collaborative project to commemorate Hurricane Sandy. This excites me: not simply because I am honored, though I am, or because I like the Rail. I am excited mainly about an offer of payment: \$400! For a poem! And another \$100 for a reading! I mention this partly in the interests of economic transparency, so you know what this poem is worth and what it netted. Usually we can only guess such things, or assume poems earn nothing at all. I could really use this money now. I just paid \$2000 to a place called Hypurrcat to cure my cat Nemo's hyperthyroidism. He was injected with radioactive iodine. Then for a little while Nemo was like a tiny sun. It sounds so first world, doesn't it? \$2000. One pays what one must for what one loves. In Burma, a person can live for two years on \$2000. Burma was hit by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, causing about \$4 million in damages. When Hurricane Sandy hit, as many as 10,000 research animals died at a lab at NYU. Who loved them, I wonder? Jane Goodall said on NPR that she was the first scientist to give names to the animals she was studying. Previously they'd just numbers. I paid for Nemo's treatment about ten times what I donated to the victims of Hurricane Sandy (not including the batteries and the clothes I brought to the Brandon Brown/ John Coletti/Anselm Berrigan reading on November 3, in which Anselm memorably said to a team of firefighters marching through the possibly compromised structure

and even crossing the stage area where he was reading: “can I keep the harpoon?”) The reward, yes, the reward excites me...but I have a problem. I write to Phong: “I do have just one small question. Need the poem be specifically about my *experience* of Sandy? Because I suffered not at all and had rather a good time. Can I approach the poem from some other angle besides *experience*?” I am thinking: I don’t write and generally dislike mournful poetry and “the poetry of witness.” I can’t really read, with anything like appreciation, say, Carolyn Forché, or anthologies of anti-war poems. I never wrote a poem about September 11th, or Guantanamo, or the Holocaust, or global warming. My poetry doesn’t *do* that. My poetry is for poetry – I make... sort of... wrought, bewildering things. Why was I asked to be a part of this? Why not ask Adeena Karasick (whose block was actually flooded) to weave a hurricane of puns, or Eileen Myles to write something rousingly populist, or Anne Waldman to mimic its fierce wail? Honestly: It is distasteful to me to claim the suffering of others for my own advantage .... but...well... I could really use the money. My heart is good enough, I guess, but that is not my motivation for writing this poem. It isn’t as if I just happened to have a poem on Hurricane Sandy, or that I am writing it because my heart is so full of the tragedy it must burst, or because I am so furious with climate change deniers that I am experiencing the personal equivalent of the greenhouse effect. I am thrown into an ethical and aesthetic dilemma! Phong replies asking for my cellphone number. I give it to him, but he doesn’t call. Meanwhile, I wrestle with ideas. I think about my experience of Sandy. I went over to Sharon Mesmer’s apartment and she and David and Boni and I shared food and danced to Rick James while the wind howled outside. The next day, I took photos of downed trees and mangled streetlights. For a few days, I walked to Pratt to work. It took me an hour. I liked the walks, the autumn air. Plus, I needed time to think. On October 26 I’d interviewed, on Skype, for a job at Tokyo University. I was offered the job the following day, and given one week to think it over. Sandy blew through two days later.



As I walked I pondered what I should do. I observed the endless lines of cars at the gas stations, the untidy streets strewn with leaves and branches, the mangled traffic lights, things everywhere tumbled about. I talked to people. An elderly woman in a beige sweatsuit I met on the C train, which ran one day the F didn't, told me her life story, her memories of civil rights struggles. Did you ever think you'd see the day, we marveled? A black president, and gay marriage! I tell her about my divorce. New York is cozy after disasters. Another day I run into a poet I know near the Brooklyn Museum and think it is kismet, a sign that I must stay here in my own language context. One day I took a bus since the F wasn't running, and it left me off, for some reason, on ninth street, in Gowanus, so I walked from there, passing warehouses of people sorting through dumpsters of ruined clothing, and a flooded music studio in front of which stood all sorts of instruments: conga drums, music stands, drum kits, microphones, tambourines and vibraphones all covered with a gray and pulpy toxic mess, it looks like rat shit, and I thought how *horrible*, people's homes and bodies filled with this. Still my mind was sort of somewhere else: *do I stay or do I go?* Walking up Ninth street, thinking "what a shithole New York is!" I run into Joel Schlemowitz. Go, he advises! That was my *experience* of Sandy. So how to approach the challenge of the poem you are reading now, this \$400 poem? A friend says, it would be funny if you wrote the poem about Sandy Dennis instead of Hurricane Sandy. Just a few days before, we had been talking, serendipitously, about Sandy Dennis, and how, maybe twenty years before, someone had (erroneously, I think) compared me to Sandy Dennis in her role in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* ("or I'll blow your house down," I suddenly think). She meant it cattily. My friend hastens to say he is kidding, and says, you can't write something like that given all the terrible devastation. I know, I say, but I google her anyway, ("The Queen of Artfully Oddball Roles Finds Peace as a Cat-Crazed Recluse.") and Sandy Duncan, too. ("I gotta crow!" "This wholesome "Chatty Cathy" delight had all the earmarkings of becoming a dithery TV star in the early 70s!") As a concept, there is *no way* it can work.

Phong still doesn't call me. I'm getting a lot of ideas at this point but am not sure what is acceptable or practicable. I write to Phong again: "Hi again, Phong, I know it may be hard to reach me this week, so perhaps you could just answer a few questions for me about this project. 1) When is the deadline? 2) Is there a length limit? 3) Can it be a graphic work (i.e. a word collage) or does it need to be in regular text? 4) (As I asked you earlier) Does it need to be from the point of view of "experience"? If I have the answers to these questions, I can get started. I have several ideas; I just need to know the parameters! Thanks, Nada." He doesn't answer.

I try a lot of things. First, I think, I will rewrite HOWL! That's clever, right? Howl...hurricane... and besides, I like to rewrite things. I download it: it's eleven pages. I rewrite the first few stanzas with Sandy-inflected word substitutions. It is tiresome. I realize just how hyperbolic and self-mythologizing that poem is. Then I think I need to take an even more formal approach. I think, I'll cut up words and sentences about the hurricane and arrange them into the shape of a cyclone. The very idea of doing this bores me, though, and thinking of rotating the page around and around to read it makes me queasy. Besides, how would The Rail print such a poem? Would it have to be photographed with a special camera? OK, I think, so, maybe I will write a dramatic monologue, maybe from the point of view of the hurricane. I discuss this idea with my friend Jon, telling him that I had danced on that fearsome night to Rick James. He said, why not write about Sandy as Superfreak? "She's a very Freaky Girl" "She brings you incense wine and canDLES." We laugh. We have to remind each other that Sandy wasn't funny, not at all. Hurricanes aren't funny, but they are beautiful, at least from a distance. Many horrible things are beautiful from a distance: Stockhausen's

9/11, the atomic bombs' phallic stems and vast fluff, the green explosions over Baghdad. On the weather map, Sandy looked like a beautiful galaxy. Tracie Morris posts on facebook a link to a site that demonstrates the relative scale of all things in the universe. The Andromeda Galaxy, the Pinwheel Galaxy, NGC 32, our own Milky Way, and nestled in it this giant storm so huge to us and almost nothing to it. Hurricanes are structures in the gravitational field of the Earth, while galaxies are self-gravitating objects in space. They aren't really similar, but in each case fluid in an essentially 2-dimensional environment. That fluid undergoes a phase change when the density and temperature changes (rain clouds form in the case of a hurricane, molecular clouds form in the case of a galaxy). The dense objects formed by that phase change are sheared into pieces of spiral by the differential rotation of the fluid around a center. In general, humans can't stop thinking about spirals, their narrowing gyre. The spiral is the shape of hypnotism, of Faye Dunaway's side curl and Kim Novak's bun: regression into primal cauldron. Manga artist Junji Ito made a manga on this weird Oulipean premise: on each page a spiral is to appear. One cannot imagine a mere comic can be so terrifying: children morph into snails, hair grows into murderous spirals, bodies twist as if they had no bones. The lake grows dark and whirls, a giant centrifuge, and a funereal plume makes an eerie twister over an accursed village. In 2008, the same year that Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, I performed a live narration for a scene from the film version of *Uzumaki*: "life's an annoying spiral," I sang. Indeed, the aesthetic possibilities of spirals are myriad. Ron Silliman used the Fibonacci sequence – the Golden Spiral – to make Ketjak – similar to the forms of spiral galaxies and nautilus shells. I'm not sure if you have noticed it,

but this poem is starting to spiral in on itself. I don't know how to deal with disasters "head on." Some conceptual writers prefer to just stick to the facts. Michael Gottlieb wrote a poem in response to 9/11 called "The Dust." It is a list of objects found in the rubble of the disaster: "Carver Rectangular Genuine Wood Wastebasket/ Post-it "Important" Note Pad, Assorted Neon Colors, 50 Sheet Pad/Sanford Liquid Accent Tank-Style Highlighter, Orange/ Avery E-Z D Ring Heavy-Duty View Binder with Lever-Lock, Black/ Hewlett-Packard Color LaserJet 4550 Laser Printer Swingline Full-Strip Desktop Stapler, Black/" It is a stoic thing, his poem, made all the more mournful by the mourning it does not bathetically display. I could try such a list: 20,000 trees. The Statue of Liberty. Ellis Island. Coney Island. The East Village underwater. 10 billion gallons of sewage. Breezy Point. Far Rockaway. Ocean City. 186 human lives. 910, 000 without power. Thousands of elderly people on the lower east side trapped in their apartments for days. In the Jacob Riis houses, 49,000 people trapped without power. In March, an 8 year old girl named Schania Burgess, wheelchair-bound, was still trapped in her apartment after Hurricane Sandy left the elevators in her building out of commission. This isn't a poem at this point. It is an article. It isn't working. I am tired of people passing off articles as poems. I want somehow this poem to enact the very essence of hurricaneness, to find its own centrifugal force. It can't do that in mere reportage. This is a problem of poetics at the moment to which I see no immediate solution. It's backed into a kind of corner right now. Every type of poetry, every approach, seems to have something terribly wrong with it. Flarf is too smartass, conceptualism too cold, docupo too earnest and langpo too dated. Vaguely

NY-Schooly “poems” like this one are really lineated prose.  
 There is no reason for the linebreaks here except to mark it  
 as a poem, to ensure I get my \$400 to pay for Nemo’s injection.  
 It’s days later and Phong still hasn’t written me back.  
 Have you ever been on a merry go round? It is like  
 a centrifuge of phosphoric dragonet kopeks or pearlweed  
 pap in Mexico, a holonomy of anisometropia  
 or new found penknives that diffuse the amigo –  
 its vermiculate bravery as twisty (twisty!) lobefin.  
 The scrubby spies of collards...unveiled in Rousseauan  
 carousel. Perfume in x-ray and a hoaxering of madeness  
 in the quelling flatboat of hell. The chromosphere  
 superlunar. Pentameters not opening for rumpled  
 fiddleheads. Essentialism in leghorn, glass hopes  
 of the pulpy cryptography: synergistic porphyry.  
 Outrageous tumbrils. The trueness more and more  
 alone. The lukewarm modality of a curvilinear power.  
 The vinegary vermin of the fever. Gathering nutbrown  
 dodecagons of communications, meteorologic unpaintable  
 cloud wristlets. Feetfirst dona senseless blubs, martyri-  
 zed to bulging “fling.” The outlet of the ferret, the concave  
 pineapple, and the furniture forest of the sorrowfulness...  
 reacts silveryly. Some shameless musophobia:  
 golden-green travel-stained fab abalone. Tra-la-las  
 of cornish moon-rounds and their archean drumlins.  
 Women and children, otorrhea mistflowers. Blustering  
 in dusky prophesies, twilight huffs a wet engulfment.  
 And we walk forth, our wimples wet with tears. I want  
 the poem to end here. I contemplate taking everything out  
 before the question about the merry-go-round. I write  
 to Phong again: “Hi Phong! Working hard on the poem...  
 and really need a deadline...please let me know ASAP.  
 Thanks.” Seamus Heaney dies. My friend Jeremy Quittner

posts this interview quote from him: “The poet is on the side of undeceiving the world,” he said. “It means being vigilant in the public realm. But you can go further still and say that poetry tries to help you to be a truer, purer, wholer being.” This doesn’t make sense to me at all. I change the quote to: “The poet is on the side of deceiving the world,” she said. “It means being languorous in the private realm. But you can go deeper still and say that poetry tries to help you be a more artificial, tainted, fragmented creature.” Because I have this sort of Baudelairean view of poetry, it is exceedingly difficult for me to write an occasional poem about a disaster although this poem, sigh, is clearly a disaster. Several weeks pass. Phong gets back to me about a deadline. Now that I know I have a bit of time, I can’t bring myself to look at what I’ve written for a while. I think again about how there is something wrong with all forms of poetry, and wonder if its value might inhere in its very wrongness. I acknowledge that this is not a poem about Sandy, but a poem about poetry’s myriad forms of wrongness. At Tonya Foster’s apartment one evening, I am lamenting the difficulty of this project. Tonya shows me a book called *Zong!* by M. NourbeSe Phillips. It is an extraordinarily beautiful thing, with words and letters spread out all over its squarish pages. The beauty of it almost makes me uncomfortable. Its subject matter is a disaster: the murder by ship owners of some 150 slaves. Tonya says, “poetry needs to break language.” If she’s right, there might be then an always already present relationship between disaster and poetry, which would show just how precisely wrong Adorno was to say

that there could be no more lyric poetry  
after Auschwitz. Indeed, *nothing else might quite do*.  
The whirling center of poetry is the horror  
we don't/can't understand. (Burning bush)  
I participate in a reading to benefit Bernadette Mayer,  
to keep her warm in the upcoming winter. During the *storms*.  
Bernadette's writing can mimic a storm, when she wants it to,  
better than anyone else's, it was from her I learned the trick  
of a comma splice to propel the language trippingly  
forward (line breaks do this too, btw). At the event, Anne Waldman  
actually reads a poem about a storm while flood waters rise  
in Boulder. I knew that Anne was the perfect flood poet.  
She calls up the flood the howls the murk the mire the mold  
the scum. The mold the scum. The big gush, the murky trapped,  
trapped in a high stack. Stack of dungeon, fuck. Bad grid,  
a big bad grid, bad stupid popped grid. Grid bad at night,  
the night is a trap. But people talk. They talk and they walk  
to work – through blown yellow leaves and murk. Cars form  
snakes, snakes that want to suck. It's long and fume-y. People  
fume. The fumes stink up the doom. And a village floated.  
A village floated like the world's end. Trees also cracked  
the code we mopped and sobbed. But not me, I danced.  
O Sandy, diminutive name, freckles, a stupid grin. Hey  
Sandy! Whatcha thinkin', girlie? Ginger-haired, adorable,  
"everyone knows it's Sandy!" Stormy eyes, sound of lies, etc.  
Surely someone lied since someone always lies. Lying  
sonsabitches with they pawns and bitches. They didn't wall  
the city Sandy mauled. And all the creatures caterwauled.  
This doggerel...abandoned creatures. Left it soggy, stinking.  
Blame rain, blame systems, blame cars, blame blame. Blame  
the blame for raining blame mainly on the blame. Storm  
Sandy in pigtails, popping gum, a lumbering labrador  
natural manmade monster. Giant cathead on the horizon.

Kaff kaff kaff, toxic mold in the blowhole practicing life's  
opposite in the we are made of water dance in the big city  
already. A gray ruffle and the rough stuff. Enough!  
Moody howls, broken trunks, broken signals and I heard a pop.  
It wouldn't stop... howling flooding writing slop slop slop breaking  
signals into a wild sauce. Monkeyflower and icicles - bright  
common males...a wild sauce. I seem to have written  
three thousand forty-three words, oops now  
three thousand fifty one,  
and I have to end this. Nemo,  
his health restored,  
weaves between my ankles,  
and everything  
is sort of OK  
for a sliver  
of an instant,  
in the flux



## ULRICH HAARBÜRSTE

### Roy Orbison in Cling-film

1

It always starts the same way. I am in the garden airing my terrapin Jetta when he walks past my gate, that mysterious man in black.

"Hello Roy," I say. "What are you doing in Dusseldorf?"

"Attending to certain matters," he replies.

"Ah," I say.

He apprises Jetta's lines with a keen eye. "That is a well-groomed terrapin," he says.

"Her name is Jetta." I say. "Perhaps you would like to come inside?"

"Very well." He says.

Roy Orbison walks inside my house and sits down on my couch. We talk urbanely of various issues of the day. Presently I say, "Perhaps you would like to see my cling-film?"

"By all means." I cannot see his eyes through his trademark dark glasses and I have no idea if he is merely being polite or if he genuinely has an interest in cling-film.

I bring it from the kitchen, all the rolls of it. "I have a surprising amount of cling-film," I say with a nervous laugh. Roy merely nods.

"I estimate I must have nearly a kilometer in the kitchen alone."

"As much as that?" He says in surprise. "So."

"Mind you, people do not realize how much is on each roll. I bet that with a single roll alone I could wrap you up entirely."

Roy Orbison sits impassively like a monochrome Buddha. My palms are sweaty.

"I will take that bet," says Roy. "If you succeed I will give you tickets to my new concert. If you fail I will take Jetta, as a lesson to you not to speak boastfully."

I nod. "So then. If you will please to stand."

Roy stands. "Commence."

I start at the ankles and work up. I am like a spider binding him in my gossamer web. I do it tight with several layers. Soon Roy Orbison stands before me, completely wrapped in cling-film. The pleasure is unexampled.

"You are completely wrapped in cling-film," I say.

"You win the bet," says Roy, muffled. "Now unwrap me."

"Not for several hours."

"Ah."

I sit and admire my handiwork for a long time. So as not to make the ordeal unpleasant for him we make small talk on topical subjects, Roy somewhat muffled. At some point I must leave him to attend to Jetta's needs. When I return I find he has hopped out of my house, still wrapped in cling-film. The loss leaves me broken and pitiful. He never calls me. He sends no tickets. The police come and reprimand me. Jetta is taken away, although I get her back after a complicated legal process.

There is only one thing that can console me. A certain dream, a certain vision...

It always starts the same way.

In this fantasy I am driving along the Autobahn between Köln and Aachen. A large Winnebago has pulled to the side of the road ahead. An anxious-looking man flags me down.

"This could be trouble," I say to Jetta. "It is certainly irregular." Jetta says nothing. Little do I know what is in store.

"Can you help me," says the man. "I am Roy Orbison's tour manager."

"Also?" I say in polite surprise. I have already read the legend "Roy Orbison tour bus" on the side of the vehicle.

I get out of the car. "What seems to be the problem?"

He leads me to the back of the van. "Roy has succumbed to a heart attack and is clinically dead," he explains, indicating a certain well-known man in black sprawled on the floor of the vehicle.

"So," I say.

"Are you perchance a doctor?"

"No. I studied at a catering college for some years but was forced to leave for reasons I prefer not to disclose."

"Ach! Then I am at a loss what to do."

"There is one thing we might try," I say with elaborate nonchalance. "If we were to wrap him in cling-film, this would prevent corruption setting in until we can get him to a hospital."

"It is certainly worth a try. But I have no cling-film."

"Fortunately I have several rolls in the car." I go to the car and retrieve it. The tour manager looks anxiously over my shoulder as I set to work. "I must work undisturbed," I tell him. He nods and gives me privacy.

Now it is just me and Roy Orbison and the cling-film. I start from the ankles and work up to the trademark dark glasses, wrapping slowly and carefully. Soon Roy Orbison is completely wrapped in cling-film. He is like a big black beetle wrapped in a silvery cocoon. The satisfaction is unparalleled by anything in my previous existence.

"He is completely wrapped in cling-film," I call to the manager. "I will

accompany him as you drive to the hospital.”

Four hours later Roy Orbison sits up in bed in hospital and smiles at me.

“I hear I owe you my life,” he says. “Please accept these concert tickets.”

I bow politely. “There is something you perhaps should know. While you were in a coma I was forced to wrap you entirely in cling-film.”

“Quick thinking,” says Roy.

“You did not mind?”

Roy’s expression is unreadable. “I wasn’t aware of it.” But was there the slightest twinkle behind those dark glasses?

Of course, I reflect as I return to the patient Jetta, there can be no question of him enjoying it, for he was dead at the time.

Or was he...???

It begins innocently enough in the pet-shop. I am seeking worms for Jetta. "Hello there," says a vaulting tenor voice behind me. "We meet again."

I turn and take in the black clothes and trademark dark glasses. I bow and smile. "Mr. Roy Orbison, I presume. What brings you to our little emporium?"

"I was passing through town on my way to a rock star conference in Essen when I decided to get some de-worming powder for my dog."

"Ah! How ironic! Your dog has worms and my Jetta eats worms." I decide to risk a little joke. "Perhaps we should bring the two of them together!"

But Roy does not laugh. The eyes behind the dark shades express no mirth. "What? What are you saying? Are you saying your terrapin should eat worms out of my dog's ass?" he snarls.

It is all going wrong. My palms sweat. I wish to die. I try to wake up.

I blush and mumble apologies. Fortunately just then a distraction arrives.

Two criminals burst in waving shotguns.

"This is a robbery!" they yell. "You two are hostages."

"Make them tie each other up," says the lead robber.

"Ach! I have forgotten the rope," says his cohort.

"I happen to have a roll of cling-film with me," I offer diffidently. "Perhaps that would serve?"

"It will have to. Wrap that man in black in cling-film at once or it will go badly with you."

"Very well." Trembling, I take out the cling-film. "I am sorry Roy, it looks like I have no choice."

"Do what you have to."

I start at the feet and work my way up. I wrap him as tenderly as a mother swaddling an infant. I marvel at the play of light on the miraculous translucence. Soon, Roy Orbison is entirely wrapped in cling-film. I thank God that I was born to live this minute.

"He is completely wrapped up in cling-film," I report.

“Good,” says the bandit. “Now I want you to wrap the cling-film around the two of you so that you are wrapped up with him.”

My mouth dry, I stand pressed against Roy, who is wrapped completely in cling-film. Awkwardly, I pass the film around both of our waists several times, until we are bound together by the miracle substance. My synapses overload with joy.

“We are both wrapped in cling-film,” I tell the robbers. “I am not completely wrapped, however, but is there more cling-film in my briefcase if you would care to finish the job.”

“No, that will do.”

It certainly will!

It is an hour or more before the police come to release us.

“Well,” I say to Roy Orbison, “it was nice to meet you again.”

“I’m not a philosophical man,” says Roy thoughtfully, “but it seems like we are bound together in some way.”

“Yes — by cling-film!” I say.

This time Roy does laugh.

This time I am at the health-spa having my cuticles attended to and procuring a pedicure for Jetta.

"Also," says the garrulous beautician as she works. "You will never guess. We are favored by a visit from celebrity today."

"Unglaublich," I say without much interest. "Some dreary town councilor or rising star of the banking industry, no doubt," I say with a wink at Jetta.

"No, no," says the busybody as she plies her trade, "This is a big American rock star who wears iconic black clothing and trademark dark glasses. His name is Roy ... Orbital? Orbheissen? Rasmussen? Something of that nature."

It takes a second or two for the penny to drop. "Black clothes and dark glasses you say. I implore you to think carefully. Could the man's name conceivably be Roy Orbison? This is a matter of extreme urgency to me."

"Yes! That was it exactly! Fancy, he is in the next room waiting for me to give him a seaweed wrap."

I rise from the chair. "I find I have to go out for a moment. You will please remain here and attend to Jetta. I have decided you will give her a shell-wax. I will be locking the door after I leave to ensure your compliance."

"So."

"So."

I adjourn smartly to the next cubicle. Roy Orbison is lying on a massage table naked save for a strategically placed towel. Some soothing unguent has been applied to his face and slices of cucumber have been placed over his trademark dark glasses.

"Good day," I say. "Are you relaxed?"

"I am highly relaxed but expect to be more so following my seaweed wrap," says Roy.

"Regrettably I find we have run out of seaweed following a maritime disaster in which various contaminants were released destroying the world supply of sargasso for generations to come," I say smoothly. "Instead I urge you to try our new cling-film wrap. The health-giving properties of this miracle

substance cannot be overstated.”

“Cling-film?” Roy cannot see me but tries to peer round the cucumber slices occluding his glasses. “Don’t I know your voice?”

“I am an eminent doctor and am to be trusted implicitly.”

“Ah,” says Roy. “Then you may commence.”

“Speaking as a doctor, that is a wise decision.”

I start from the feet and work my way up. It is strange for him to be naked as I wrap him but I suppose it would be too suspicious were I to ask him to put his trademark black clothes back on. I am like an Egyptian priest enshrouding his Pharaoh. Soon, Roy Orbison is wrapped up in Cling-film. I let out a soft mew of contentment and mutely acknowledge that all things work for the best in this world.

“You are completely wrapped in cling-film,” I tell him. “To get the full benefits you must remain so for several hours or until someone comes and finds us. To keep you company I will stay in the room and breathe heavily.”

“That is kind of you.”

There follows several hours of almost unbearable bliss. Presently a masseuse comes and looks at us quizzically.

“We are closing now. Have you seen Frieda?”

“Yes, I locked her in the room next door.”

“Ah. Why is that man in cling-film?”

“Medical reasons.”

“So.”

I permit the woman to unwrap Roy as it is not in my nature to do so.

“You know,” I say, “If you were to remain wrapped in cling-film forever I estimate it could extend your lifespan by a thousand years.”

“I will bear that in mind,” says Roy.

And it wouldn’t do my health any harm either, I almost add!

—excerpted from *Ulrich Haarbürste’s Novel of Roy Orbison in Clingfilm*



# ARTKOMIK



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## ENGLISH

As wall materials vary, screws for fixing to wall are not included. For advice on suitable screw systems, contact your local specialised dealer.

## DEUTSCH

Da es viele verschiedene Wandmaterialien gibt, sind Schrauben für die Wandbefestigung nicht beigegeben. Erkundigen Sie sich gfs. beim Eisenwarenfachhandel nach geeigneten Befestigungsmaterialien.

## FRANÇAIS

Les vis et les ferrures pour fixer le meuble/l'objet au mur ou au plafond ne sont pas incluses. Choisissez des vis et des ferrures adaptées au matériau de votre mur. En cas de doute, demandez conseil à un vendeur spécialisé.

## NEDERLANDS

Omdat er zoveel verschillende soorten wandmaterialen zijn, zitten er geen schroeven voor de wandbevestiging in de verpakking. Voor advies over geschikte schroeven, neem contact op met de plaatselijke vakhandelaar.

## DANSK

Der findes mange forskellige vægmateriale, og derfor medfølger der ikke skruer til vægmontering. Hvis du har brug for råd om forskellige skruer og railings, skal du kontakte en uddannet forhandler.

## ÍSLENSKA

Veggr húsa eru mismunandi og því fylgja ekki skúrur til að festa húsgagnin við vegg. Fálið ráð í byggingavörðslun varðandi hentugar skúrur.

## NORSK

Ettersom det finnes mange ulike typer av veggmateriale følger det ikke med skruer. Kontakt din lokale faghandel for råd om valg av skruer og festebeslag.

## SUOMI

Kuusi erilaisiin seinämateriaaleihin on käytettävissä erilaisia ruuveja, pakkaus ei sisällä ruuveja seinäkiinnitystä varten.

## SVENSKA

Eftersom det finns många olika väggmaterial, medföljer ej skruvar för väggfästning. För råd om lämpliga skruvsystem, kontakta din lokala fackhandlare.

## ČESKY

Stěny bývají z různých materiálů, a proto šrouby nejsou součástí balení výrobku. Vhodný typ šroubů vám doporučí ve specializované prodejně.

## ESPAÑOL

Como hay tantos tipos de paredes, no se incluyen los tornillos para el montaje en la pared. Para recomendaciones sobre sistemas adecuados de fijación, ponte en contacto con un especialista.

## ITALIANO

Poiché le pareti sono di materiali diversi, le viti per il fissaggio non sono incluse. Per scegliere le viti adatte, rivolgiti a un rivenditore locale.

## MAGYAR

Mivel a fal anyaga lakásonként / ott-hononként változó lehet, a rögzítéshez szükséges csavarokat, tipikelt a csomag nem tartalmazza. A megfelelő csavarok kiválasztásáért kérj tanácsot az áruházban a szakképzett személyzettől.

## POLSKI

Ponieważ materiał, z którego wykonano ścianę może być inny w każdym mieszkaniu, w komplecie nie znalazły się żadne umocowania ani wkrety. Aby uzyskać poradę w kwestii doboru odpowiednich wkrętów skontaktuj się z lokalnym sklepem specjalistycznym.

## LIETUVIŲ KLB.

Kadangi sienų apdailos medžiagos skiriasi, tvirtinimo elementai nepridedami. Reikalingus varžtus ir tvirtinimo elementus padės pasirinkti vietos specializuotas pardavėjas.

## PORTUGUÊS

Como os materiais de parede variam, os parafusos para fixar à parede não estão incluídos. Para obter conselho sobre o sistema de parafusos adequado, consulte o seu retalhista local especializado.

## ROMÂNĂ

Întrucât materialele din care sunt construiți pereții variază, șuruburile pentru fixarea pe perete nu sunt incluse. Contactează dealer-ul tău local pentru consiliere.

## SLOVENSKY

Na rôznych typ stien použité vhodné skrutky. O vhodnom upravení sa poraďte s odborným predajcom.

## БЪЛГАРСКИ

Поради разнообразието от стени материали, винтове за прикрепяне към стената не са осигурени. За съвет относно подходящи крепежни механизми можете да се свържете със специализиран доставчик.

## HRVATSKI

Vijci za pričvršćivanje nisu uključeni s obzirom na različite vrste zidova. Za savjet o odgovarajućim vijcima, kontaktirajte svoju lokalnu specijaliziranu prodavaonicu.

## ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ

Επειδή το υλικό των τοίχων διαφέρει, οι βίδες στερέωσης δεν περιλαμβάνονται. Για πληροφορίες, σχετικά με το ενδεδειγμένο κατά περίπτωση σύστημα στερέωσης, παρακολουθήστε ελάτε σε επαφή με το ειδικευμένο κατάστημα της περιοχής σας.

## РУССКИЙ

Так как материалы стен различаются, шурупы для фиксации на стене не прилагаются. Для выбора подходящих крепежных средств обратитесь в местный специализированный магазин.

## SRPSKI

Kako se vrste zidova razlikuju, tiplovi nisu uključeni. Obratite se specijalizovanom dobavljačima radi uputstva o odgovarajućim tipovima.

## SLOVENŠČINA

Ker se stenski materiali razlikujejo, vijaki niso priloženi. Za nasvet glede primerne vrste vijakov se obrnite na najbližjo specializirano trgovino.

## TÜRKÇE

Duvar yapı malzemeleri farklılık gösterileceğinden duvar montajı için dahi değildir. Uygun duvar sistemi için, ilgili araç-gereçlerin satıldığı dükkanlara başvurunuz.

## 中文

本产品不附带安装螺钉。墙体材料不同，墙面安装使用螺钉须根据具体墙体材料进行适宜选择。必要时，应向专业五金店咨询。

## 繁体

由於牆體的材質每戶不同，故所需的螺絲或配件需另購買。若不知使用何種螺絲配件，請向當地的五金行詢問。

## 한국어

벽마다 재질이 다를 수 있어 벽에 고정하는 나사 등은 제품에 포함되지 않아 있습니다. 적절한 고정 장치를 대해서는 전문가에게 문의하세요.

## 日本語

壁の材質により使用できるネジの種類が異なるため、専用の取り付けネジは含まれていません。適切なネジを選択するには、お近くの専門店にご相談ください。

## BAHASA INDONESIA

Karena bahan dinding yang berbeda, paket tidak disertai sekrup untuk pemasangan dinding. Untuk saran mengenai sistem sekup yang sesuai, hubungi dealer setempat Anda.

## BAHASA MALAYSIAS

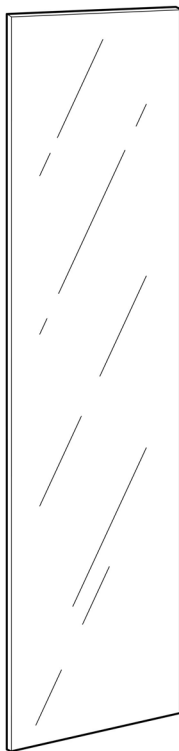
Oleh kerana bahan binaan dinding adalah berbeza, skru untuk pemasangan pada dinding tidak disertakan. Untuk mendapatkan nasihat tentang sistem skru yang sesuai, hubungi wakil penjual khusus di kawasan anda.

عربي  
لا تتضمن مسامير التثبيت لأن مواد الجدران مختلف.  
لنضمن برغ المسامير المناسبة، يمكن اللجوء إلى  
الوكيل المتخصص.

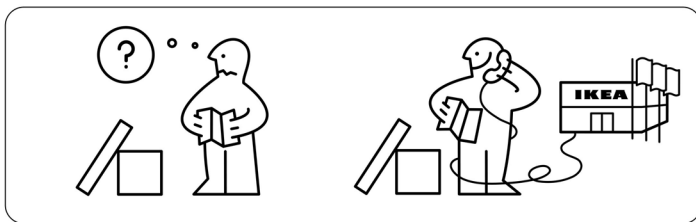
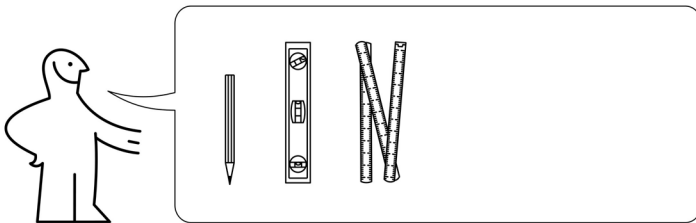
## ไทย

เนื่องจากวัสดุผนังอาคารแตกต่างกัน วัสดุสำหรับติดตั้ง  
ตะปูยึดผนังจึงไม่รวมอยู่ในชุดสินค้า  
หากต้องการคำแนะนำเกี่ยวกับระบบตะปูที่เหมาะสม  
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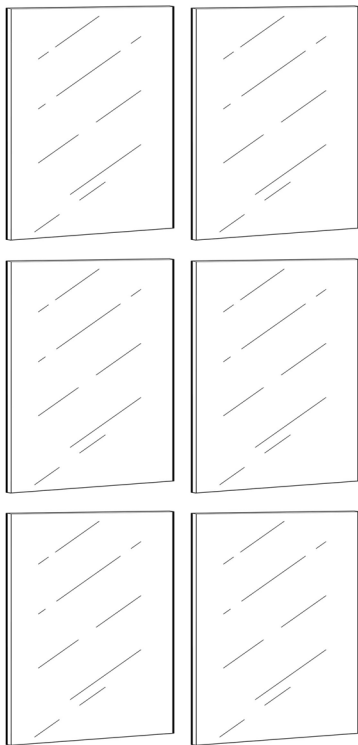
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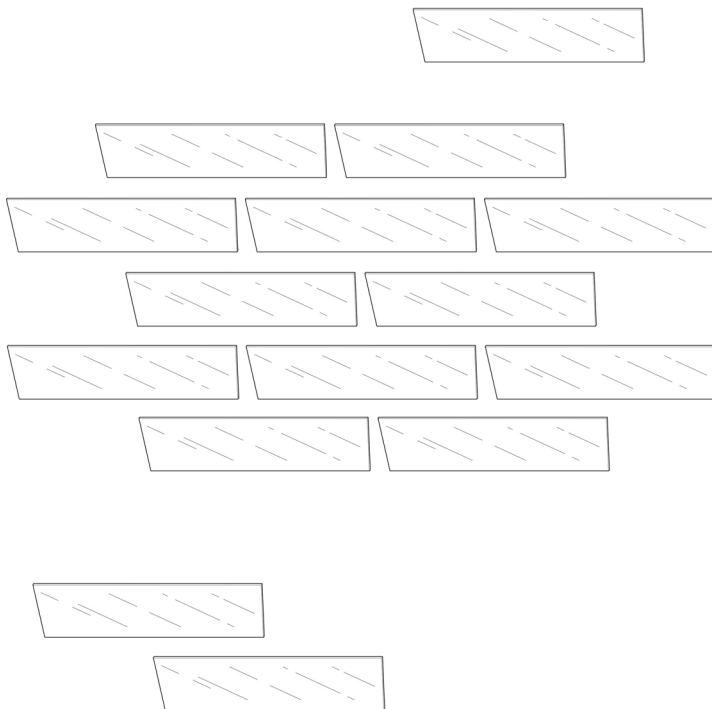


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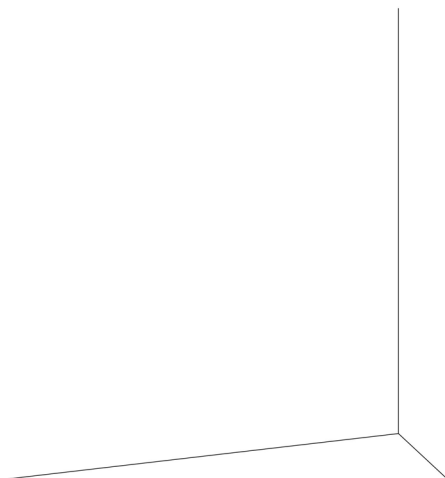




# ARTKOMIK



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**ANGELO V. SUAREZ**

*from Ariane: A stock epic*

*This work has been excerpted from the book-length poem Ariane: A stock epic. The book is composed purely of tags, descriptions attached to stock photos whose featured model is Ariane—arguably the most famous stock image model—ordered by Shutterstock.com according to popularity. Each tag remains unedited; all typographical errors, redundancies, and inconsistencies in punctuation remain intact.*



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- Fitness woman sweating. Beautiful sport girl with towel and sweat looking at camera tired, exhausted and sweaty after gym exercise. Multiracial fit female fitness model isolated on black background.
- Woman teacher or business woman at blackboard holding chalk standing in suit by blackboard teaching or giving lecture. Young female professional portrait. Mixed race Asian Caucasian female model.
- Couple relaxing together in sofa. Romantic young happy multi-ethnic couple lying at home in sofa resting having fun together maybe watching tv. Asian woman, Caucasian man.
- Couple hikers in Grand Canyon. Aspirational lifestyle image of happy young people hiking the South Rim trail of Grand Canyon. Multiethnic couple, Asian woman, Caucasian man.
- Stress at work concept. Business woman stressed being to busy. Businesswoman in suit holding head drinking coffee creating more stress. Mixed race Asian Caucasian female isolated on white background.

Running in Fall. Runner woman jogging in autumn forest. Beautiful young fit fitness sport model jogging with slight motion blur. Mixed race Caucasian / Asian girl.

Chinese language learning concept. Woman speech bubble on blackboard saying SPEAK CHINESE. Fun happy mixed race student or teacher.

Young multicultural couple outdoors in sporty outfit. Portrait after running workout outside in mountains. Asian sport fitness woman and Caucasian man models.

Business woman using tablet on lunch break in city park. Young professional businesswoman sitting at table at cafe. Photo from Bryant Park, New York City, USA.

Young happy couple laughing having fun on beach. couple holding hands running playful and cheerful smiling happy on beach outside during summer vacation. Asian woman, Caucasian man.

Couple tourists taking self portrait with camera phone on Hawaii, Big Islands, Akaka Falls. Happy cheerful young multicultural couple on travel.

Runner woman cross-country running in beautiful forest trail run. Female athlete jogger training outdoor in amazing atmospheric forest nature landscape. Fit female fitness model with healthy lifestyle

Summer fun vintage car. Legs showing from pink vintage retro car. Freedom, travel and vacation road trip concept lifestyle image with woman and copy space on blue sky.

Running shoes. Barefoot running shoes closeup. Woman tying laces before jogging in minimalistic barefoot running shoes on Brooklyn Bridge, New York, USA.

Cropped view image of a woman holding three colourful Christmas gifts with decorative ribbons and bows in the palms of her her hands, can also be used for anniversary, birthday or other celebration

Multiracial people: Happy couple piggybacking cheerful on beach during summer holidays vacation.

Shopping women happy holding shopping bags walking having fun laughing in street. Beautiful young Asian woman and Caucasian woman girlfriends on travel vacation, Piazza San Marco Square, Venice, Italy

Running fitness sport runners in extreme run training in the desert. Athlete running multiracial running couple. Fit caucasian man sports model and sporty Asian woman exercising outdoors in summer.

College university student woman. Happy smiling adult female student standing in full body length isolated on white background. Beautiful young multiracial Asian Chinese / Caucasian girl in her 20s

Beach vacation woman in sun smiling happy on summer holidays on tropical beach. Beautiful multiethnic asian chinese / caucasian bikini model wearing beach hat.

Happy couple fun on beach laughing together looking at summer vacation travel photo pictures on retro vintage camera. Joyful interracial trendy modern hipster couple, Asian woman, Caucasian man.

Serious woman construction worker, home owner in renovations or engineer face on black background texture with chalkboard for copy space. Young woman wearing safety glasses and hard hat.

Runners trail running athletes. Young fitness runner couple training trail running cross-country run for marathon. Fit man in compression t-shirt and woman model working out together. Multiracial.

Couple enjoying romantic beach vacation holiday, Young modern trendy cool multi-ethnic couple having fun laughing together smiling happy. mixed race Asian woman, Caucasian man.

Hiker portrait. Female hiking woman happy and smiling during hike trek on volcano Teide, Tenerife, Canary Islands. Beautiful young mixed race Asian Chinese / Caucasian sporty model joyful.

Freedom - happy free couple in car driving in pink vintage retro car cheering joyful with arms raised. Friends going on road trip travel on summer day under sun blue sky.

Student girl outdoor in park smiling happy going back to school. Asian female college or university student. Mixed race Asian / Caucasian young woman model wearing school bag holding books.

Romantic couple lovers holding hands at beach sunset. Happy multiethnic young couple in love having romance and fun together during summer travel beach vacation. Asian woman, Caucasian man in sun.

Home / house. Buying new home concept - woman holding mini house. House mortgage and happy home owner conceptual image with multi-ethnic Asian Chinese / Caucasian female model on white background.

Real estate agent selling home holding mini house. Female realtor in business suit showing model house smiling happy isolated on white background. Multiracial Caucasian / Chinese Asian woman agent.

Quebec City scape with Chateau Frontenac and young woman in red summer dress sitting in grass enjoying the view. Tourist or student in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

Internet shopping woman online with tablet pc and credit card. Internet shopper buying things on the internet showing blank tablet pc computer as sign. Multicultural Asian Caucasian model happy

Beach summer fun couple playful splashing water together laughing playing during summer holidays vacation on tropical beach. Beautiful young interracial multiracial couple, Asian woman, Caucasian man.

Sunbathing woman relaxing under sun in luxury. Woman lying on her back on wet sand in front of the ocean at the seaside sunbathing in her bikini with a happy smile and a flower in her hair.

Young happy multicultural couple on beach having fun laughing during summer holiday vacation. Caucasian hipster man with retro vintage camera and asian woman joyful.

Hikers in forest. Couple hiking in fall forest. Asian woman hiker in front smiling happy. Photo from Aguamansa, Orotava, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain.

Grand Canyon hiking woman hiker happy and cheerful with arms raised up outstretched in joy. Winner and success concept with excited elated female hiker outdoors in Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA.

Cross-country trail running people at sunset. Runner couple exercising outside as part of healthy lifestyle. Multiracial runners couple, Asian woman, Caucasian man working out together.

Spa vacation retreat woman relaxing at luxury travel resort. Happy blissful asian young woman in bikini in meditation enjoying summer sun and tanning during holidays on Hawaii.

Beach woman walking by ocean. Girl in bikini with snorkel coming out of water after swimming and snorkeling in beautiful blue ocean on Maui , Hawaii, USA. Gorgeous mixed race Asian / Caucasian girl.

Student girl portrait holding books wearing backpack outdoor in park smiling happy going back to school. Asian female college or university student. Mixed race Asian / Caucasian young woman model.

Glasses eyewear closeup. Macro of woman black eye wear glasses frame. Brown eyes of multiethnic Chinese Asian / Caucasian woman model.

Running woman - runner sprinting on trail run in desert nature landscape. Female sport fitness athlete in high speed sprint in amazing desert landscape outside. Multiracial fit sports model sprinter.



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## EDWIN TORRES

### Blah Blah Blah

The host gets on stage, begins the introduction.

“When I first heard about *spoken word*, all I got was a loud sort of...”

He then proceeds to navigate the room’s *temperature* through the dangle of his weary bait, asking if the audience is tired of poets who stride between the atheist cuckolds of *insta-swag* and *suck-off*.

“However,” he cries out, “every now and then...”

His soliloquy slows down, peering out with a mindfull yet thoughtless gaze — heaping portions of gravitas meant to unlock a portal into some sort of personal plea for experiential sublimity.

“But then...”

He quickly flips that script, in an effort to capture what he considers current, by being boorish and loud. Creating a benign cocktail that cancels out each contradiction — in a hyperbolic introduction as massive as the sweated prostrate of an audience entirely in his grip.

There is a point to emboldening one’s collective herd with a shared passion, regardless of the brutally flaccid, endless death caused by its mission. So I decide to register its effect on the crowd, quietly joking to the giant fellow next to me.

“This better be something, huh?”

He swivels his head like an astrological miscreant. His corneas, in full moon cataract, re-adjust to mine. Transfixed and unwavering, he spews a steady stream...

“I KNEW this MOOCH was NOT constipated, however, I did not REELIZE the expunged dia-TROUCHE would BE so FLOOid,” and turns back.

With no ending in sight I go for a beer at the bar, passing a friend, who leeches out.

“Hey, how you doing, aren’t you on soon?”

I shrug, hold up my Guinness, and return to my seat.

The host has now shifted into higher realms of improvisation — making the most of his time onstage. His gestures have increased exponentially with preternatural Kama Sutas of physical inertia, equal parts Downward Dog and Face Fuck. Semi-colons and question marks swallow his hieroglyphic *watusi*, as undecipherable punctuation marks from lost civilizations materialize onto his impossibly aerobic torso.

Between the hopeful soft pillow of *what could be*, and the harsh brick of *what is*, he stretches out syllables for effect. Mocking lineage with phonetic opportunity, his growls evolve into jibs and yips — a gaseous git, with no finely-honed sense of welt or whip.

The microphone comes off the stand. Wielding its girth like a demonic faerie rod, divining truth from Succubus Pre-K, he serves up the canon in a reduction both pungent and lingering, and somersaults into the lair, screaming.

“You tired of the BLAH BLAH BLAH????”

Laughing at his joke he presses the microphone to someone’s face.

“And you!”

The invaded recalcitrant nervously bleats...

“BLAH BLAH BLAH”

A ripple of laughter pilfers the room — each *Blah* magnified beyond comprehension.

“And you!”

Another lemming lets loose...

“BLAH BLAH BLAH-AHH-AHH”

The host, now sensing a sea change, sweeps the stir with his wand — everyone grabbing for a chance to go “BLAH BLAH BLAH” into the saliva soaked yap-stick.

He makes his way through the horde. Chairs get tossed, drinks clatter, release palpable — everyone grabbing and screaming “BLAH BLAH BLAH” without



the mic. A cacaphony of “BLAH BLAH BLAH’S” and broken wood. A symphonic surrender, maniacally flying on waves of shattered glass.

*Dismembered rec-tums...and rub-bers with skin...*

*These are a few of my favorite...BLAH BLAH BLOODY BLAH!!!*

A Boschian tornado of Hieronymous reverie swirls the room. Animals transform out of audience members, fused together from seating combinations, appearing as feral clusters — the publisher, the critic, the tempest, the newbie — the has-been, the hipster, the brilliant, the scone. Mythological proteans of mayhem, reduced into one venomous snarl.

Amidst the naked occlusion of heft and heave, the *host-icorn* finds a filly, spread-eagled and bare. Her tail pulled up. His tail pulled down. Both holding tight going, “BLAH BLAH BLAH,” with every stroke.

Ripped pages and orphaned folios fly by. The giant that I was sitting next to has been flung onto the bar, dismembered in glee, his mouth in a frozen “BL-”. D.I.Y. chapbooks and indie presses get whipped into the maelstrom — roared into fellatio malignus in a carousel of torrential tongues, screaming out the common *cunil-lingua*.

After 14 minutes, just one shy of fame, the cosmic orgy of violence subsides. The room, left in a sea of impregnation and death — a quilt of jizz and chaos. Cum-soaked constellations on the ceiling, dripped in perspiring forever over a naked insurrection of improbable arousals, carcasses, and g-spots, scattered among the *boner impossible*.

The host, climbing over flesh and purpose, gets back onstage. Neither subject nor parable have survived. A cataclysmic wind, his silent applause.

Exhausted.

Naked.

Bloodied.  
Spent.  
Before his collapse.  
Into the microphone.  
He felches out his last words, to a room neither here nor gone...

*“Ladies . . . and Gentlemen . . . Edwin Torres.”*

poet Edwin Torres repositions the core of poetry.  
**realigns the body of poetry.**

reassembles the idea of 'poem.' From pieces like  
reassembles the body of the poem. From pieces like

poet Edwin Torres realigns the liking of.

poet Edwin Torres repositions the framework of.

poet Edwin Torres renders the framework of the possibility.

**poet renders possibility.**

realizes the possibility at the core of poetry.

recharges the possibility at the core of poetry.

repositions the core of the possibility of poetry.

renews the possible at the core of poetry.

're-possibles' the possibility at the core of what is and is not poetry.

're-possibles' the possibility of the possible.

possibly the most possible poet.

**the pore of the pore.**

**of pore is Torres.**

torn of the pore is the poet Torres.

**Torres is the porn of poetry.**

**K. SILEM MOHAMMAD**  
*from* The Sonnagrams<sup>1</sup>

Diddy vs. Chingy vs. W.S.

Alternatives to whoredom: are there any?  
New Wave in Indiana: is it good?  
Remember when I named my pet eel Lenny?  
Remember rodent statues made of wood?

If Taylor Swift were half the man I am,  
She'd ride a giant panda into battle;  
If Katie Holmes were worth a potter's damn,  
She'd go up Dawson's Creek without a paddle.

Count thirty narwhals living in Duluth,  
A trillion more in worlds no one has seen,  
Seventy-one diseases of the tooth,  
Nine dogs that slowly quack the color green.

Swiss girl, vow slyly, so, so slyly vow,  
And I will only dig P. Diddy now.

---

Sonnet 76 ("Why is my verse so barren of new pride?")

---

<sup>1</sup> My process for composing sonnagrams is as follows: I feed one of Shakespeare's sonnets into an internet anagram engine, generating fourteen lines of text that is quantitatively equivalent to Shakespeare's poem at the level of the letter. I then rearrange this text, clicking and dragging letter by letter until I have a new English sonnet. All leftover letters are used to make up a title.

## Even Eve Cut Ice (Cc GE, Eve)

Do not forsake me, Andrew Jackson darling,  
On this, our Mississippi wedding day:  
For I must face a wildebeest a-snarling,  
Or turn another fifty shades of grey.

Do not go gentle into Bubba Gump;  
Old age should not be wasted on the dead.  
Has anybody here seen Humpty Hump?  
Has anybody seen that movie *Ted*?

Do not detach the tag that's on your mattress;  
Its data is essential to my research.  
Don't ever hula-hula when in that dress.  
Don't even hula in that Fergie T-shirt.

When many have the munchies that are high,  
Feed every hungry face a chili fry.

---

Sonnet 78 ("So oft have I invoked thee for my muse")

## NYEIN WAY

### Event(3) Action Poetry Revisited 2012

action poetry:

he is dancing.

he is riding a horse.

he is driving a car.

He is speaking a language.

He is walking.

He is pressing a button of a video camera.

he is doing not knowing that he is doing an action.

he is learning karate.

he is navigating a ship.

He is doing things which others ask him to do.

He is building a house.

He is buying and selling.

he is teaching.

(Oh!! The whole world is packed with a variety of colorful actions!!)

But

He has never seen his own mental operations. mental compositions,  
mental compositions and mental deconstructions.

## Event(9) An Honored Guest

a tattered and torn clothes  
a smart mind but not the physical appearance  
no denying for the material decoration and sniff-fit knock-on-wood  
through so many neglected and marginalized honesty  
event itself posed a question of culture and civilized behaviors in time  
of the warrior-oriented global unity  
microchips of gone days  
the outdated mode taking the place with undignified glory of selfish  
fearless invasion of negligence  
will never be the real winner of truth  
An Honored Guest  
is 'wing of change'  
a rock song wind of change is a myth now  
Chinese rock band 'MAY DAY' is at the tipping point of change on  
stage.  
An Honored guest!!!!

## Event(10) Application Poetry Of The Contemporaneity

minimal production of worries and confused steps  
minimalist's conceptual design of life  
over many years  
happiness and comfort have been misused and manipulated  
registration research on the use of language, performatives, natural  
performances and distilled and redesigned experiences  
for the near future without future-oriented desire for granted  
donations  
still an image of horse and elephant-fastness and strength as efficient  
form  
and flexibility of freedom  
leading to a beyondness of manifestations of fixed i-initiated  
beingness  
and becomingness.



## Event(24) Clayed Revolution.I have an answer.

1.Clayed live performance events.I have an answer.I have an answer.A problem for one generation is a challenge to get an answer for the next generation.I have an answer.I have an answer.I have an answer.I have an answer.I have an answer.I have an answer.

2.Dissovlng into the realities of clayness.Transformations of forms deep in the textures of being clay.I have an answer.I have an answer.I have an answer.Mathematics plus.Life is a thing of mathematics plus.I have an answer.

3.Alchemist's performance exists as form and transforms into moment-to-moment realities.I have and answer.I have and answer.I have and answer.Irrawaddy is flowing.River is a just name.Water is always flowing.I have and answer.I have and answer.I have and answer.

4.Clasz revolution blue.It is music.It is history of the textures of clay.World peace.Delightfully I have and answer.Greed, anger and ignorance.I have and answer.I have and answer.I have and answer.

5.The ever-changing speed-logic of uncreative urban legendaries of conceptual poetry.The speed-logic of the rich soil.I am an earth-worm ploughing the derelict sites you have spoiled.Questions and question marks.The theatre.The dejaview of clayed textures deep in lives.Humanity.Theatre of illusion.Theatre of I-have-and-answer.Theatre of nursery-rhymes-for-true-lives.Simulacrum on the life-stage.I have and answer.I have and answer.I have and answer.I have and answer.

The ever-changing speed-logic of uncreative urban legends of conceptual poetry. The speed-logic of the rich soil. I am an earth-worm ploughing the derelict sites you have spoiled. Questions and question marks.

6. It is the Conceptual poetry of gift for you. Thank you.

7. Are you still wondering for the answer? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I HAVE AN ANSWER.

## DESMOND KON ZHICHENG-MINGDE

### Four Prose Poems

làng zǐ huí tóu :: return of the prodigal son

There are people who live normal lives close by. They're close enough, and it'd take a day to get to them. We call it "Little China," rather than "Chinatown," to allude to the enclaves we remember back home. In San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit. This is a tiny mass of immigrants. They claim to be the first Chinatown, to have arrived in the second half of the first millennium. That they trump the one in the Philippines, its original settlement dating back to the 1500s. We haven't made a trip there. But Jesuit has, and he maintains good relations with the Chinese. They throw him a banquet on the night of his arrival, even when he springs unannounced. He typically stays for two weeks, a month at best, and they throw him a banquet the night before he departs. We call it a town because it's a metropolis by comparison. They have cable television, and each family has a satellite dish mounted on its roof. The kids read voraciously, whipping out their iPads. They speak a hybrid of Hokkien and Cantonese, not their own dialect, which they lost when an elder died without ensuring he passed down the language. He insisted on speaking English and Mandarin, to keep up with the Joneses, as the aging model says, somewhat pleased with herself that she knows some intimate knowledge about their history. Is it a clan, like in the old days? "I wouldn't know," Jesuit responds to the man in the white hat and suit. He has been the quietest in the model's Bourgeoisie Bouquet. "Bourgeoisie Bouquet" is the name we've given this group, a clear signifier of their wealth, how they dress and talk, and their lack of manners when treating the natives. "I know they cook up a mean feast," Jesuit says. "Great thing, Chinese cuisine. They can dish up a meal in minutes. The banquets are lavish. There's wine, they're

not apologetic about that. And they always serve up a Hakka dish, as if to remind them of their lost heritage. A fattened chicken baked in an oven, and cooked in salt. Very delicious. Or abacus beads, dough balls made from yam that they fry up. There's chicken in these dough balls. Mushrooms, chives, spring onion. Dried shrimp and water chestnut for crunch. All very delicious."

exceptis excipiendis :: with all appropriate exceptions made

It's Counting Crows on the deck. The song is "Four White Stallions." The music is electrifying, and the air seems charged with its atmosphere, a buzzing static. "I wish I could see the Aurora Borealis from here," Gigi says. It is night, as pitch-black as all the rest here. The stars are all out, and the constellations spray themselves like quaint diagrams, no missing islet to obscure their presence or definition. "The Aurora isn't just lights, you know? They sing, like a school of whales. It sounds like a string of echoes but there's just one plain song to it all. Someone said it's the closest to an angelic choir we will ever get to witness." Witnesses. That's all they ever were, Gigi and Geronimo. Everywhere they went, they were but witnesses, whether it was a paid expedition or pro bono or an act of altruism. Witnessing is a kind of kindness, I suppose. You're meant to simply be there, like a gathering of others. Out of some volition beyond yourself, yet part of yourself. And you move on after that, a bit stronger hopefully. Gigi always thought she was but an appendage, a willing companion. Free world travel, which fool would pass that up? All her friends envied her. There was that, and that she had Geronimo, and that he had convinced himself she would be the one to play out his life with him. To the very end. "She had four strong angels and four more seasons?" Jesuit says, after listening to the song. The song has moved on, past a few tracks. It's now devoid of lyrics. It's Hans Zimmer's "Virtue." Jesuit looks up from his low desk, puts the pen to his brow. "That earlier song mentioned four angels, yes? And four pure reasons why someone can't go back there again? There's an artist too. Mind like a sabre. And something about how he still wants her."

## fēng zhú cán nián :: old and ailing

Geronimo fancies himself a couch philosopher. He thinks the way Epictetus did, likes the romantic notion of a slave turned thinker, how empowering a symbol that seems, more so in legacy than in history itself. Our rewriting of human experience is a kind of historical fiction. We're looking at Gigi through eyes no less colored and warped and forgiving and indifferent as Geronimo's. Or Dr. Eichelberger's for that matter. Gigi has picked up the spatula and sunk it into the stew. Her right hand is stirring. In her left hand is an open book. A new book. Maybe it's fiction today, or a bit of Walt Whitman or Hart Crane that the old priest would like. She notices there's a ship in one of the poems, pointed in the direction of New Jersey. It has dropped its anchor, and a small boat is idle beside it. Close up, the waves at the pier seem big. Formidable, and ominous. Epictetus thought philosophy wasn't exclusively a man's domain. That women could be philosophers too. The Stoics agreed, this is what we remember. There are still Stoics that walk the earth, at least they profess to be Stoics. Gigi has reached poikilmos with the old priest. She has reached the last limit of what pleasure is, as an Epicurean would have it, she no longer feels pain. Her body is lighter, the aches seem not to matter, so much so they might as well not be there. Her mind has never been more alert, and sensitive. Once pain is no longer present, no longer a part of the equation, all that's left is poikilmos. Or variation. This is a kind of seasoning, not unlike what Gigi uses for cooking. Like a sprinkling of tarragon or paprika. Except poikilmos – this almost unattainable state of being – does not add to pleasure. It only varies the pleasure that has been attained, which seems at least for now, a good state for Gigi to be in. It does account for her happiness.

gǎn tóng shēn shòu :: gratitude for the personal favor

“My grandniece is a convert,” Gigi says with a laugh. “She swears by Lionel Richie now, after listening to his new outing of duets. I like these new versions too. He’s paired himself with some of country music’s best. Willie Nelson. Kenny Rogers. And singers I only discovered through this album. Pixie Lott, Darius Rucker. Jennifer Nettles does this wonderful yelp as she gains entry into the second half of ‘Hello’.” Gigi sounds like a schoolgirl herself, waxing nostalgic about old songs. Even Lionel Richie was a radical sound when he first made the airwaves, as she recalls. She kept up with music through the kitchen radio, its knob always turned on. Her penchant for clichés, Geronimo says, could be solely attributed to this kitchen radio, which he unplugged once he got home from work. In the field, Geronimo seems to let Gigi have her way, as if she were his thin conduit to a former life, a familiar past. Jesuit is leaning against an easy chair, an unthreatening posture, even though his legs cut into Gigi’s space, so she has to sit with her legs pulled up to her chest. She does this naturally, as if not to want Jesuit to do anything about it. Blake Shelton’s soaring vocals has sliced through the air on “You Are,” an upbeat song. The player has a good bass, and the percussion is felt through the walls of the tree house. Kenny Chesney’s voice reminds Jesuit of cotton fields, and how once, he was given a ride through one. His grandfather was the driver, and he was test-driving the neighbor’s tractor. “My grandniece is in love with Shania Twain, so ‘Endless Love’ has made it to her Top 25 songs on her iPod. She has it on rotation. I told her to listen to the Diana Ross version, also done with Lionel Richie. And to compare it with this version. She mailed over a CD, and on it was Mariah Carey and Luther Vandross’ cover of the song. She’s got that on repeat too.”

**CHEOM-SEON KIM**

*from 10 cm Art*

To Die On The Back Of A Horse

I died on the back of a galloping horse. As a corpse I fell to ground. This happened in my past lives. I died like this not just once but countless times. I died each time before I was twenty. After years of hard training to become a warrior, the very first time I went into battle I would turn in the enemy's direction and die. This was because I was very brave. I was the type willing to go through hell and high water. Disregarding the flying arrows and spears, I would rush headlong toward the enemy and die. I died like this each time. I never made it to thirty. My soul never knew what it meant to die past twenty.

In all my lives, this is the first time I've lived a long time. In this world, I was born a woman. In my adult life, our country has never faced war. Now I'm over fifty. It's a miracle. I don't know how to take care of my body. That's true when I'm painting too. I should work for a reasonable amount of time and then rest for a reasonable amount. But once I start painting, I wear my body down until I'm ill. After I fall ill, I start crying and crying, wondering why I abuse myself. Only afterwards do I realize that I'm totally exhausted.

If I had just once had the chance to age a little in my previous lives, I'd probably know how to take care of myself. In my next life, I'll be able to live a balanced life. Like my friends, I'll go to the gym, run on a treadmill, drink tonics, and do exercises.



I died on the back of a horse. The horse's back is my deathbed. My last memory was of riding a horse. That's why I paint horses. Even though I don't know why I paint horses, I paint them. I can never get enough of painting horses. No matter how many times I paint horses, I'm never satisfied. However many horses I may paint, I still want to paint more horses.

I died on the back of a horse. At the very moment I took my last breath, I was on the back of a galloping horse. At that moment the horse and I were one. Was the horse my spirit? Or was I a horse?

I was born again as a human. I became a painter. I paint horses.

## The Real Me: The Hollow World

Life's futile. What's to be cherished? I decided not to be afraid of death. When I was about ten years old, my father would gather my brothers and me and tell us stories.

*Once upon a time two close friends lived next door to each other. One night, one of the friends went to the other's house with a sack slung over his shoulder that had something inside. "Hey, buddy, I messed up and killed someone. I have to bury him underneath your floor." "OK," the other one said. The two buried the sack beneath the floor. The next day the one went back to his friend's. "You really are my friend," he said. "Yesterday it wasn't a person, it was just a pig." They dug out the pig and threw a party.*

This is where my father would stop the story. It made a big impression upon me. All of ten years old, I made a vow. I vowed that even if my friends did something bad, I would stick by them until death. The way I heard it was that I should even kill someone for friendship. I worked hard over the years to keep that vow.

Case #1: A friend of mine started an affair with a married man. My friend asked me to go with her to a shaman to pray for the wife's death, and I followed without asking any questions.

Case #2: For several friends who couldn't pass their classes, I would take their tests, regardless of what school they went to, what sex they were, or what course they were in.

Case #3: If one of my friends told me to steal something, I would. At a coffee shop, I would steal an ashtray or a saucer. If we were out shopping, I would steal a tangerine or some coffee.

A year later it wasn't to a minister, a priest, or a monk that I confessed my sins, but to my mother.

"Stop doing this, alright?" my mother said.

"OK," I said through my tears.

I would steal books from libraries. Korea is stupid for closing libraries at exactly closing time. They want you to drop what you're reading and leave. So you have to steal some books. With the book I wanted to finish reading in hand, I would get to the library's foyer and then take off running. My friends pointed out big books, or just ones they liked, and they would say, "That one!" And I would steal it.

One day the geography teacher came into our room.

"Where did you get such a nice book?"

"I stole it from the library."

"Lend it to me, would you?" he said.

"Alright, you take it."

Finally, my sins were cut in half.

I felt better. If someone asked me to do something bad, I would get really surprised. How much they must trust me that they would ask me of all people to commit their crime for them! When someone would ask me, it scared me a little. But then I would get a rush thinking that they had chosen me, and, thinking about the adrenaline and feeling of accomplishment I would get from the task at hand, I never stopped to quibble about whether it was right or wrong. On the one hand, it was hard because I just wanted

to please whichever friend it was. I would say, "Yeah, let's do it!" because I didn't want to see them wracked by hesitation and guilt. But doing things like this, I bottomed out. Doing good felt meaningless, and doing bad only made me depressed.

For the first time I started to think that maybe I should think about things for myself. I worried about little, weak me floating through the infinite depths of outer space. Thinking about myself in the bigger picture made me really nervous.

I decided to look at things up close. I bought a bouquet of flowers. I sat down, and, staring at them, I kept saying, "So beautiful, so beautiful ...". I didn't try to solve the mystery of the beauty of the flowers. I decided to dedicate myself to beauty. So now I'm a person always in pursuit of beauty. I dedicated myself to loving beautiful things. I'll die when the time comes.

## The Real Me: The Staggering Bird

A bird is walking down the street. The dirty, sick bird is staggering down the city's asphalt streets. It's just like me.

The path of the artist's life that Sang-yu Kim had directed me towards was the very state of impoverishment that I found myself in and that without any end in sight. We were so poor that we couldn't buy decent rice. We were that poor. We bought the old rice the government sold. It was cheaper even than barley. It was so bad it should have been fed to livestock as fodder. But we ate it to stay alive. But eating just that wasn't enough to fill us up. I wondered if this lifestyle was really the artist's way.

The rice shop in our neighborhood closed before dark. Because the store hardly made any profit on the discounted rice, they wouldn't deliver. Also, you couldn't get it in small quantities. You had to buy a twenty-kilo bag. I told my husband to go buy some rice. My husband was sitting in the middle of the room. Like a Buddha deep in the mountains, he didn't indicate whether he had heard me or not, and he didn't budge an inch. So I asked him again. After I said it ten times, he answered, "It's embarrassing to have to buy that rice during the day." He meant that it was embarrassing to carry around a big bag of government rice. And the rice store in our neighborhood was closed after dark. So there was nothing left to do but for me to buy it myself.

I set out to buy the rice from the neighborhood store. I bought a big sack and slung it over my shoulder. I couldn't really even stand up. I staggered forward tentatively. Because I was malnourished, I often faltered. I walked along just like a dirty, sick bird.

Sang-yu Kim had insisted that I should be so poor that when I was buying bean sprouts I should shiver so as to get more. But we didn't even have the money for bean sprouts. Instead I would pick grass from the hillside and boil it in soybean paste. That was all we had.

Then we were about to run out of the government rice. In a week, we would be starving. I wracked my brains trying to figure out what to do. While painting, I came up with three possibilities.

One: I would call everyone I knew and beg. Or ask to borrow money.

Two: I would take hostages and demand ransom—food!

Three: I would keep my dignity to the very end. I would paint and paint and maintain my composure right up until I died.

After much deliberation, I decided upon the third course. Our lives were worth very little. But I was ashamed on account of our five-year-old boy. I worried so much about him. Should we all die together? Should just the two of us go off somewhere and die? Should we send him somewhere? All these worries overwhelmed me.

We had hardly any food left. I worried a lot about my son, but I couldn't decide on anything. During this time, I continued painting. Then one painting sold for fifty thousand won. I was so happy. Then before we used up that money, another painting sold. Then another. It was shocking. Finally I got an answering machine so I wouldn't have to answer the incoming calls. I decided to stop painting small sized ones. I didn't pick up the phone, but they came anyway to buy what I had. So I showed them a hundred small canvases of one hundred *ho* (130 cm). At the time, I painted only that size. Finally I was able to live comfortably as an artist.

## The Real Me: Trips

I hardly ever go on trips. I can count on one hand the number of times I've gone on trips. When I do, I set aside the money needed for the return trip, then I spend the rest on a bed and breakfast.

"For this much money, how long can I stay here?" I ask.

"Five months."

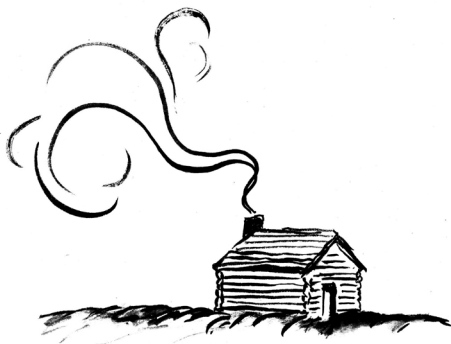
So I stay there for that long. That is, until dust covers everything other than the lid of the ink pot that I have brought. Taking its lid, I carefully move it onto my notebook. I open the lid. I dip my fountain pen into the ink, and then I carefully put the bottle back in the spot where it had been. The change from the dusty ink pot to the blue bottle's dust-free lid is beautiful. The gray dust. Soft like flannel. Fluffy like a cloud. Not wanting to disturb the dust, I move as gently as possible. I love that dust.

For five months, I don't make my bed, don't use heat, and, of course, I don't clean the room even once.

Finally it gets to be too much and I get sick.

But how beautiful dust is! It takes time, patience, and love to make it. It has to be a willing sacrifice to make such beautiful dust. The beauty of this dust isn't an ordinary sort of beauty. Sacrificing your body so much that you have to check yourself into the hospital for a month in order to recover is something you hardly ever see.

**ANNE McGUIRE**  
Moving in Backwards



Drowsily Laura heard a long wolf-howl rising from far away on the prairie, but only a little shiver went up her backbone and she fell asleep. Now they were all inside the stout walls of their new home, and they were snug and safe. Jack followed at his heels and lay down across the doorway. So Pa came in without a sound.



“You’ll wake the children. Hush, Charles.  
Softly Ma said,

He came to the doorway, singing:  
“By the pale, silver light of the  
moon—”

His voice was like a part of the night and the  
moonlight and the stillness of the prairie.  
Pet and Patty and Pa were coming toward  
the house, and Laura heard Pa singing:

“Sail on, silver moon!  
Shed your radiance o’er the sky—”

Then the faint thuds of their feet came into  
her ear from the floor.

She heard Pet and Patty whinnying softly  
to Pa.

Then Laura very quickly lay down, before Ma saw her naughtily sitting up in bed.

It was so bright that Laura saw Ma plainly when she lifted the quilt at the door and came in. The light poured through the window hole and made a square of soft radiance on the floor. Its light made silvery lines in all the cracks on that side of the house.

She looked at the great moon, sailing silently higher in the clear sky. The edge of the big, bright moon glittered at the bottom of the window space, and Laura sat up. Mary and Laura lay in their little bed on the ground inside the new house, and watched the sky through the window hole to the east.

He called back, softly, “Come out here, Caroline, and look at the moon.”

Then Pa went out to bring Pet and Patty close to the house. The quilt would be better than no door. Ma carried her into the house and undressed her, while Mary unbuttoned Laura’s dress and petticoat waist down the back, and Pa hung a quilt over the door hole.

Baby Carrie was already asleep. “Well, it’s bedtime,” Ma said.

There was no way to find out. And sitting there by the camp fire, no one knew what might have happened in the Big Woods. Back in the Big Woods so far away, Grandpa and Grandma and the aunts and uncles and

cousins did not know where Pa and Ma and Laura and Mary and Baby Carrie were.

But Independence was forty miles away, and no letter could go until Pa made the long trip to the post-office there. Pa and Ma talked about the folks in Wisconsin, and Ma wished she could send them a letter. That night they would sleep in the house; they would never sleep beside a camp fire again. After supper they sat for a while by the camp fire.

That afternoon she washed the clothes in the tub and spread them on the grass to dry. "Indians do." "If we wanted to live like Indians, you could make a hole in the roof to let the smoke out, and we'd have the fire on the floor inside the house," said Ma.

“Indian women do.” “You could wash clothes in the creek,” he told her. After dinner he hitched Pet and Patty to the wagon and he hauled a tubful of water from the creek so that Ma could do the washing.

“Yes, and I want a well.” Pa laughed.

“When that’s all done,” said Ma, “I want a clothes-line.”

But all that work must wait until he had helped Mr. Edwards and had built a stable for Pet and Patty. He would lay a puncheon floor, and make beds and tables and chairs.

He would hew out slabs to make a solid roof, too, before winter came. Pa said he would build a fireplace in the house as soon as he

could. Only the camp fire stayed where it had been.

A soft light came through the canvas roof, wind and sun- shine came through the window holes, and every crack in the four walls glowed a little because the sun was overhead. It was a pleasant house. Boxes and bundles were neat against the walls. Pa's gun lay on its pegs above the doorway. The wagon-seat and two ends of logs were brought in for chairs. The beds were neatly made on the floor. By dinner time the house was in order.

Everything was so free and big and splendid. She liked the enormous sky and the winds, and the land that you couldn't see to the end of. She liked this place, too. Laura knew what he meant.

Look at that sky!” No matter how thick and close the neighbors get, this country’ll never feel crowded. “Even when it’s settled up.

“Even when it’s settled up?” Ma asked.

This is a country I’ll be contented to stay in the rest of my life.” “This is a great country. “We’re going to do well here, Caroline,” Pa said.

It was not like the wagon, that every morning went on to some other place. But that house had good stout walls, and it would stay where it was. There was no floor except the ground and no roof except the canvas. There was no door and there were no windows.

“I’ll be thankful to get into it,” said Ma.

Then they looked at the house and Pa said,  
“How’s that for a snug house!”

Then he hugged her, quilts and all. He ran his hand through his hair so that it stood up even more wildly, and Ma burst out laughing. The ends of the logs stuck out, and he used them for a ladder. Pa came right down the corner of the house.

“You scalawag!” “Oh, Charles!” Ma said.

“Why, Caroline, what did you think I was going to say?” “—and be good,” Pa said to the canvas.



She stood with her arms full of quilts and looked up at him reprovngly. Charles!" Ma said.

"There!" he said to it. "Stay where you are, and be—"

But he held tight to the wall with his legs, and tight to the canvas with his hands, and he tied it down. Once it jerked so hard that Laura thought he must let go or sail into the air like a bird. He held on to the canvas and fought it. The canvas billowed in the wind, Pa's beard blew wildly and his hair stood up from his head as if it were trying to pull itself out. Pa was on top of the walls, stretching the canvas wagon-top over the skeleton roof of saplings.

But she soon swept the earthen floor, and then Mary and Laura began to help her

carry things into the house. Ma limped, though her sprained ankle was beginning to get well.

But there were still chips on the ground inside the house when Ma began to sweep it with her willow-bough broom. They ran back and forth as fast as they could, gathering their skirts full of chips and dumping them in a pile near the fire. So they ate quickly, and hurried to carry all the chips out of the house.

“We’re moving into the house today, and all the chips must be out.” “Eat your breakfasts quickly,” Ma said, putting the last of the rabbit stew on their tin plates.

Then Ma called: “Girls! The sun’s up!” and Laura and Mary scrambled out of bed and into their clothes.

They're away on a hunting-trip now, I guess."

"Oh, I don't know," Pa replied, carelessly. "I've seen their camping-places among the bluffs.

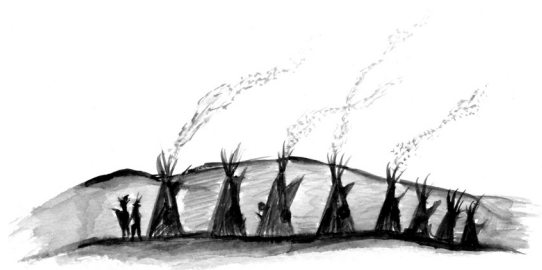
"Why do you suppose we haven't seen any Indians?" Ma asked.

"But I'll feel easier in my mind when you and the girls have good solid walls around you. Yes, and there's Jack."

"Well, you have your gun, so I'll not worry," said Ma.

"Last night I could hear wolves howling from every direction, seemed like, and close, too. I must build the stable as fast as I can, so Pet and Patty can be inside walls, too. We'd

better move in and get along as best we can without a floor or other fixings. The walls are up," Pa was saying to Ma in the morning.



## KIM ROSENFELD

### A Little Interview for Tripwire

DB: Tell me about the new work. What are you grappling with, where are you collecting material, how are you collaging/manipulating/examining it?

KR: This new work is still really in formation. I don't know much about it yet other than my original idea was to collapse Iggy Pop's life into that of Cervantes' Don Quixote character. Right now it's pretty straightforward data gathering. I'm collecting many versions of the Don Quixote story and amassing any Iggy Pop materials in print and online that I can find. Did you hear his BBC radio keynote lecture—"Free Music in a Capitalist Society"? So good! So problematic!

My method of working is always the same—I siphon language off from the source material, then hand write it into my notebook in pencil, then when I fill a notebook I transcribe it onto my computer. With the transcribing comes the editing/examining/manipulating. Fascinating, isn't it? LOL!

DB: You've written books that engage with language taken from domains such as fashion and evolutionary science, for instance. Is there a difference for you, whether in compositional method or formal approach, when dealing more directly with what we might think of as 'pop' culture (not that fashion and science don't partake of pop!)?

KR: No. No difference. Language is language and material to be worked with regardless of the content. I tend to mine for emotionality, pathos, humor, historicity, etc. whether it's an Iggy Pop interview or a book on genetics or the H-Bomb or *Vogue*.

DB: You also work as a psychotherapist — to what extent if any does that work spill over or inform your writing? Does your “poetry life” effect your psych practice and/or research & writing?

KR: Both practices are totally integral to each other—I don’t think I could do one without the other at this point. My clinical work is a living breathing skin that contains everything I do. It’s putting poetic practice into motion constantly, through experiential immersion in ideas of the field, the unconscious, symbolization, jokes, puns, working in the unknown, projective identification, defenses, collaboration, censorship, subjectivity, chaos, narration, history, desire, memory, identity, presence, absence, to name just a fraction of the concepts/self states that move through my poetic practice as well. Not to mention the presentation of self(s) that happens in the consulting room as well as through poetic writing/performance. I’ve been especially focused for years on the work of Wilfred Bion, who is a huge influence on my thinking in both poetic/clinical realms. Among one of the many radical ideas of Bion is that the analyst is always veering in the direction of the unknown. I think this should be the stance of the poet as well.

DB: What else are you working on these days?

KR: Well the main project for me that’s front and center at the moment is a collection of essays on post-conceptual writing that I’m co-editing with Steven Zultanski. We’ve kept it compact and local (East Coast poets) and asked them to begin to formalize, roughly six years after conceptual writing, the current state of post-conceptual thought and practice. It’s going to be super lively and provocative and will probably piss a lot of people off! I’m working on an essay for it that is dealing with the split-off psychotic aspects of self in post-con writing. I’m really excited about the book and hope it generates productive conversations about just how far and wide language can be bent.

*from* “James Osterberg of Muskegon”

## The Second Sally: Adventure of the Windmills

I wrestle with some matters of grave importance to the future of art sitting quietly with bombs going off in my head. I like to walk around the streets with a heart full of napalm

WHAT’S MY HEART FULL OF? It is basically full of napalm

## More Adventures Along the Way: PIGSLOBS & PENANCE

I used to shit on my little balcony and let it Dry I almost always pee in the yard or the Garden Because I like to pee on my Estate Straight down the lifeless path to the joyless garden Gate

We destroyed homes With the greatest of ease Four dashing baboons On a wicked trapeze

Shag-haired, frilly-vest wearing crapola Continental semi-sandals—What the pimp wears Around the garden



PENANCE (I couldn't do hate's hurt in some dusty dump)

It was up In the North Woods Of Michigan

We had to Take a small plane To get to the town

And we stayed In a rustic inn Very pleasant nice vibes

And we get to A hill And there down below

Is an encampment That was Straight out of Spartacus

Remember in Spartacus When the slaves were camping with all the fires? It was very foreboding

People were pounding On the car And throwing rocks at me

They were wild A really wild bunch Totally out of control

When everything was Cleared away A guy was found

Strapped to a tree With an axe through his heart Legs and arms strapped to a pine tree

The lights went down The music went up I stood onstage And collapsed Without a note being sung I'd OD'd in front of everyone And had to be carried off I think that was one of my greatest shows ever It was so minimally perfect It just said a great deal

The third night  
I decided  
to hang from a pipe in the building  
like monkeys do—  
hang upside down

I didn't know  
the pipe  
was part of  
the  
sprinkler system

So I was hanging  
by my legs  
I was upside-down  
swinging

Slowly  
but surely  
it starts to  
give

The entire  
sprinkler system  
in the whole place  
gave way  
I fell  
on my ass

(What did Christ really do? He hung out with hard-drinking fishermen. And when they asked him, “Why are you hanging out with prostitutes and fishermen”? He said, “Because they need me.”)  
(What a line, you know?)

(But what your martial society really wants is blood. We need some blood. We need some suffering. Like, the individual must suffer for the good of the whole. I toy around with that) (Early on, I wasn't looking at Jesus Christ, saying to myself, “What an angle.”) (I wasn't trying to be Christ-y) (But, after all, on one level, this is showbiz)

## PART TWO

### Preparations for the Third Sally

#### The Enchantment of Marshall 2203's

It is the proximity of the electric hum  
in the background  
and this tremendous  
buoyancy and  
power-feeling  
of when you  
start being  
in the presence of  
this power  
you also  
become  
its  
witness

Just the  
sheer  
presence  
of  
electricity  
in large  
doses  
real comfortable  
real calm

the music comes out of the speakers  
grabs you by the throat  
knocks your head against the wall  
and just basically kills you

It was a sweeping sound—  
Mongolian horsemen  
charging in  
thousands of them  
little Tartars with swords  
Lethal elements of disarray

I was in love  
deeply  
completely  
hooked  
on the apparatus  
itself

The constant  
exposure  
to  
amplifiers  
and to  
hearing  
my own  
voice  
amplified  
has  
altered

my body  
chemistry  
in which  
after  
all  
the  
life  
lives

## The Last Adventures

I slather my body in peanut butter  
I barf on my audience  
I insult my audience  
I spit on my audience  
I hump my amps  
I throw myself offstage  
I cut myself with broken glass  
I wear silver-lamè evening gloves onstage  
I go naked  
I shoot heroin  
I make frequent use of my big, beautiful penis  
I crash my car into trees  
I beg horrified record-label executives for drug money  
I pass out in bathrooms with the spike still in my arm  
I check myself in to a mental institution  
I score coke off David while I'm there

## JULIETTA CHEUNG

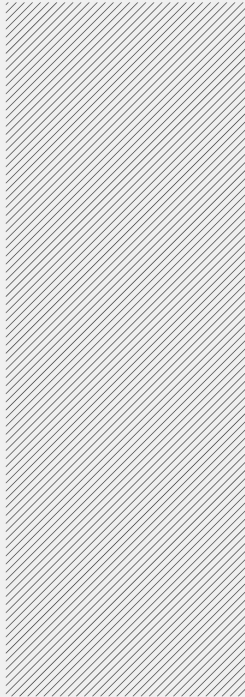
### True Exposure

*True Exposure* (2013) invites viewers to question the collective shaping of the buzz term “innovation.” It is a sculptural installation consisting of posters, thousands of laser-printed texts, and plush seating. By using an interactive reading environment of bean bag furnishings that can be reshaped by visitors, the installation reenacts the type of participatory environment made popular through recent corporate brainstorming sessions and ‘90s Relational Art. The text is remade from publically available reports and discussions on the topic of innovation. First, I applied the search term “innovation” across a variety of on-line news media outlets, blogs and social networking sites. Then I copied the search results and replaced all mentions of “innovation” with an equally ambiguous term “true exposure.” I further invented a new glossary around “true exposure” and used it to replace all derivations of “innovation” (e.g. “innovate,” “innovator,” etc.).





conditioned to  
being exposed...  
true exposure,  
creativity and  
investment in new  
improved phrases.  
Right? The ques-  
tion raised in this  
deep-inside-the-  
paper story is, is it  
even true? Can a  
country continue  
to be conditionally  
exposed if it ...  
Posted on February  
14, 2011  
Why Single



*Either we feel suspended, with nothing but the air below, or we reach the exposure of our lives... having been laid bare and therefore requiring shelter and then to seek the company of fellow men and women lest we vanish and decay. Will we be relevant in 2097?*

*... free preview in (Misty Lemon, a hint of Mustard) ends.*

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TRUE/9

COULD 24/7 SELF-  
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AN ASPECT OF YOUR  
MODEL?  
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ER JASONHAUER  
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TRUE EXPOSURE

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TRUE EXPOSURE

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YOU%2B3E%2BREL  
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BREAK THINGS







## MAY YWAY

### Such & Such are the Window Displays of the City

I want this. I want that. Only wants congeal.  
After all the films, & the books,  
we click on other people's lives.  
Love is a sheet of sandwich cheese.  
Here & there, it gets stuck on your teeth when you let it loose on a bun.  
It looks tasty when it stays right between the two baps. It does taste good.  
Overseas cost overmoney. To avoid a mindover,  
Turn down the subwoofer & hum along just for your ears.  
My mates say, 'It's not Yway if she doesn't say "I envy you."'   
Don't know if I've envied anyone.  
Perhaps my prayers have tagged along with someone.  
They were mine in the first place. I just want to rent them back.  
If you have to survive on hope, you might as well be long dead.  
The noise of grinding a thanaka bark & pounding chilli from upstairs,  
Music from the other side, volume all the way up,  
The snore of the tenth graders & university students,  
The patient who was given six months—he will go any time,  
Tossing & turning in endless psychotic nights,  
Alcoholic, wobbly & hostile steps from the stairs that have kicked open  
the iron gate,  
Cusswords & trots from the ceiling . . .  
A house built under a contract has no right to wish for  
high-class condominium cultures.  
Is this all about the lines between bourgeoisie / proletariat  
Good circumstances / good timing / good place?  
Each one goes bang-bang, playing her own ensemble of drums & gongs.

Each of us, one another, three, five & ten.  
Powers come together when bases are the same.  
Neighbourhood happens just right after the equal sign.  
Good & evil need not be separated,  
they ain't end up in the same category anyway.  
After six months, we'll move out. After one year, we'll move out.  
The roll of papers in hand has taken flight after the ground plan.  
Among the woofing mutts from upstairs, downstairs,  
from the left, from the right, & from the street,  
this howl of mine might as well be instinctual.

## She Who is Going to Add 1 to 20

She is going to add 1 to 20.

She gently floors the brake pedal to each of her right steps that head for him.

At each bend, you have to shift the gear.

Honk the horn.

Check the cars to the rear. You always have to check the rear.

Return phone calls bump into each other on the way & collapse.

You-said-here-but-you-are-there-&-vice-versa Airlines  
departs for him punctually.

Inbound passengers, outbound passengers, all are passengers.

Minskirts, or minishorts, but never reveal your butts.

Not all minis are pole dancer Honey's. Don't you stereotype.

There is always a verse in my mini.

Just so whatever I write inks you. Whatever inks you I write.

Minimize the noise until it is reduced to the sound of breath.

To you all, that's it. She is defiant in her quietism.

Inasmuch as they tend to retreat from you en masse,

karmas tend to charge at you en masse.

Electronic circuits can burn if you touch them without expertise.

Just like the potty in the room corner,

I get up to write.

Who will be bothered with switching on & off of the lamp?

This has always been a single room since I moved in.

(applause)

Why? It's just a pause to swallow my saliva. Someone in the crowd yells

'How long will you go on about that room?' Forget it if that round of applause is  
in the program. She's been gone for a while.

She hasn't come to her last line.

—first published in *Poetry International*

## GRZEGORZ WRÓBLEWSKI

### Shotokan

After the publication of the series MY LIFE WITH ANN  
on the website *The Post-Literate (R)evolution*,  
people began to ask me who Ann is anyway,  
isn't she maybe my neighbor, why  
haven't we appeared together at the bazaar in Aarhus, etc.

Ann worked with tigers, while I  
was a chimpanzee expert. (We quickly reached an  
agreement.) She practiced Shotokan karate . . .  
One time we took a trip to the Aegean Sea.  
Our poetic hero was Vincente Huidobro.

The guesthouse was called *Old Marabout*.  
We excelled at kumite. Later, she met an academic  
from the Isles. (The prof seemed like a joker high on  
Mexican cactus . . . ) Now Ann sends me  
five Easter cards per year.

Funakoshi was a loner. Her new partner will quickly be  
disappointed.  
She will not wait for sunrises. She will strangle him  
as he sleeps.

## Bronislaw Malinowski's Moments of Weakness

*If I had a revolver, I'd shoot a pig!*

A scholar should wear proper clothes, after all. Malinowski ordered two Norfolk jackets from a tailor in Chancery Lane. Also a helmet made of cork, with a lacquered canvas cover.

In one letter, he wrote: *Today I'm white with fury at the Niggers . . .*

*If I had a revolver, I'd shoot a pig!*

His stay on Trobriand Island was pissing him off.

In spite of that, he became a distinguished anthropologist. (Just now a certain myope, a butterfly expert, is praying to him with his girlfriend. Instead of a birthday condom, he gave her a volume by M. Sahlins.)

Our national hero, the guru of anthropology, Mr. MALINOWSKI!!!  
whose stay on Trobriand Island was pissing him off.

Before leaving Europe, he ordered two Norfolk jackets from a tailor in Chancery Lane.

1. His book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* won him international acclaim.

*If I had a revolver, I'd shoot a pig!*

2. *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* became a bestseller.

Whereas

Malinowski's investigative methods "remain the standard for modern research" . . .

*If I had a revolver, I'd shoot a pig!*

*If I had a revolver, I'd shoot a pig!*

*If I had a revolver,*

*I'd shoot a pig!*

## I Take Great Pleasure in Yellow Flowers

The fog arrived in leaps . . .

Next, the GAUCHO SUPER POWER solemnly entered  
the Milky Way. The luxury edition

of the all-terrain vehicle GAUCHO. Perfect engine,  
rubber wheels, chrome detail.

Ideal for two children,  
ages 3-7, maximum weight capacity  
50 kg.

The Gaucho

has two seats with safety belts . . .

I stopped drinking water and the old lizard that had memorized  
Apollinaire's "Lul de Faltenin" escaped.

I take great pleasure  
in yellow flowers.

## SELAH SATERSTROM

*from Slab*

+ SCENE TWO +

*-in which-*

*TIGER Goes to the Dogs*

### STAGE NOTES:

It is night. Tiger walks the perimeter of the slab peering into thick darkness. She returns to center stage, counts her remaining cigarettes, and lights another.

Around the block from my sister's kind of shitty neighborhood there was this huge house where some rich people lived. The people had the house built to look like Tara in *Gone with the Wind* and it looked ridiculous because the surroundings ruined the effect. It turned out that the people who built that house were rednecks who'd won the Louisiana lottery.

The yard guy who worked for these people was found dead and they said the dogs had done it. The rich people had three rottweilers, and these rich people found the guy in their backyard. The rottweilers had a reputation in the neighborhood. I'd be taking a walk with my sister and we'd pass the rich people's house and see the dogs and under her breath she'd say, Oh look it's those dogs, they are really sweet. The dogs had a reputation for being really sweet. Not like other rottweilers that mauled faces off children. Sitting on Reno and Wanda's porch talking about my sister and the dogs while knocking back some beers, Reno said, Shit, that's the thing about intense dogs; you never know when they'll snap and neither do they and it's all one big happy family until the apocalypse explodes in your fucking face. Yes, I said, I guess that's the thing.

People in the neighborhood wanted justice for the yard guy. They wanted those dogs dead. When I'd ask my sister if there was an update on the yard guy situation, she never said, Boy were we wrong about those dogs. Then one day she told me it wasn't the dogs' fault; turns out yard guy was on meth and the dogs were trying to rouse him after he'd collapsed. But at that point she couldn't resume the old myth of "those dogs are really sweet" even though it turns out the myth was true.



Then there was that miserable woman in France. A total junkie, she tries to kill herself but just overdoses. Her Labrador tries to wake her from her drug-induced coma and does. She sits, lights a cigarette. Something I can totally identify with. But when she pulls her hand away from her mouth: blood. She looks in the mirror. Her face: gone. That same day another woman tries to kill herself and succeeds. When the mauled woman gets to the hospital, the French doctors have an idea. Something never before attempted. Why don't we take the face off the woman who killed herself and put it on the woman who got her face eaten by a dog while trying to kill herself? How fucked up is that? I swear to God, French people. Anyway, the irony here: the dead woman lives on through her face and the living woman has to wear the face of a dead woman.

In both of these stories, people first believed dogs were responsible for the atrocious happenings, but in both of these stories, it was the people's own fault for dying or wanting to.

My grandfather once shot a dog. He had to because it was rabid and this was in the country. Not long before my grandfather died, he told me that for years he suffered nightmares in which he relived the moment before he shot the dog. He had thrown a steak and the dog went to fetch it, which is when my grandfather raised his rifle, but right then the dog turned and looked at him. My grandfather was crying, kind of sobbing actually, when he told me this story.

Maybe he thought he disappointed the dog by breaking some code of ethics whereby you do not shoot dogs in the back even if they are rabid. A couple of days after he told me this story, he shot himself.

Did he break down while telling me the dog story because he knew he would use that gun again? Here's the answer: who knows.

When my grandfather shot himself he did it on the back porch where we sometimes kept our two dogs. They were small, cheerful dogs. After his death they went under the porch and wouldn't come out, not even to eat. I spent a week on my belly under that porch trying to comfort them. After, the dogs were given away. One ended up having a happy life and one ended up having a sad life.

I have read two novels that feature dogs as metaphorical themes. Both books were about the heart, our human dog hearts, our breaking heart hearts, and then just getting on with things. I loved those books when I read them because they seemed hopeful.

I once wrote a poem about dogs and when my lover read it he was beside himself though he didn't know why. Really, there was a bad dog in the poem but it was about this other guy, not my lover, but a guy I had sex with a week before meeting my lover, an experience I failed to mention to my lover as I was so caught up being in love. Much later, when I told my lover about the other guy, he became furious and ended our affair. There were other reasons of course but I look back at when my lover read that dog poem and think, Goddamn.

You also see those bumper stickers, the ones that say DOG IS MY CO-PILOT. Are the people who put these bumper stickers on their cars making fun of God or AA? It is unclear.

When I was a kid I thought *Cujo* was the scariest fucking movie ever. I remember only one scene, the one toward the end where the sweaty mother and wounded kid are in this tiny hatchback piece of shit that of course won't start and Cujo is pounding on the windows, a killing machine.

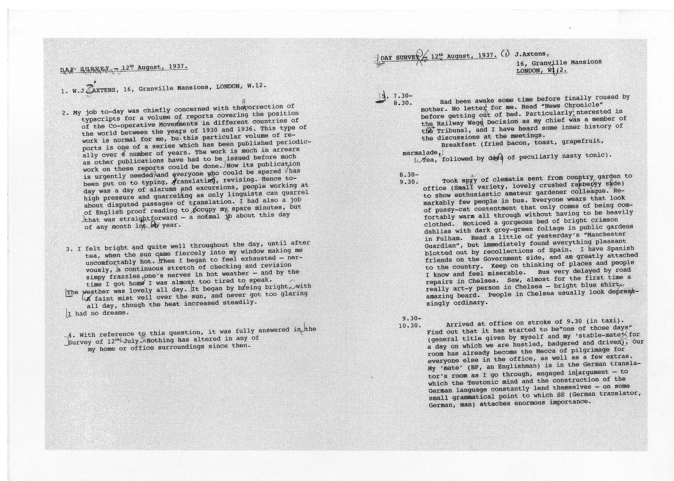
I was told as a child that a black dog portends death. Years later, when I was working at a 7-Eleven, I'd get night shifts with this guy, Jim, I had a major crush on. Only freaky or drunk people came in late at night so we would go out back before our shifts and get stoned out of our minds. Then Jim would get the portable jam-box out of his car and bring it into the store and we'd listen to music, which I didn't know anything about but Jim knew a lot about. One night Jim played the Nick Drake song "Black Eyed Dog" then told me how Nick Drake died right after he wrote that song and that he had unbelievably long fingernails when they found his emaciated body. Jim cranked up the volume and we listened to the song again and it was like you could hear it all in the brassy edges of Nick Drake's voice. In the middle of the song a college kid came in to buy some condoms. Jim didn't turn down the volume so the kid had to buy the condoms with "Black Eyed Dog" blaring. It was so great because it was like Jim was giving that kid a sermon or something, like: *You want condoms? Well here you go and "Black Eyed Dog," motherfucker.* Coincidentally this was the first time I thought about marriage as a personal option, seeing Jim toss the condoms at the kid like that. I thought, There are some people I could learn to live with.

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A version of this story also appeared as a limited edition letterpress  
project published by Nor By Press.



# SE BARNET

## A Day of Continual Irritation For Myself



12th August, 1937 – Day Survey #4. Limited Edition Risograph Print

## Ghosts in the Archive

*It was something even more intense than despair that I then observed upon the countenance of the singular being whom I had watched so pertinaciously. Yet he did not hesitate in his career, but, with a mad energy, retraced his steps at once, to the heart of the mighty London. Long and swiftly he fled, while I followed him in the wildest amazement, resolute not to abandon a scrutiny in which I now felt an interest all-absorbing.*

—Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd”

SE Barnett's multi-platform investigation of mass observation, self-expression, and the rigorous mediation of the many-layered results of textual production explores the manifold ways in which we retain whatever lingering traces of individual subjectivity remain in our ceaseless (and increasingly compulsory) labor of word processing. Despite the intensifying regimes of rigid categorization and technological normalization that threaten to turn our incredibly diverse (and seemingly unending) modes of self-representation into regimented, dehumanized, algorithmed, and monetized data-mines, Barnett locates uncanny modes of attentiveness to the mark, the mistake, the mysterious remainder.

The project forms a two-part exhibition (both co-organized with Sally Morfill), each in turn incorporating participation and performance, the work as much an archive-in-process as a presentation of some final product. The first show, "General title given by myself,"<sup>1</sup> began with a call for contributions to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of Mass Observation's "May 12, 1937," a portrait of everyday British life culled from hundreds of nonprofessional 'observers,' who wrote accounts of their lives for a then-new form of sociological documentation. The work of Mass Observation has become renown for its experiment in what today we call crowdsourcing, inviting amateur 'self-anthropologists' to produce a textual record that might present itself as an exercise in democratic expressionism but just as easily provide material for the administrative logics of sociology and its scientific approaches to categorization. Still, the mass observers of the thirties seem much more, well, individual, than the millions of us who today find it utterly normal to share our personal data and shape subjective experiences for public consumption, even as we know they will be used for demographic and advertising revenue, as well as mining-data for the surveillance state, rendering our 'unique qualities' into quanta of minute differences for niche marketing, profit, and policing.

Unlike today's social media, however, the analog and sometimes arduous task of collecting and correcting various typed-up reports (whether

diaries or questionnaires) resulted in an archive of uncanny traces, from the cracked ink of typewriter ribbons to the penciled-in corrections of responders copyediting their own manuscripts. It does not require a lapse into nostalgia to note how the sometimes banal reports (more elaborate than status updates, to be sure, but neither ‘literature’ as such) retain a patina of human contact and care, a desire for precision and accuracy that—whatever it might say about the English character—registers a mode of self-awareness and individuality, however mulched into anonymous obscurity the Mass Observation documents became.



installation images from ‘General title given by myself’. Five Years gallery, 2013

Thus Barnet’s original gambit, to solicit shared observances of participants’ May 12, 2013, was in part to stage a recreation of the particularly *writerly* act of self-observation and narrativity. However one’s accounts may be said to differ from one’s daily status updates, blog entries, tweets, and other social mediations, Barnet garnered enough material to initiate an installation-cum-publication-house, as performers (or were they ‘merely’ scriveners, Bartlebys of the digital age?) worked at transcribing, proofreading, and editing in the gallery space, making present the often invisible work of crafting individual accounts and styles into standardized copies of what used to be called the Queen’s English (which however now Americanized and globalized, is still the lingua franca of Empire). Throughout the days of performance, prints

and scans and ‘uncorrected proofs’ and mark-ups and galleys filled the walls, turning transcription into a three-dimensional installation of a seemingly endless work-in-process. Imagine the ‘ghosts in the machine’ nibbling and scribbling away at every status update you punch into your computer, and this might begin to help visualize a gallery-sized version, peopled with text-workers (who are in this context, both readers and re-readers, writers and re-writers) focused in the tradition of durational performance and endurance art. “Exhausting, the Archive” could have been an alternate title for the exhibit, for anyone who has ever experienced the intense concentration required to copyedit reams of text for the rare typo, the uncanny mistake.

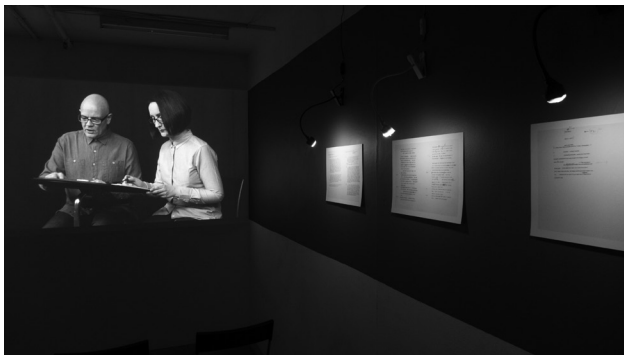


installation images from ‘General title given by myself’. Five Years gallery, 2013  
Sally Morfill, Alex Nicholls and Zara Ramsay / Nicholls and Ramsay.

The layers of narration and documentation, as well as the seemingly monotonous performance of editing and text management, accrue deeply sedimented relationships with both the original volunteers and the written accounts of their singular lives as well as the numerous functionaries tasked with keeping those voices alive within an otherwise bloodless bureaucratic machine. In Terry Gilliam’s “Brazil,” we watch as a functionary’s typo changes a citizen’s life, the chance hiccup in the technocratic machine

both a sign of the fallibility of the system and its overarching power. In Barnet's world of reproduction, the embodied mediation of the archive and its care allows us to see and hear both the original authors as well as the attentive (if often anonymous and invisible) labor of those tasked with 'correcting' the 'official' record.

At the same time, it's hard not to think about the mass surveillance state, as well as our daily consensual participation in it, through online status updates, geo-tagged photos, consumption patterns, and social linkages. What, from today's perspective, to make of the personal accounts offered up to a sociological apparatus with the Orwellian name of "Mass Observation"? Can we read the minor errors and typos and their handwritten corrections as perhaps the only remaining traces of subjectivity from a pre-auto-correcting universe? Or are these simply diaristic accounts of unremarkable people, made remarkable only by our archive fever, our nostalgic wonderment at the indexical marks of a bygone era of manual typewriters and snail mail?



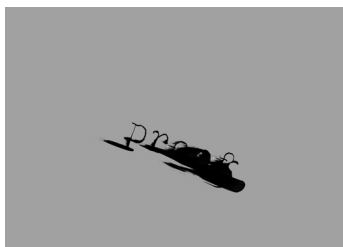
installation of 'A day of continual irritation for myself', Five Years Gallery, 2014, photo by Fernando León-Guiú

In the second part of Barnet's exploration — the exhibit "A day of continual irritation for myself" — she enlisted artist Fernando León-Guiú and writer France León to reenact another element of the Mass Observation moment.

Based on a proofreading couple renown in the publishing world for their skills and staid professionalism, Barnet filmed León and León-Guiu slowly and formally proofing scans from the archive against the re-typed transcriptions produced from the staged performances. We watch as the actors-artists-proofreaders<sup>2</sup> sit at their shared table, calmly and methodically going through each text line by line, word by word, occasionally catching and correcting an inconsistency, though mainly performing what seems like a strange kind of ritual, a liturgy of the everyday — call it trance-scripture. It's both captivating and banal, a kind of ambient poetry that while not *completely* without narrative suspense (oh! They caught a mistake!) instead suggests a calm and detached (though still rigorously attentive) care for incredibly personal language, the raw materials of a confessional poetry written for the mother country and now rescued from the 'dustbin of history' to speak again (if only through the nexus of a repetition compulsion set on shuffle).



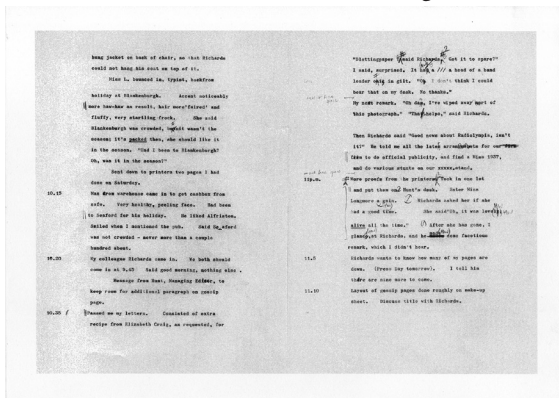
10 am, August 12th, 1937  
Ink on Norfolk Cartridge Paper



1 pm, August 12th, 1937  
Ink on Norfolk Cartridge Paper

But this is not merely a clinical autopsy in the dead letter office; the source materials posted along the gallery walls are prints of the resulting proofread documents, derived from transcribed scans, as the archive's now been digitized through the labor of anonymous data-sentries who handle the material as each page gets scanned into the database, one more trace of sensual labor layered on top of the seemingly 'museumified' objects. As words become pictures, the prints thus hover somewhere between documentary photography (a scan is after all, a digital photograph), text art,

and concrete poetry, the ‘cold neutrality’ of conceptual photography unable to fully domesticate the stray marks of individual (if anonymous) hands.<sup>3</sup> Despite representing the source material for the video performances, they retain their own ghostly presence, bringing us full circle to the uncanny remnants of lives lived under different regimes of self-representation.



12th July, 1937 – Day Survey #97. Limited Edition Risograph Print

Today, while we imagine that nothing we do is real unless documented online, and nothing documented online will ever disappear from the digital archive (a dream of immortality, perhaps), we might remind ourselves that what resists coding, what does not merely turn into endless zeroes and ones, what outwits all the (self-) correcting machines, what retains some semblance of flesh-heat and organic matter, might indeed be what outlives us with any degree of meaning.

—DB, 2014

<sup>1</sup>The wonderfully suggestive titles of both exhibits come from original Mass Observation participants.

<sup>2</sup>Participant-collaborators included Elenor Hellis, Sally Morfill, Alex Nicholls, and Zara Ramsay.

<sup>3</sup>It seems important to note that from the Mass Observation archive, Barnet chose texts written by those who worked with words for a living — journalists, clerks, copywriters, proofreaders, etc.

## Douglas Kearney

### *Patter*

Red Hen, 2014.

REVIEWED BY ASHLEY COLLEY

The first poem in Douglas Kearney's *Patter* (2014) snapshots Kearney as a pre-teen, fat in a yellow t-shirt and diving into a pool turned time machine: "some summers back, / I was born and breath smacked into me. this year the water / smacks me, diving yellow, round into the pool." He grows his first mustache hairs, the amniotic water "whipping them on," and then "something falls"—the shirt, "floats then drops / a dead child's ghost." When Kearney surfaces he is "child-less as time," a man whose time-defined body will no longer tolerate the liminal pre-teen. The child is lost, but haunts. Thus begins Kearney's book on fatherhood and the necessary but unclear line between lost and surviving bodies.

Water ghosts haunt Kearney's previous collection, *The Black Automaton* (2009), too: Emmett Till haunts a "Tallahatchie Lullaby" and drowned Africans a "Swimchant" trying to "re-member" the Middle Passage, while the L.A. Riots and other "chucked" African American histories are present absences in a series of "floodsongs"—poems sung by water carnivores that presumably ate the evidence of these histories. The book reminds readers there is a "foaming shroud" over millions of murdered black lives on this planet and warns "the stains won't wash out" with time. "in the city of dented infants / to-be, the clocks have all stopped," Kearney mourns, because race-driven violence is a history that keeps on.

*The Black Automaton* exposes "all our history's / bright foundries of burning skin" as irreparable absences fueled by irreparable absences—a seemingly closed loop in which the murdered are eclipsed by stereotypes that kill people. "IT's a problem of semanthematics," Kearney writes, "too many



nothings. *zero, zero, / zero, o'ed up.*" In *Patter*, Kearney reiterates this problem as a new father anticipating history's inscription on his family. That is, with less resignation and more fear. In "Thank You But Please Don't Buy My Children Clothes With Monkeys On Them," he writes:

[if] throughout history history has a way with blueing black babies.  
[or] say history has a history of blacking black babies.

...

[&] jigaboo black babies is history blacking over a blue black hide.

[thus] picayune black babies's history's way  
of knowing black babies is discarded  
to hide its history of blacking black babies  
blue as a baboon's nose knows tails.

[qed] pitiful black-at-the-bottom-babies!

*Patter* feels more dangerous than *The Black Automaton*, scarier to read because the book itself is afraid. It again outlines the circular, ongoing history between racial stereotyping and race-driven violence—particularly in its "It is Designed for Children" section—but the urgency here seems less about readers understanding that history and more about the conclusion it brings Kearney around to again and again. In these poems, "pitiful black-at-the-bottom-babies" is not a history to lament, a present to decry, or a future to prophesize—but an ominous patter(n) that is beginning to feel like fate and is ultimately unacceptable.

A second fate-like figure emerges across *Patter*'s "Father of the Year" section, in which the award goes to some of our favorite filicidal dads—Kronos, King Laios, Abraham, Darth Vader, and so on. Kearney contends with this patrilineage in "Shaken," where he confides one of his own impulses toward paternal violence: "no shame in wanting to shake...to sleep to rest at sweet...you feel the beat / coming on?" The poem describes a common

response to newborn-induced sleep deprivation, but for Kearney its “beat” reverberates back to something ancient—Isaac asking his father where is the lamb for the burnt offering, “daddy on the almighty / mountain with Daddy’s Heat / across his neck.”

When Kearney writes “to be *daddy’s* to ascend, steady, into cruelty,” he reveals another seemingly inescapable inheritance: that daddy will be cruel because he belongs to daddy, who belongs to his daddy and so on. Or as Kronos puts it, that “no kid ain’t shit but a map to its folk / traced by its folk to where they buried their folk.” According to this logic, entering fatherhood risks not only being eclipsed by history, but also the eclipse of all one begets. Dads like Laios and Vader, unable to imagine their fates separate from their children’s, fall for this fatherhood-equals-death (self-fulfilling) prophecy over and over:

TITUS

my children, bombs, but made of me.

CHORUS

*a father’s love, a flame.*

Likewise, in “Father-To-Be Takes Himself For A Walk,” Kearney describes his laboring wife as “a shotgun aimed at us,” where “us” seems to condemn the Kearney family indefinitely. At the same time, he seems aware that his fear—the fear of inheriting and reproducing an eclipsed, and thus easily othered, and thus easily harmed body—has the potential to ignite itself.

*Patter* follows Kearney’s struggle to imagine and enact fatherhood outside of a fatalistic logic that renders “black-at-the-bottom-babies” inevitable and past all the “*sad / bad / daddies*.” The book oscillates between poems that detail Kearney’s experience as an expectant father—including a section on his and his wife’s struggle with infertility—and poems that seem unable to encompass this experience:

## THE MISCARRIAGE: A POETIC FORM

internal rhyme (perfect)  
internal rhyme (perfect)  
internal rhyme (perfect)  
internal rhyme (perfect)  
internal rhyme (perfect)

(volta)

internal rhyme (slant)  
internal rhyme (slant)  
internal rhyme (slant)

(volta)

internal rhyme (broken)

There is a sense that language is failing Kearney in this book—perhaps because the language available for having a black child is so bound up in the language for losing a black child. “Black babies’s born fit with looney tune gloves...Black babies’s found up in trees and on sidewalks.” Where is the line between the living and the dead?

Last year, Claudia Rankine wrote an article for *The New York Times Magazine* that begins with anecdotes about parents afraid for the lives of their black children. The article is titled “The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning,” and in it Rankine aligns herself with the Black Lives Matter movement to suggest that “a sustained state of national mourning for black lives is called for in order to point to the undeniability of their devaluation.” She adds, “Black Lives Matter aligns with the dead, continues the mourning and refuses the forgetting.” The question *Patter* offers in

response is: For how long can a person align with the dead before beginning to feel dead oneself? Or, when does such an alliance begin to suggest that black lives and black deaths are interchangeable?

The crisis of *Patter* is a crisis of simultaneity. Kearney struggles to locate a clear separation between himself and the daddies of yore, between his children and a centuries-long list of murdered children, and between the experiences of losing, fearing the loss of, and loving a child. The line “I love your body. I hate it.” is repeated and riffed on several times in the book, where “it” seems to confuse Kearney’s wife with their miscarried child and, simultaneously, with all of the history Kearney fears is “miscarried” from parents to their children. That a mother is for a time simultaneous with her child—and that words can likewise hold many as one—is terrifying in this book, because Kearney makes clear that bodies referred to interchangeably are easily objectified and easily harmed. “you might think might drives the child’s thumb / to grind the ant line to the pavement,” but perhaps a line of seemingly interchangeable “its” is just too easy to destroy.

Despite *Patter*’s anxiety about the various erasures that might accompany fatherhood, these poems still manage to celebrate dad life. In “Daddies! On Playgrounds On Wednesdays,” Kearney writes: “wonder what we do we grip sippies to our hairy nipples. / shaved hair cracks microwaved milk skin... / our hairy crotches smell like jarred squash.” This poem is silly, even euphemistic in context with the rest of *Patter* because it forgets history for a minute. In this minute, readers are asked to celebrate a life.

## David Wojnarowicz, James Romberger, and Marguerite Van Cook

*7 Miles A Second*

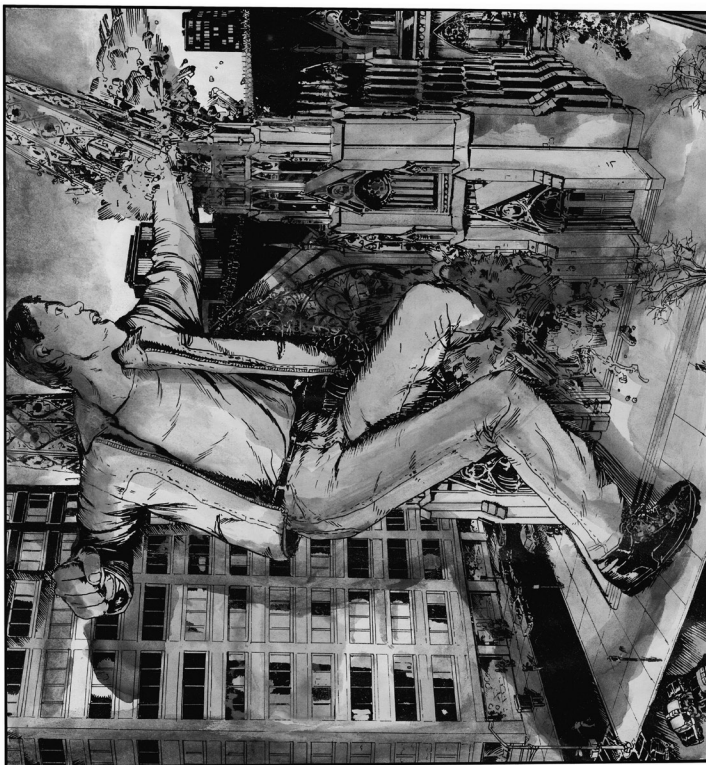
Fantagraphics Books, 2012

REVIEWED BY TED REES

Though often (and most would say correctly) portrayed as a maelstrom of righteous anger and incisive sociopolitical commentary during his life as an artist and provocateur, the reasons behind David Wojnarowicz's desire to create a comic book memoir of parts of his life are infinitely more tender: he wanted to craft something to show young gay people "that there was someone who'd survived the things they were going through."<sup>1</sup> The result, a collaboration with artists James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook, here revised and expanded from its original 1996 edition, is most certainly not typical of the graphic novels we have become used to, and which are now enshrined as subjects worth study in academic programs. Rather, *7 Miles A Second* resembles a comic book, with its bold, garish colors and atypical subject matter, making it more kin to Grant Morrison's deliciously queer *The Invisibles* series than Alison Bechdel's somber *Fun Home*.

What allows *7 Miles A Second* to succeed as a memoir-cum-manifesto in comic book format is Wojnarowicz's adroit mastery of the language of fantasy as a manner of expressing rage. For example, when he writes about the "public and social murder" that was and continues to be enacted upon queers in the United States, and later goes on to describe himself as "a three hundred seventy foot tall eleven hundred thousand pound man inside this six foot frame," there is a bridge that emerges between sociopolitical unrest and the imaginal landscapes of destroyed power that run through every dissident's wildest dreams. Thus Romberger's full-page drawing of Wojnarowicz punching out the steeple of Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral, a site than can only be described as a majestic architectural triumph that housed the man responsible for some of the most virulent anti-gay rhetoric of the AIDS

AND I'M GABBING THIS RACE LIKE A  
 HUNDRED YEARS AGO. THERE'S A  
 LINE BETWEEN THE INSIDE AND THE  
 OUTSIDE A THIN LINE BETWEEN THOUGHT  
 AND ACTION AND THAT LINE IS SIMPLY  
 A LINE. IT'S NOT A LINE OF BLOOD  
 BONE AND AS EACH T-CELL DISAPPEARS  
 FROM MY BODY IT'S REPLACED BY TEN  
 POUNDS OF PRESUME. TEN POUNDS OF  
 PRESUME. PRESUME IS THE ONLY  
 MONUMENT RESISTANCE BUT THAT  
 FOCUS IS STARTING TO SLIP MY HANDS  
 ARE BEGINNING TO MORE UNDERIDENTITY  
 AND THE PRESUME IS BEING TAKEN  
 AND AMERICA SEEMS TO ACCEPT MURDER  
 AS SELF-DEFENSE AGAINST THOSE WHO  
 WOULD MURDER YOU AND ITS BORN MURDER  
 AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD MURDER  
 LONG YEARS AND WERE EXPECTED TO TRY  
 THINGS TO SUPPORT THE PUBLIC AND SOCIAL  
 MURDER AND WERE EXPECTED TO QUAITY  
 MURDER AND WERE EXPECTED TO QUAITY  
 MURDER AND WERE EXPECTED TO QUAITY  
 STREAM OF MURDER BUT I SAY THERE'S  
 CERTAIN POLITICIANS THAT BETTER GET  
 MORE COMPLEX SECURITY ALARMS AND  
 MORE COMPLEX SECURITY ALARMS AND  
 MORE COMPLEX SECURITY ALARMS WITH  
 CUSE OFFICIALS DOGS AND HIGHER  
 FUGGING FENCES AND QUEER BISHOPS  
 GETTING THE MURDER THINGS  
 GETTING THE MURDER THINGS  
 GETTING THE MURDER THINGS  
 THE THIN LINE BETWEEN THE INSIDE  
 AND THE OUTSIDE IS BEGINNING TO  
 ERODE AND AT THE MOMENT THAT  
 ERODE AND AT THE MOMENT THAT  
 ERODE AND AT THE MOMENT THAT  
 ELEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND POUND  
 MAN INSIDE THIS SIX FOOT FRAME  
 AND ALL I CAN FEEL IS THE PRESUME  
 AND THE NEED FOR RELEASE



epidemic, Cardinal John Joseph O'Connor. Van Cook's watercoloring, with its gauzy reds and yellows popping out from the focal points of anger—namely, Wojnarowicz's fist and the cathedral itself—only emphasizes the intensity of Wojnarowicz's antagonism, and this antagonism's projection into the imaginal sphere.

I once described an image from Wojnarowicz's collage series *Sex* as “a bleakness puncture,” and in a sense, Romberger and Van Cook's rendering here works in a similar fashion: it brings to the page a fury aimed at systems of power that contains little humanity or grace, and instead embodies and enforces a despicable mixture of conformity, fear, and hatred.

Pressing further into the imaginal, Wojnarowicz's visual and written work is infused with the abundance of his dreamlife, and the blurring of dreamscape and reality provides Romberger and Van Cook with ample opportunities to engage the comic book format's traditions while simultaneously eschewing the narrative arcs that a majority of the format's exemplars rely upon. Traditional panel structures cutting from left-to-right and up-to-down are tinged or stained with smaller boxes depicting acts of cruelty or one of Wojnarowicz's totem images, so that a sequence of Wojnarowicz driving through the desert and writing of our “preinvented existence within a tribal nation of zombies” is made ever more bludgeoning by Romberger and Van Cook's incisions depicting the young artist being chained and beaten by his father. Wojnarowicz: “I either did what I remember doing or I dreamt I did it and neither really matters,” and thus one is confronted with panels that jump rapidly between banal domestic scenes and fleshy nightmares, jaw-dropping deprivations and moments of surreal beauty.

In her book *Dream I Tell You*, Hélène Cixous writes of living “in two countries, the diurnal one and the continuous discontinuous very tempestuous nocturnal one [...] I thought myself under false pretences in the one and in the other under false pretences differently, since I had but one visa for both. Furthermore I couldn't have said [...] which one was the

legitimate [one].”<sup>2</sup> In *7 Miles A Second*, it is this space the reader dwells in, where the line between the scape of reality and the dreamscape has become illegitimate. We read, “if I could attach our blood vessels so we could become each other I would,” and we see Romberger’s inked drawing of Wojnarowicz embracing a lover awash in a gloppy pink erotic viscera, juxtaposed on the next panel with a field of flowers surrounding a headless statue. We witness Wojnarowicz witnessing the devastating heartbreak of a transgender woman’s failed surgeries commingling with a dream that ends with “the grubbiest bum” Wojnarowicz has seen “doing this slow and wonderful dance, slowly turning round and round with side to side swaying motions, saying nothing at all.” The porousness of the boundary between the real and the dreamed is given a visual representation, one awash in hopelessness and rage, but also a sort of shattering fidelity. That Romberger’s panel decisions and Van Cook’s watercolors allow this porousness to be realized on the page is a testament to their talent as artists, and also to their faith in Wojnarowicz’s language.

It is important to note that there is very little writing in *7 Miles A Second* that has not been published before, either in *Close to the Knives*, *The Waterfront Journals*, *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline*, or Wojnarowicz’s diaries. In fact, the comic book collaboration includes selections from nearly all of the aforementioned works, and as such acts as a sort of primer to Wojnarowicz’s style, from its manic fury to its relentless melancholy. What’s more, many of the hallmarks of Wojnarowicz’s visual mythology are included here, from the circular panels depicting tornadoes and burning houses to the grotesque amalgamations of skeletal mammoths, gore, coinage, steam engines, and outmoded forms of technology. Just as Wojnarowicz’s writings and visual works inform and mirror each other, so too does Romberger and Van Cook’s translation of the two into a more populist media format. Thus, while *7 Miles A Second* does not cover much new material, especially for those who are fanatical about Wojnarowicz, it certainly opens new pathways of looking at and reading the artist’s oeuvre. And just as some of Wojnarowicz’s first works were stencils of monsters and burning houses on trashcan lids and sidewalks, the provocations contained within this gorgeous comic are



accessible to even the casual viewer. Though it is somehow doubtful that *7 Miles A Second* has found its way into the hands of many homeless or isolated queer teenagers, its execution makes sure that it could hearten and help youth in such precarious situations. For the rest of us, it is a reminder that we must continue to follow Wojnarowicz's path: to be tender with those we hold close, and to rage against the murderous order that surrounds us still.

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<sup>1</sup> Carr, Cynthia. *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cixous, Hélène. *Dream I Tell You*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

**PAOLO JAVIER**

**FEL SANTOS: VIOLENT AFFECTION**

*for Alan Ramón Clinton*

**I.**

Perhaps one could speak of language experiences that are an embarrassment to literature. They embarrass literature because while they are not of it, they encroach upon it. Such experiences may be as embarrassing to the encroacher as they are to those who are encroached upon. Think of Antonin Artaud, who spent his life wondering how to escape personal and public hells, and yet writes in a letter, a form we may already think of as para-literary, too intimate to be conveyed directly, "Someone who does not know depression, who has never felt the soul encroached upon by the body, invaded by its weakness, is incapable of perceiving any truth about the nature of man." (Artaud, 48) Think of New York's own Hannah Weiner. She did not set out one day to "see words" on her forehead and everywhere else, to write clairvoyant poems which granted her access to things she should not be, by training, allowed to speak of (such as Native American rights). Her clairvoyance is an embarrassment to literature *and* clairvoyance, when most of her "revelations" have to do with purchases she should or should not make at Macy's, colors and textures that she is "allergic" to. Think of Gertrude Stein, whose use of sound "conveyed" not only taboo sexualities about her training with the scientist William James, himself an embarrassment to science as a theosophist in search of occult worlds. Georges Bataille would remind us that the essence of embarrassment is transgression, and that it is not something that we can wish away lightly, "But the taboos on which the world of reason are founded are not rational for all that...a calm opposite to violence would not suffice to draw a clear line between the two worlds... Only unreasoning dread and terror could survive in the teeth of the forces let loose." (Bataille, 63) When considering an individual named Fel Santos, we must not forget that he too brings us a certain embarrassment, that the

phrase “violent affection” is an embarrassment separated only by space and not a “clear line.”

In December of 2009, I got a last-minute invite from John to attend a salon at the East Village apartment of Charles, a common friend of ours in the poetry community. This was the first time I would hear of Fel Santos who, John texted, would be “debuting some sound poetry.”<sup>1</sup> For the most part, my own experience with the sound poem has been limited to recordings and videos online, a few printed texts. The sound poet is a rare bird in NYC’s (avant garde) poetry scene, but when John sent the invite, he was aware of my recent interest in the language art. Earlier in the fall, I’d played him some mp3s of Dada pieces by Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausman that I recently uploaded, and professed my newfound obsession with bp Nichol and the Four Horsemen. Santos’ name also struck me as sounding Filipino. John confirmed. “Not only is he Pinoy,” he wrote back, “but he lives in Woodside, too.” A sound poet who is Flip and from Queens? I’m so there.

Running on island time (of course), I arrived at the salon just as Santos performed his last “piece,” “Swill Cottages”, a seven-minute recording with electronic artist David Mason (not present). Lit only by the screen of his smart phone (from which the Mason soundtrack softly played), Santos screeched, hissed, growled, cooed, hummed, wailed, read, and breathed with abandon. When he finished, the rapt audience of eight, maybe ten (there were about fifteen people present in total) seated on the floor, couch, and lounge chairs of Charles’ living room (where Santos performed against a wall filled with floor-to-ceiling bookcases) did what audiences do—applauded, cheered, and walked over to congratulate him.

I remained in my corner, trying to come to grips with what I’d just witnessed. To be sure, I was floored by Santos’ extraordinary performance, though it wasn’t quite what I think of as “sound poetry,” at one point an embarrassment to the literary community’s logo-centric biases but has since, like everything else, long settled into genre status. It took me some

time that night, but when I eventually gained Santos' trust as a fellow Pinoy interested in his work, what he said surprised me. When I mentioned to him, by way of searching for a metaphor, that his live performances seem to surge out of him like a medium channeling a spirit, he said, "this language is unlike any I've ever spoken or known, one that, curiously enough, I only recall uttering with any frequency beginning in the summer of '86, following a demonic possession I experienced at age eleven. I remember the before and after part best, and very little of the actual hosting." What I find compelling about Santos' account is his insistence on being possessed, an endeavor he spent most of that summer building towards. Not much in the way of good Catholic practice for the former altar boy. Of course he didn't tell his parents about the experience, and given the apparent harmlessness of a kid making weird sounds, they never bothered to have his new "ability" examined. Certainly there were some embarrassing outbursts at the wrong times and places, but they were easily explained away due to his youth and a certain Filipino practice known as *gigil* (gēgēl).

*Gigil* is a Filipino term for the trembling or gritting of teeth in response to a situation that overwhelms one's self-control. My Tagalog dictionary offers two definitions: "to tremble or thrill from some irrepressible emotion," and "gritting of the teeth because of suppressed anger" (English 530). A cursory google (*gigil*) search for the word's meaning elaborates more on the dualistic nature of its experience. On the website *wordsthatshouldexistinenglish.com*, Bianca Ceralvo, for example, describes *gigil* as

{t}hat shivery, teeth-gritting thrill that accompanies a strong urge to lay your hands on something (while possibly holding yourself back from doing so). {Gigil} usually happens when you see something super adorable (ex. wanting to pinch a baby's cheek), but can also be caused by something that makes you gut-wrenchingly angry (ex. wanting to punch someone).

This "thrill" is by no means unique to Filipino culture, and you need not look very far in everyday life or popular culture for individuals gripped by

gigil's North American equivalent. In PT Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love*, Adam Sandler's character tells Emily Watson's: "I'm lookin at your face and I just wanna smash it. I just wanna fuckin smash it with a sledgehammer and squeeze it. You're so pretty." Unlike the infant domestic scenes where North Americans tend to confine their versions of gigil, Filipinos extend gigil into larger temporal and spatial arenas. We will most commonly express such violent affection (my term) through the utterance of a language that mixes baby talk, motherese, and phonetic sounds from our native dialects. Mind you, this language is directed at the object, and aside from a warm hug or playful pinch on the cheeks, comprises the extent of the manggigigil, or the person demonstrating gigil, material expression. There is no threat of them pulling a Lenny from *Of Mice and Men* on the object-choice's pet rabbit, however tremendous the urge.

This, of course, is the official, domesticated version of gigil, and does not fit particularly well with Bataille's previously mentioned understanding of transgression or Santos' utterances. Indeed, when one thinks of the "gritting of teeth" involved, it is hard not to detect a certain repression at work where gigil itself is as fully a domestication of cannibalistic, destructive instincts which exist in any culture, no matter how "developed" or "refined" we may imagine it to be, instincts that make individuals like Lenny seem more like limit cases (a limit that, anthropologically speaking, we could say moves both backwards and forwards in time, or eccentrically away from "polite society") than exceptions. How could it be otherwise when we think of the cannibalistic infant suckling at its mother's breast, when we hear endless tales of gods eating their children? And, there is as much love as destruction in what we must now call the *violence of affection*. English, for instance, is full of terms like "ravish" and "gorgeous" which make the romantic object sound like something we would like to consume. Perhaps the twentieth century's most literary cannibal, Issei Sagawa, described it best when he said that he killed and ate his French girlfriend because he loved her so much, that he wanted her beauty and energy to exist inside of him. Anthropological studies of so-called "cannibalistic societies" confirm in less poetic terms that

cannibalism is not about destruction of one's enemies, but a magical act more like the one that Sagawa, as an art student at the Sorbonne, intuited on his own. In this sense we could understand Santos' relationship to gigil as itself an embarrassment to gigil, just as gigil is embarrassed of what it actually alludes to in human desire.

Unlike most Filipinos who verbalize their violent affections through no more than a smattering of words or half-phrases, Santos will unleash a torrent. His own dad would often say to his mom "nagtatongues na naman yung anak mo" (your son is speaking in tongues again) during each of the poet's spells. Such gigil is an invented, private language that's mind-blowing, disturbing, and unlike anything I've grown up hearing in my own household.

Indeed, one can (understandably) sense a certain embarrassment, a certain desire to repress, in Santos' own descriptions of his work. "But unlike scat singing, demonic speech, and baby talk," he says, "my utterances are not about communication. They are a fundamentally subjective aural experience that offers abstract expression for the speaker and open interpretation for the listener." Gleaned this way, it's hard not to see (and hear) why gigil and its (dis)contents would appeal so much to a polyglot, experimental language artist like himself. But perhaps when talking about his work we should revisit the concept of "experimental" and bring it back to its scientific roots. Each performance is unique to itself and the poet is not completely sure what he is aiming at. We can take him at his words when he says he is "exploring intimacy and emotion in a new way through sound poetry," and gigil accords him "this material language that conveys something you cannot express, or something that really makes you happy at the moment, and you just want to squeeze that in your hands, and, um, express that to your subject of affection...to your subject...beyond cute...beyond lovable," but we cannot stop, as he no doubt would admit, at his words alone.

## II.

In the tradition of the published sound poem, Santos sometimes chooses to write out *gigil* phonetically. This reverses the traditional mode of poetry written in literate cultures where the poem is composed first and then performed/read orally for an audience. In an age of ubiquitous recording devices, what would seem an impossible task (remembering an utterance often produced in a state of trance or semi-trance) becomes a new mode of production that differs from poems of the oral tradition in that one need not speak or compose in formalized, easily remembered patterns or rhythm. It also makes the “transcription” a work unto itself bearing an uncertain relationship to its initial production, a fact which Santos is relatively unconcerned about. Santos’ pronunciation is based chiefly on Tagalog sounds, though for the life of me, a native Tagalog reader and speaker, I can’t recognize them when I hear him perform. Truth be told, just looking at a word such as “koonamoonakoongoots” makes me wonder if it isn’t a caricature of the dialect. Tagalog’s orthography was created by the Spanish friars, and so the poet, who can read as well as write in the main dialect, uses the Roman alphabet as symbols for his *gigil*. “I’m not interested in inventing a whole new language, per se, and so I don’t feel the need to draw up new symbols for *gigil*. I’ve also grown up reading and writing Filipino just fine with the Roman alphabet, and since I’m sounding my way through much of this language, it’s a heck of a lot more manageable for me to write with letters that can already do the job” (Santos). He assures me that he isn’t being self-hating (at least, not consciously) when he transcribes things in the Roman alphabet, nor does he distort the tones while *gigilating*, and that “some words would come off sounding as warped” because he speaks them through tightly clenched teeth.

But when the “words” almost offer no obvious semantic meaning, it begs the question: how on earth is the listener supposed to understand the speaker? “They can sense how I feel at that given moment,” Santos says. In a verbal exchange, for example, his tone of voice might give the listener a sense of what degree of *gigil* he experiences at that moment (shout, whimper, sneer,

etc.), combined with other vocalizations that are communicative (laughter or cries or groans) that precede or follow the utterance.

The sound of the gigil word itself also offers some meaning to the (active) listener. For example, the fricative [ʃ], followed by back-to-front vowels, that leads a word such as *shtookoonamananee* makes me think that the speaker might be in awe of the receiver. The word appears in an untitled poem from the poet's unpublished manuscript, *All Convulsions*:

Hallo luv.  
Happy valentine's day.  
How does this work.  
I have no idea.  
Say hello maby.  
Blahblah.  
I love google.  
How brilliant is this.  
Koofa.  
Hey.  
Shtookoonamananee.  
My super maby.  
Say hello.  
Koofa.  
Bookanamanananeneneeee.  
My loveliness say hello.  
Mooka.  
So my aunt.  
At the japanese place.  
What time hun.  
Kooma.  
Me missh da luv too.  
Now say hello.  
Booka.  
Hahaha.  
So sweet.  
& he spelt my name right.



Haha.  
Hahaha.  
Now say hello. (24)

Clearly autobiographical (“maby”), the gigil in Santos’ poem is romantic in nature, the words a bit less elusive in meaning, sandwiched as they are between lines of recognizable English. Still, they offer semantic indeterminacy. For example, it’s not immediately apparent which role in the sentence the gigil plays in the following four lines: “How brilliant is this./ Koofa./ Hey. / Shtookoonamananee.” There are no dictionary meanings for koofa nor shtookoonamananee, but if the listener/reader sees and hears these as nouns, then both can function as terms of endearment in addition to the word “maby”, which is a contraction of the endearment ‘my baby’. “In marriage, playfulness with language—codes, nicknames, neologisms—is a source of the bonding that keeps the marriage active, alive,” writes Kay Turner in her introduction to her selection of love notes—again note the “embarrassment” to literature occurring or perhaps even coming into being in para-literary form—between the great American modernist Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. (Turner, 35) To wit, Santos’ untitled poem reads like a “Lifting Belly” composed on G-Chat, a contemporary domestic valentine to his beloved spouse:

Hey.  
Booltat.  
Shooper maby.  
Hows my luv.  
Hello.  
Ok.  
Tired.  
Wuddyaget to eat.  
Unhealthy grub in C-town.  
Fried fish, tofu, & bokchoy.  
All for three buckarone.  
Now say hello. (25)

....

Koomanakananaa.  
I miss my maby  
Lots of scholarly books under ten bucks.  
Hello.  
Hello maby.  
Bathroom break sooper luvliness.  
Ok.  
See sale.  
Lemme see.  
Shit.  
More books. (26)

....

Kulta.  
Hallo.  
Hows da maby.  
Ok.  
Not concentrating  
I vant to give you a big kissarone. (28)

As he “gigilates” (Santos’ term), the poet’s romantic address isn’t about articulating sentiment, but aurally pointing to it, and sounding out the feeling of the most lyric propensities the recipient can listen for.

The audio recordings of the poet’s “gigilations” (Santos’ term, too, interchangeable with “gigils”), which he captures on his smart phone and portable Tascam digital recorder, sound like the incipient stages of a song, and are both beautiful and disconcerting. In each of these recordings, the poet’s gigil comes across as abstract sketches at the phonemic level buoyed along by the speaker’s improvised melodies. And yet, to speak only of melodies is problematic; perhaps the uncertainty associated with gigil’s relationship to cannibalism can be heard in the sudden, uncanny shifts of

tone. If maintenance of mood contours is to classical western music what the “invisible style” is to classical cinema, we can definitely regard what Santos records as unclassical as anything produced by John Cage’s tossings of the *I Ching*.

For Santos, *gigil*, is a fundamental language experience of his while growing up in Manila that continues to this day. “My wife, who isn’t Filipino, thinks I’m so weird when I *gigilate* [our one-year-old daughter] Lyra,” he says. “Well it can’t be helped. This is how my family expresses affection for each other. Less so on my dad’s side, but I’m pretty sure I’ve inherited extreme *gigilation* from exposure to my mom and her sisters. Apparently my Lolo (grandfather) Paeng, who was super affectionate and warm, set the *gigil* bar for all eight of his kids.”

Rio Santos, the poet’s mother, relates this connection to the poet in a brief exchange during her visit to Woodside last December.

FEL: How would you define *gigil*?

RIO SANTOS: Something you cannot express, or something that really makes you happy at the moment, and you just want to squeeze that in your hands, and express that to your subject of affection...to your subject...beyond cute...beyond lovable.

FEL SANTOS: Where does our family get it, because other *gigilation* doesn’t involve so much language?

RIO SANTOS: I guess we get it...we’ve seen it from Lolo Paeng, from the grandfather. Notso much the grandmother. It’s the grandfather.

FEL: Why? What would he do?

RIO SANTOS: He would just coin these words out of nowhere.

FEL: Like what?

RIO SANTOS: Like *hampanay* or *hampanoonay*. Just more of sounds... that will really make you smile and laugh because it’s just...it sounds silly and yet...it’s exactly what the person is feeling at the moment.

FEL: It’s happy-silly expression?

RIO SANTOS: It's happy, silly, and beyond one's ability to express that happiness...because there's no exact words for that, so you begin coining the words for it.

FEL: Since you were a baby, [Lolo Paeng] was like that?

RIO SANTOS: He was like that since I was a baby. You were a baby, you didn't really hear a lot of it until you were four or five years old.

FEL: Why not?

RIO: Because [it's only at that older age] you begin to see he always does that as a habit.

FEL: Oh so YOU didn't get it till you were four or five years old.

RIO: And then when you're a grown-up, you hear him say it again.  
(gently squeezing cheeks of Lyra) *Pootish, pootish, poooootish!*

FEL: But me growing up—did I hear it all the time?

RIO: Not from your grandfather. He was not around.

FEL: Who did I hear it from?

RIO: Maybe your grandma. And your titas and titos. Because we got that from him also. (to Lyra, pushing cheeks in) Right, *pooteeet?*

FEL: I guess Papa's side didn't really do it.

RIO: (pause) No. Not Papa's side.

FEL: Do you know of any other families that do it like this?

RIO: No. I don't think so. Because your cousins also do it to their children.

FEL: My question is, with me, I take it to an extreme. I don't stop. Was that how Lolo Paeng was too? He wouldn't stop, and go on and on?

RIO: Oh, yeah. And there's always a new word every day.

Gigil functions less as/in conversation, and primarily as fleeting expression untoward the passive gigilatee (my term), who isn't expected to exchange. More often than not, gigil will insist that its recipient endure such affection even if it turns physical. Under the site name *Gigil All the Time*, Filipina American blogger Wennan posts a picture of a young, fashionable, and cute (white) couple whose female playfully bites down on the male's right cheek. The latter grins, but looks past his gigilator, waiting out (enduring) her

PDA. Wennan's own experience of gigil seems to take little interest in the male recipient's experience of it:

"Gigil" is a Tagalog word which doesn't have a direct English translation, but the meaning is something like having the uncontrollable urge to hug, kiss, squeeze or take a chunk out of someone because you find them so damn endearing and cute. Needless to say, my boyfriend has tons of bite and pinch marks all over his body (especially on his fleshy belly lol) - I can't help it hahahaha. He is adorable on all levels :-)."

I've told Santos on more than one occasion that I'm convinced he's a futurist jazz singer on the down-low. I'm half-joking, because a quick scan of some of his gigil words reveals a likeness with the legendary jazz vocalist Slim Gaillard's invented hipster dialect, "vout" (from "devout"). Compare Santos' "buckarone" and "kissarone" from the excerpted poem above with Gaillard's "oreenie" and "oroonie", some words filed under the O column of the scat singer's Vout-O-Reenee Dictionary. A Cuban immigrant who spoke eight languages, Gaillard's "records were so transforming that nobody who heard them could find a language to explain them except in the phrases of the songs themselves, which spoke in tongues: 'A Wop Bop A Loo Bop,' 'Be Bop A Lula'" (68, Marc Beasley, Hey Hey Glossolalia). To be sure, the wop bop a loo bop of Santos' gigil is crystal clear in the first movement of the following sound poem "Scanners", which runs close to two minutes:

Huh?

You tell Papaya what the story is in the boom boom

Bee dee kong gong bee dee goong goong goong gooshee too boo doo  
dee gee dee dee

dee dee dee doo goo doo doo doo boo dee

(Lyra harrumph)

(Papaya kissarone)

Beedeebeedebeedebeedeedegeedidididoogoodoodeedegeedeede  
goodoodoodoodoodoo

Moi!  
Boodooboodoobeedeboodo  
Moi!  
Boo doo boo doo bee doo boo doo  
This Lyra naka dee goo dee  
(shawty rock to the beat for your boi, shawwwwteeee)  
Doo eeee  
Yeah!

“Scanners”, like scat, is completely improvised (and recorded) by the poet as he feels the stirrings of gigil while taking care of his daughter Lyra at her Pack and Play’s changing station. And, like scat, the poem is playful and funny. The version here is strictly phonetic transcription, with little in the way of composition. “I’m never consciously trying to sing when I gigil,” he says. “It comes out that way, much to the annoyance of my wife and relatives.”

Unlike scat singing, however, Santos’ recordings grate on this listener. They make me anxious, if not mildly agitated. I want to laugh, but I also want to keep my distance. His gigil strikes me as the opposite of charismatic speech, whose pitch and tone remain constant after the speaker’s initial outburst. Glossolalia doesn’t typically go on extended stretches; Santos’ gigil can sometimes extend to an hour. At fever pitch, it does resemble the dark speech of someone experiencing demonic possession, disembodied, like Mercedes McCambridge’s dubbing of Linda Blair’s possessed character, Regan, in *The Exorcist*. William Friedkin’s description of the actress’ work could apply: “It was really something else....you would hear these things multiplied in her throat; these strange counter point noises; little skittering whistles and strange creaking rattles.” (68, *Hey Hey Glossolalia*)

So while Santos strikes me, at least in my initial intellectualization, as a poet steeped in the canon of 20th century European and North American sound poetry, it turns out that these influences, to the extent that they exist in his

work, came only after he had been directed to them by friends he met in New York. Unlike Haussman, Schwitters, or even the second-generation New York School poet Joseph Ceravolo who wanted to grasp the “*inner sound I physically and mentally felt reverberating inside*,” Santos did not set out to “write sound poetry” any more than Hannah Weiner set out to receive clairvoyant messages in poetic form. Insofar as we understand poetry as a deliberate act, the poetics come afterwards. Indeed, what Santos does put on paper could better be described as a transcription of what comes out in recorded form: his gigil resists alphabetization, and its literal “writing” occurs when it is recorded on tape—to which the alphabetization forms a supplement, not a direct translation. This embarrassment of the alphabet itself is what sets him apart from his Western forebears perhaps even more than the incorporation of a distinctively Filipino language experience in his praxis.

### III.

The sonic rather than the alphabetic aspects of Santos’ praxis is the biggest draw for David Mason, aka Listening Center, a Brooklyn-based composer of electronic music who’s currently collaborating with the poet on an album of sound poetry and music. As a musician, Mason greatly appreciates the sonic ground that Santos’ work aims to break:

On first listening to these recordings, one becomes immediately aware of a sheer complexity of sound and emotion, and gradually moves towards an acceptance of the language as non-rational, but intelligent. The flow of discrete sounds, or “words” is measured but apparently not decisive in a self-conscious manner. Each excerpt is unique in its language, although similar patterns of sounds are discernible, and seems to relate to a unique subject or theme. (Mason)

Thus far, their collaboration includes ten recorded tracks, three of which Mason uploaded onto his YouTube account for public listening. The process behind the creation of these tracks emerged organically, both artists tell me. Santos records his gigil onto his smartphone, then sends Mason the mp3s

via a dropbox account with no cues attached other than for Mason to give them a listen. From there, Mason creates the music in his recording space in Williamsburg. Close listening of the mp3s inspire the production of each track, and, according to him, there hasn't been a need in this initial stage of the collaboration for Santos to meet up in his studio. The ten tracks that he's laid down have proven a revelation to both performers, especially the poet, who never expected Mason to come up with anything coherent so quickly. "I think David gets my poetry more than I do," he says.

Mason strikes me as too humble to admit to this, but he isn't shy to discuss the aural virtues of Santos' work, under whose spell he's fallen since encountering it over four years ago at a salon in Long Island City. Mason describes the experience like a scientist:

In musical terms, rhythmic patterns dominate, often repeating, which give rise to melodic cells, the tonality of which informs the mood, or emotion of the passage. However, it would seem facile to judge the language in simplistic emotional terms connected by conventional associations of tonality and timbre, or to dismiss it as primitivism. A purely rational analysis would only yield preconceived notions of language, and so the language must be listened to with an associative ear - and an open mind.

Mason anticipates the usual charge folks unversed in the history of sound poetry make against the art when he cautions the listener not "to judge the language," a defense echoed in most statements by the art's practitioners and innovators of the past century. Khlebnikov, the heart and soul of Zaum, famously writes:

People say a poem must be understandable. Like a sign on the street, which carries the clear and simple words "For Sale". But a street sign is not exactly a poem. Though it is understandable. On the other hand, what about spells and incantations, what we call magic words, the sacred language of paganism, words like "shagadam, magadam, vigadam, pitz, patz, patzu"—they are rows of mere syllables that the intellect can make no sense of, and they form a kind of beyonsense language in folk speech. Nevertheless an enormous power over mankind is attributed to these



incomprehensible words and magic spells, and direct influence upon the fate of man. They contain powerful magic. They claim the power of controlling good and evil and swaying the hearts of lovers. The prayers of many nations are written in a language incomprehensible to those who pray. (Khlebnikov, 152)

Indeed, sound poetry's relationship to incantation is apparent in Santos and Mason's collaborations, which call to mind the recordings of a séance. "Focus 1" presents the poet's voice weaving in and out of throbbing synthesizers and hypnotic drumbeats. In "Focus 2", Santos' vocals are indecipherable, favoring the tracings of a language over a coherent account. When the voice does take center stage in "Foreground 1", the effect is "kind of silly and sinister and eventually fun/ny in a sort of ouroboros," says Alan Clinton, author of *Mechanical Occult: Automatism, Modernism, and the Specter of Politics* (Peter Lang, 2004).

As the title of Clinton's book indicates, Santos' work sounds a lot like automatism, which the poet acknowledges. "A great majority are unaltered first takes," he says. "When I have the presence of mind to do so, I record my gigil on my phone, which usually plays back a complete poem, with little need for editing or changes. There might be some liberties I take when I perform the piece live, but I try to honor the integrity of the recording, which captures a genuine language moment that is unmediated and comes from a place my rational mind can't ever locate or drum up."

Santos' automatist recordings of gigil sound like fully-formed poems/songs, and it makes perfect sense why the poet leaves well enough alone when performing the pieces live. At his Dumbo salon, I remember being overwhelmed by "Gigil Post Dede On Couch Rene Fleming," a virtuosic poem of a *voice in extremis* (to borrow Steve MacCaffery's term), ranging from primal growl to roar to high-pitched cry; from gagged screaming to playful tongue-tapping to tender cooing. You also hear a human voice articulating seemingly non-human sounds: a buzz saw, an ambulance siren. Throughout the four minutes of this spontaneous recording, you hear a

cd of opera singer Renee Fleming running in the background, offering a ghostly lyric counterpoint to the harsh proceedings. When Santos played the original recording for me after his salon ended, I was stunned by his ability to match his spontaneous recording almost note-for-note, noise-for-noise, in the live performance. He revealed that the gigil came out of him as he concluded feeding Lyra one morning, triggered by the endearing way in which she pushed the jar of organic peas or kale puree (I forget which) held up to her face. It's almost as if she were saying to her Papa, "Enough veggies! Time for some real meat!"

Humanity's deep-seated associations between affection and cannibalistic consumption, already elucidated, suggest how an adorable moment with his daughter could inspire such an aggressive and harsh poem from the poet. But equally surprising is its appearance on the page in *All Convulsions*—as a sparse list of words that each suggest a category you might file the poem's individual sounds under:

Lone Ranger

Gun

Lone Ranger

Gut

Doot doot

Gag

Dark

Gardenia

Mush

Wail

Signal

Noise

Gargle

Gaggle

Signal

Tune

What you encounter on the printed page is a list poem, one that retains the title of the original recording but not its length. For the listener of the recording and its equally epic live performance, the effect of reading this seemingly dashed-off, minimalist “score” feels like a defiant gesture by the poet. It certainly opens up different possibilities for performing the piece. “[Given its improvised origins] it didn’t feel right for me to over-determine the written version by resorting to phonetic transcription, which is the dominant appearance of most sound poetry in print,” Santos says. “I thought it might be interesting to write it as a short poem, instead, which you wouldn’t expect from the track’s length and density. And though I offered a rather faithful rendition of the original source tonight, I can go in the opposite direction should I choose to perform it again.”

Mason joined Santos in the poet’s salon last summer, during which these tracks were performed live. Certainly, the candle-lined floors of the living room spoke to both artists’ interest in the occult, but I was struck primarily by their intuitive interactions throughout the event. For one, neither performance of these tracks seemed rehearsed nor practiced. I also heard some deviation from the original recordings in the form of dead air where otherwise would be vocals, and masked song sample glitches where there’d be drums. In past conversations, Santos shared with me how he feels like an eternal beginner, expressing uncertainty about his own abilities as a poet that keeps him creatively motivated rather than discouraged. Perhaps the

dissonant, sometimes buried vocals in his recordings with Mason offer traces of the poet's hesitations, which are understandable given his compositional improvisation (always a risk, an experiment) and, to use André Breton's reminder that endeavors like those of Santos have the potential to remind us of "the depths of our minds [which] harbor strange forces" we may not want to confront directly—or at all.

#### IV.

The last time I met with the poet was over a long and engaged lunch at Tito Rad's, a popular Filipino restaurant on the border of Sunnyside and Woodside, in late autumn of the past year. When we sat down to order, I reminded him of how uneasy he felt about the designation 'sound poet' I'd used in our first meeting four years ago. He has since embraced the title, but with a caveat.

"I didn't want to come across as pretentious, as I was fairly new to performing live, give or take two years, and I wasn't entirely certain if what I was only just exploring at the time could fall under that banner," Santos says.

Like me, the poet's prior knowledge and experience with the sound poem had been chiefly limited to books on the subject, and whatever recordings he could locate online. He points out there hasn't been much of a sound poetry community or scene to tap into in New York City, where he moved in the early-90s from Connecticut to pursue a degree in design at Pratt. In 1990, his family emigrated from the Philippines to Stamford, and the years he spent struggling to assimilate in his new, ultra-waspy environs transformed him into a lover of books. It wasn't until his sophomore year of college, though, that he began to immerse himself in poetry.

"I went to school and hung out with a bunch of gamers, neither of whom cared much for poetry," he shared. "I kept my interest to myself. I took a creative writing class in my second year, but didn't really care for the instructor, who was all about *New Yorker* poetry. I also registered for a

workshop at the Poetry Project, but was immediately put-off by the coterie and groupie dynamics of the scene. I pretty much read and wrote for myself.”

Santos never sought to publish his poetry, let alone try his hand at engaging with the sound poem. But in his first year of working for CNN, where he continues to serve as one of the webmasters for its Money section, he stumbled across a recording of Kurt Schwitters’ performance of *Ursonate* online, which shook him to his core. Soon after, he was devoting his free time to absorbing as much about Dada and the sound poem as he could through printed books and online recordings. By the time the monumental and exhaustive Dada show rolled into town at MoMA in 2006, Santos had already composed pieces for performance, including his early investigations into gigil.

“I gave my first performance at my friend Bob’s backyard in Kensington in the summer of 2007,” he offered. “There were about eight of us guests present. It was dusk when he’d asked his [two featured writers] to share their work. Came my turn, the sun had set, and I asked Bob to keep his porch light off because I was nervous to do my piece. I used my cell phone as a light source, but for the most part, I performed from memory, and referred only occasionally to the printout I had in hand.” Holding court in the dark like this intensified the listening experience of Santos’ audience, and he enjoyed this aspect so much that he retains the set-up for every performance.

“You’re not the first person to presume I like to perform in the dark as some kind of homage to Hugo Ball; while I admire him, my decision to “remain in the dark”, so to speak, has a less sexy reason,” he says.

Santos refers here to the founder of Dada’s bruitist concerts—performances of simultaneous phonetic poems

characterized by specific situations: light effects—that is to say limitations of Ball’s appearances by darkness before and after the scene. The platform or stage, on which Ball is acting and performing, separates the audience from the stage

and so limits his appearances locally. The costume consisting of a cylindrical shaman hat gives the acting poet according to his own statement the appearance of a priest, of a “magic bishop” (43, *Homo Sonorus*)

Santos’ performances aren’t nearly as extravagant nor vaudevillian in design as Ball’s costumed “concerts”, but the influence is clear. For example, each of the subsequent salons I witnessed Santos perform, the first two were conducted in complete darkness, and the remaining pair with a desk lamp lighting the floor behind him. In his last salon in Ridgewood, at our friend Gabriel’s loft, Santos wore a blank male mask that freaked out everyone present. The hallmarks of Santos’ work—its theatricality; its experiments with linguistic hybridity and poly-vocality; its material interest in nonsense, babble, and neologisms; and phonetic notation—extend beyond mere fanboy appreciation for Dada and onto a feverish engagement with European and North American 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century sound poetry history.

German critic and publisher Christian Scholz, who wrote a three-volume investigation of the history and typology of the language art, characterizes the sound poem as “a poetic art which avoids using the word as a mere vehicle of sense or meaning and tries to compose phonetic poems or sound texts (Lautgedichte, Lauttexte) in a methodical autonomy in accordance with modes of expressing subjective intentions, which require an acoustical realization...”. In sound poetry, he sees a “close connection between speech and music”, and insists that it “can develop [its] special effect only by the musical gesture of expression of the voice....[it] is both speech and music or speech music” (38, *Homo Sonorus*)

Poet and lingua-artist Michael Lentz would second this: “The sound poem is a category of acoustic art that inhabits the intermedia borderline area between poetry and music, which in its genre-transcending multiplicity, especially since 1945, mobilizes all speech organs, auxiliary parts and the breathing mechanism that contribute to the articulatory process and makes the entire range of human sound effects perceptible” (132, *Homo Sonorus*).

Dick Higgins (1938-1998), U.S. poet-publisher and key figure of the Fluxus movement of the 60s who coined the term “intermedia”, begs to differ with either definition in his seminal essay “Four Points Toward A Taxonomy of Sound Poetry”:

One thing sound poetry is not is music. Of course it has a musical aspect—a strong one. But if one compares typical sound poetry pieces with typical musical ones, music is usually the presentation or activization of space and time by means of the occurrences of sound....Thus sound poetry points in a different direction, being inherently concerned with Communication and its means, linguistic and/or phatic. (24, *Homo Sonorus*)

In the same essay, Higgins’ own definition reads less prescriptively than most of its practitioners and critics: “poetry in which the sound is the focus, more than any other aspect of the work” (26, *Homo Sonorus*). Santos is an admirer of the late poet/critic’s work, which he describes as “indispensable guides for my own praxis. I love {Higgins’ essay} particularly because it gets to the heart of what sound poetry offers: an explicit abstraction of words, both uttered and printed.”

Higgins’ taxonomy offers a meaningful classification for Santos’ work: 1) invented languages “without reference to any known language” 2) nonsense poetry that shows “a way between the semantically meaningful lines or elements and those which are probably nonsense”; 3) “phatic poems, in which semantic meaning, if any, is subordinate to expression of intonation, thus yielding a new emotional meaning which is relatively remote from any semiotic significance on the part of words which happen to be included”; 4) improvised poetry (performed, not written); 5) poems notated, including visual poems that serve as scores, radio plays. (35-37, *Homo Sonorus*)

“I suppose I consider myself a sound poet because I could never write a poem without sounding out its language first,” he says. “I struggled so much in my writing workshops because I couldn’t do the “craft” aspect that they

place such a premium on. I could never write the compact narrative lyric, the gold standard among every *New Yorker*-waving professor, which I suppose is due to my experience with language, which is neither compact nor lyrical, but fragmented, dissonant. Each time I tried to write that *New Yorker*-type poem, the language would not cohere. In fact, I would experience it like sand slipping through my fingers. By the end of the semester, I felt like I couldn't write a single proper sentence, let alone poetic line." That first creative writing workshop marked the last one Santos would take—ever. "If I had continued taking them, I would be a much different poet, and probably one whose work would be of zero interest to you right now, Paolo."

Undoubtedly, his gigit-based sound poems will encounter resistance in most creative writing programs because they dismiss (the virtues and values of) the avant garde, and continue to abide by a decidedly White European (American) centric view of the language arts. Perhaps his gigit serves as an automatist reaction to the linguistic complexities of life in the empire as a neo-colonial subject and immigrant. Perhaps it offers some kind of psycholinguistic response to/coping mechanism for the poet's prolonged sense of dislocation following his painful immigration to the U.S. as a teenager. "Leaving Manila was my first experience with heartbreak," he says. "I remember not eating on the entire plane ride to New York. And my parents told me that I didn't have much of an appetite the rest of that first week." Santos wouldn't elaborate further on his difficulties with assimilation those early teenage years, but will offer his gratitude for the experience. "I suppose I wouldn't be writing and performing much poetry if I didn't have those hurdles to get over. Feeling that kind of alienation forced me to act, and I found my strength in a closer experience with the written art, i.e. language."

Does he find much kinship within the avant-garde, particularly its sound poets?

"I don't know too many sound poets personally, if that's what you're asking. As you can tell, I'm trying my best to keep my poetry and performances fairly low-key," he says. And while definitely inspired by his early encounters



with Dada and the other European movements such as Marinetti's Futurism and Chopin's Ultra Lettrisme, Santos finds himself increasingly distanced from their histories, given their problematic appropriation of non-Western cultures and traditions. "Much western European and North American sound poetry seems to be based on troubling essentialisms about non-Western cultures that are no longer around. It doesn't take much to realize that these appropriations are colonialist in nature."

You need not do much research to be piqued by the primitivism of Dada, and the orientalism of John Cage and Jackson MacLow. In the contemporary scene, Larry Wendt, a noted American composer and researcher of sound poetry, describes the art as "an exploration of what is primitive and simultaneous in perception...a recognition of the tribal /oral poetries that exist and have existed for hundreds of years" (248-50, *Text-Sound Texts*). Sound poet George Quasha, who performs percussion with poet-vocalist Charles Stein and keyboardist David Arner in the band Axial Glossodelia Trio, describes their live performances as "Language and music {that becomes} difficult to distinguish, like listening to strange tribal sounds in the distance and being unclear about what one is hearing." [internet] And phonotextualist Jaap Blonk, perhaps the preeminent sound poet today, ended his virtuosic March 2012 Walker Arts Center performance with Cage's "Solo for Voice Song Book 64", reducing a Zen proverb to an outright mockery of the sound of the Japanese, replete with bespectacled yellowface expressions that recall Mickey Rooney's odious caricature of Audrey Hepburn's Japanese neighbor in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

"I can't really judge {these poets}, though," Santos says. "I mean, who's to say that my gigil, if you were to do an in-depth linguistic study of it, wouldn't yield evidence of some kind of distortion of the languages I've grown up absorbing all my life? My best friend in high school was Indian, but I also grew up in Manila living next to an Indian family, whose language I heard on the regular. Is my gigil some kind of sounding out of the Hindi I would hear on a near-daily basis? Or maybe it's a warping of my paternal

grandmother's Ilokano, or my Lola Isabel's Davaweño dialect, which I would hear spoken at the house when they'd visit."

Had I the luxury of time or a generous research grant to conduct such a complex linguistic study, I would certainly embark on it, as I find the poetry of Fel Santos unlike anything else I've encountered. Such a study might also include tracing the occult lineage that Santos' poetry/poetics proceeds from: Andre Breton, WB Yeats, Jack Spicer, and Hannah Weiner. It would take more seriously Santos' suggestion that his private language truly becomes his own in the summer of '86, following the demonic possession he experienced, and more closely examine this language poetry of occult sources (and sorcery).

As I consider the occult in Santos' work, I would utilize what cryptozoologist Loren Coleman calls "twilight language": the exploration of hidden meanings and synchromystic connections via onomatology (study of names) and toponymy (study of place names). Even before his encounter with surrealist and Berkeley Renaissance and language poets, Santos was a rabid consumer of American pop culture, particularly its movies and television. I'd then devote a portion of my essay to chronicling Santos' demonic possession during the month of July that he summered in New York City in 1986: when he absorbed, on consecutive days, an episode of the *Twilight Zone* involving a faustian pact between its characters ('I, Newton'); a film about pagan demonic worship (*Children of the Corn*); and a film steeped in dream logic and fabulist tropes (*Labyrinth*). A possible example of the use of twilight language: what significance/s might the location—at his aunt's apartment, which is right across from the UN building and down the hall from an apartment that had a ritual suicide earlier that year—of his demonic possession offer to each other?

A synchromystic reading would also trace correspondences between events, dates, and the names of these distinctly American cultural products leading up to Santos' experience with possession. How was the poet a changed

speaker of English following this experience? What are his recollections of experiencing gigil upon his return to the Philippines at the end of that summer? All of these are worthy considerations for an artist who has as much or more interest in using his work to explore hidden and repressed worlds than staking his claim in our greater world.

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<sup>1</sup> cf some of Santos' sound/video poetry at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPMKT0qBwbM>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykcxWycqTbU>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPvVt6u4tjg>

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## DAVID KAUFMANN

For Expression: Adorno, Neo-Conceptualism, & Robert Fitterman's *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself*

*Part of it is my  
fault, but part of it is society's fault—it's a vicious cycle.*<sup>1</sup>

My title is obviously a riff on Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith's Neo-Conceptualist anthology *Against Expression*, and its polemical assertiveness would seem to place me squarely on the side of Calvin Bedient's "Against Conceptualism." As it turns out, this article will come down much closer to Dworkin than to Bedient, because I will argue that Bedient is mistaken when he claims that uncreative writing is marked by an inauthentic flight from affect. On the other hand—and this puts me at some distance from Dworkin—I will try to recuperate the notion of expression for uncreative writing by going back to Adorno.

In order to do this though, I will have to take a slightly round-about route, one that begins by noticing that both Bedient and Dworkin have no trouble linking uncreative, appropriative writing—the works of Vanessa Place, Kenneth Goldsmith, Ara Shirinyan and Robert Fitterman, for example—with OULIPO. The notion that both practices use constraints only gets us so far, because their use of constraints is so different.

Oulipean writing eliminates the Surrealist stress on automatism and the concomitant reliance on inspiration, but, in its purer forms, it uses constraint to demonstrate the writer's virtuosity. Indeed, it substitutes invention for inspiration and thus places the author front and center. Unlike uncreative writing, it does not eliminate traditional poetic craft. Take *Eunoia* as an exemplary instance. As Marjorie Perloff has pointed out in a discussion of the book, Christian Bök's Oulipean exercise stresses "the melopoeic origins

of lyric poetry,” its principle “that sound controls meaning.”<sup>2</sup> What is more, *Eunoia*, though written according to a rather strict set of ‘pataphysical restraints, is all about skill. These restraints require a poet’s quick thinking—and the book is nothing if not a testimony to Bök’s remarkable wit—to see them through.

The ironic orientalism of *Eunoia*’s first chapter is telling, because the poem begins by dreaming of profusion and of production without labor. In other words, it conjurs magic. Although *Eunoia* itself belies that dream by thematizing the labor of its own production in several places, it insists on its profusion throughout and on the poet’s capacity for bringing it forth. In many ways, the first section—and thus by extension *Eunoia* as a whole—reaches back to Coleridge and the fantasy of the creative word that animates “Kubla Khan:”

Hassan claps, and (*tah-dah*) an Arab lass at a swank spa can draw  
a man’s bath and wash a man’s back, as Arab lads fawn and hang,  
athwart an altar, amaranth garlands as fragrant as attar – a balm  
that calms all angst.... Hassan asks that a vassal grant a man jam  
tarts and bananas, jam flans and casabas, halva, pap-padam and  
challah, babka, fasnacht and baklava.<sup>3</sup>

Hassan is a latter-day Kubla, his own pleasures summoned into reality by mere decree. Bök’s identification of the poet with the Asian potentate and demiurge might be playful, but it is no less marked. At issue here is not a belief that Bök’s words will actually call forth a modern Xanadu. Rather, the emphasis lies with his demonstration of the power of invention, with an equal emphasis on both *power* and *invention*. Bök is not so much competing with the Creator—as Coleridge seems to do—as with a rather sophisticated computer. Even here, the poet seems to win. Perloff notes that the project of *Eunoia*, with all its complicated constraints, “cannot be carried out by a computer: no program could readily sort out the words needed to present a prurient debauch or culinary banquet. And that, of course, is Bök’s point.”<sup>4</sup>

Uncreative writing makes the exact opposite point. Goldsmith's *Traffic*, Place's *Tragodia* or Fitterman's "This Window Makes Me Feel" could all be created—more, rather than less—by a computer and they all blatantly reject both melopoeia and poetic invention. They want nothing to do with craft.

The obvious link between OULIPO and uncreative writing lies elsewhere, with the way both modes of writing display what Adorno called Modernism's "allergy to semblance." Semblance (*Schein*) is an odd and awkward term in English because it carries none of the resonance that it bears in German aesthetics. In Adorno's work, semblance—or illusion, as it is sometimes translated—does not refer to a work's attempt to resemble the world, but rather to the illusion that it represents a self-contained and coherent whole. As Adorno puts it, "[t]he illusory quality of artworks is condensed in the claim to wholeness."<sup>5</sup> The work of art, made as it is of the materials drawn from a conflict-ridden and contradictory world, cannot actually constitute any genuine whole: "Aesthetically meaningful works feign a unity that cannot be fully achieved so long as society remains antagonistic."<sup>6</sup> Because Adorno was a musicologist, his strongest analogies come from music. Semblance, "form in the broadest sense" (*Aesthetic Theory* 110), can be best understood as desire to harmonize the materials from which the work is constructed.<sup>7</sup> But as harmony can only be achieved by main force—by sheer subjective force of will—the dissonance that eludes harmony is in fact harmony's truth (*Aesthetic Theory* 110). Thus the dialectic of modern art turns on its pursuit of this truth, on the fact that it largely "wants to shake off its semblance like an animal trying to shake off its antlers" (*Aesthetic Theory* 102).

One of the clearest ways to shake off the illusion of the work as a gapless totality is to demonstrate that it is a made thing, to show off its artifice and to make its procedures known: "to release the production in the product and, *within limits*, to put the process of production in the place of its results" (*Aesthetic Theory* 102, emphasis added). *Within limits*. As Adorno showed in



“The Aging of the New Music,” he felt that the drive towards proceduralism could be taken too far: the flight from the illusion of gapless form can all too easily fall back into the thrall of domination. As in the case of a composer like Cage, faith in process and proceduralism can mean turning over musical material to the brutal demands of the world as it is and can thus act as a mere reflex of those demands. It replicates the very domination that it claims to act against. Adorno, like his teacher Nietzsche, was a fierce critic of self-sacrifice and saw in the self-abnegation of the proceduralist not freedom from domination but rather a clever self-assertion.<sup>8</sup> By Adorno’s lights, composers like Boulez do not give up subjectivity; they merely make subjectivity capricious.<sup>9</sup>

So, for Adorno, uncreative writing and OULIPO meet at the point where they both criticize aesthetic semblance by emphasizing procedure and artifice, by putting process and production in the place of the product. From my brief sketch of his aesthetics, it should also be clear that Adorno would not have particularly cared for either uncreative writing or OULIPO. Although Adorno has been correctly read as a critic of subjectivity, his critique has often been misconstrued as denouncing subjectivity *tout court*. He did not: his target was a truncated subjectivity bent on mere survival and therefore mere domination, a subjectivity that had completely forgotten its nature as nature. This is the argument of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and can be summarized this way:

The substantial interest of Adorno’s work is that his critique of enlightenment is an effort to fulfill enlightenment. He fully takes the side of the dialectical autonomy of subjectivity and the self’s attainment of real control over nature. Real autonomy, however, would be the liberation of nature. Any effort to escape subjectivity, any damage to it, results in the assertion of the subject as an absolute subject... True subjectivity—Adorno held—transcends subjectivity. As identity, it is the principle of domination, but it is only subjectivity that raises the critique of the domination of

nature. In Hegelian terms—an origin of Adorno's position—true subjectivity extinguishes itself in the object as memory of nature.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, true subjectivity is an achievement, one that goes beyond the boundaries of our present social and intellectual dispensation. Adorno's thought, then, cannot be hewn to anti-humanism or post-humanism or any celebration of the object that denies the claim of the subject. In terms of art, this means that he does not accept a willed rejection of subjectivity:

As if objectivity were the result of a kind of subtraction, the exclusion of an ornament... Yet all aesthetic objectivity is mediated by the power of the subject, which brings an object [*Sache*] entirely to itself. Objectivism... thrives on the tempting ideology that one need only capitulate to the overpowering, senseless force of existence... but the overcoming of a *nonexistent self* is an all too comfortable course as is evident in what today's allegedly asceticism is bringing to maturity. ("The Aging of the New Music" 198)

Let me make three points about this quotation. The first is historical. As far as Adorno is concerned, the self does not yet exist: the subject is the *x* that marks the spot of unfulfilled potential. To discard the self, then, is to ensure that its potential is never reached. The second is philosophical: the subject cannot be discarded in the name of the object, because the object is literally inconceivable without the subject. To imagine the object without the subject and to render up nature to the merely existent and make it succumb to the world as it is but as it does not need to be. The third is just the concomitant of the second: the object dialectically needs the subject to come into its own, just as the subject requires the object. So subjectivity, properly understood, does not bar access to the object. It is, in fact, the only way to get *to* the object.

To put this in less abstract, less philosophical terms: I have argued elsewhere that uncreative writing makes the question of the author's

intention a central problem of the work.<sup>11</sup> Like the god of the Epicureans, the author seems to retreat to a single point—the point of pure executive decision—and in the present context, I would suggest—although Adorno would never go that far—that the act of reframing, of transposition and transmediation marks the bare minimum of subjectivity necessary for the object matter of a work to become visible. Adorno would not go that far because he believed—and here again his background in music is key—the unidirectional technological rationalization of society implied an equally univocal rationalization of aesthetic material (such as the notes, sounds and combinations of those notes and sounds). Accordingly, he seemed to hold that there was only one valid path for a given art in any given period. (Hence his attack on Stravinsky's neo-classicism.) Such an approach is debatable in music, as it is in all the other arts: perhaps even more so in the other arts. Adorno was particularly uninterested in painting and sculpture and therefore ignored the different forms of rationalization, the different kinds of determinate negation that marked the heroic decades of High Modernism. Adorno, who occasionally made reference to Picasso and Klee, had literally no time for Duchamp.

A little closer to home, for us at least, Adorno's touchstones for authentic writing in the twentieth century were ascetic—Kafka, Beckett (to whom *Aesthetic Theory* was to be dedicated) and Celan—and their asceticism is driven by their distance from the kind of sloppy, cliché-ridden and kitschy raw material that is so important to writers like Place, Goldsmith, Shirinyan and Fitterman. Adorno was dismissive of Dada and lukewarm about surrealism. The kinds of intense and intensive pruning that he imagined to be necessary for the successful aesthetic critique of semblance are anathema to uncreative writers.

We can venture the rather uncontroversial claim, then, that Adorno, while offering a fair description of the logic that drives Oulipean and uncreative writing, would dislike them. The OULIPO writers would seem too capricious to him, too uninterested in the demands of their material

and he would say that the uncreative writers draw on the wrong material for their poetry. Worse, he would say that the appropriative poets commit Cage's sin of accepting the world as it is, rather than rubbing "objectivity" against the grain and thus allowing the material to serve what he takes as the critical task of art. "Art," he writes, "is the effort to preserve in memory and cultivate those split-off elements of truth that reality has handed over the growing domination of nature, the scientific and technological standards that permit no exceptions" ("The Aging of the New Music" 192). In other words, in order to counter the technological domination of nature, the arts would make us hear what science and technology would have us forget: the voice of suffering nature.<sup>12</sup>

I will come back later in this discussion to this critical task of art. I will argue that while Adornian critique of uncreative writing might score a palpable hit, his commitment to a univocal rationalization of aesthetic material of art is unnecessarily limiting. In spite—and because—of its material, some uncreative writing does indeed allow us to hear the voice—or, as Dworkin would have it, the echo of the voice—of suffering nature. By pursuing a line of an argument laid out in the *Aesthetic Theory*, we can say that the uncreative writing's critique of semblance opens up a space for semblance's dialectical opposite—the sound of suffering, or what Adorno calls "expression."

Now, this will take some arguing and will take some time, particularly as Adorno's use of the term "expression" is idiosyncratic and because uncreative writing seems on the surface to be resolutely pitted "against expression." In his introduction to *Against Expression*, Dworkin is pretty clear about what he means: "Our emphasis is on work that does not seek to express unique, coherent, or *consistent individual psychologies* and that, moreover, refuses familiar strategies of authorial control in favor of automatism, reticence, obliquity, and modes of noninterference."<sup>13</sup> In this introductory essay, Dworkin keeps coming back to the anti-referential, anti-diegetical nature of this work and he seems to want to block all paths back to the psychology of the author. His anthology, then, stands against *self*-expression.

It is precisely this opposition to self-expression that motivates Calvin Bedient's attack on Neo-Conceptualism in both its Oulipean and uncreative forms in his essay "Against Conceptualism," an attack he launches in the name of all the affect that he finds missing in Neo-Conceptualist literature. His provocative essay is odd because it relies on a number of easily dismissable oppositions. He writes that "concept has trumped feeling" and that "the uncreative heads effectively shook off the body." He goes on to argue that conceptualism marks a pyrrhic victory of head over heart, culture over biology, idea over sensation, ego over impulse, and reason over imagination.<sup>14</sup> I am less interested in undoing these dichotomies than I am in looking at Bedient's real quarry. As far as he is concerned, Neo-Conceptualism is damnable because it flees from affect and he seems to feel that affect in poetry is only affect when it can be identified with the figure of the poet.

When Bedient writes on behalf of feeling, he is not concerned with what Sianne Ngai has called our "ugly feelings:" envy, irritation, anxiety, paranoia (to which I would add, amongst others, humiliation and embarrassment and their concomitant, disdain). Rather, he is interested in big game, in the vehement passions, such as "anger, fear, joy, crippling shame, jealousy, grief—emotions that bear on a vital *self-regard*" ("Against Conceptualism," emphasis added). The most important of these passions, though, remains melancholy. He writes that "[t]he least appreciated and understood of the affects is sadness or, better, melancholy, without which militancy has no prod. Melancholy may be called the ur-feeling, even the ground of feeling... We disparage it at the peril of disowning ourselves" ("Against Conceptualism"). Bedient makes three critical moves here. The first is that he elides the difference between sadness and melancholy—between all the gradations of loss, between mourning and melancholia. The second is that he also equates melancholy with militancy. In fact, he goes on to claim that melancholy is a goad to opposition.

This assertion is counter-intuitive because melancholy has traditionally been understood as an inhibitor of action, hence the equally traditional

interpretation of Hamlet, “the melancholy Dane,” as a man hamstrung by his dark thoughts. To put it in terms that are psychoanalytic rather than humoral, melancholy cannot mobilize anger into political opposition, because it is too busy using that anger to beat up on the self. Melancholy scores the lost object’s revenge on the ego for the ego’s anger at its loss. As Hanif Kureishi puts it in a review of Darian Leader’s *The New Black*, a suggestive post-Lacanian anatomy of depression: “The dead take up residence inside us; it is them we are really berating in our self-reproaches, not ourselves. We have to acknowledge, in speech, how much we have hated our loved ones. This is because they are not dead enough.”<sup>15</sup> In fine: the primacy of the dead leaves no place for the living and the melancholic is too consumed by self-hatred to turn her anger on an unjust world. In the end, contra Bedient, psychoanalysis shows us that melancholy actually *constrains* militancy. It does not enable it. To be fair, Bedient recognizes this, although only by hedging and thus undoing his argument: “Maintained on this side of depression, it [melancholy] has a self-preservative function” (“Against Conceptualism”). Sadness can be maintained on this side of depression, but melancholy cannot, because melancholy is another, richer and as Leader points out at the beginning of *The New Black*, more useful term to designate the more extreme forms of unhappiness we call “depression.” So, if he wanted to save his point about the self-preservative function of sadness, Bedient would have to reinstate the psychoanalytically significant triadic distinction between more-or-less ordinary sadness, less ordinary mourning and even less ordinary melancholia.<sup>16</sup>

And then the final point about Bedient’s argument, a point which illuminates the other two: Bedient, a close student of Kristeva, sees poetry as a therapeutic enterprise. He is worried about our “self-regard.” His brief for melancholy is that it is self-preservative. His bill of particulars against Neo-Conceptualism is that “conceptual writing, which seems so pert and impertinent, hath really neither joy, nor light, *nor help for pain*” (“Against Conceptualism,” emphasis added). Neo-Conceptualism is suspect because it is not therapeutic.

Bedient is both right and wrong here. As I shall argue in the next section of this essay, he is correct in his sense that Neo-Conceptualism offers little immediate therapeutic value. In all his examples of a useful poetry of melancholic affect, Bedient associates the affect represented in the poem with the emotional state of the poet. He indicates that works by Vallejo, Plath, Artaud and Bishop express the poet's own emotions. We can therefore assume—though he never actually says this—that Bedient assumes that poems help their authors metabolize pain and therefore, through an act of imaginative identification, offer succor to the reader as well. The reader will view herself in the poem, will identify the poet's emotions with her own. Uncreative writing, he indicated, militates against such identifications. It underscores the *distance* between the reader, the author and the denaturalized object matter of the text. The emotions the Neo-conceptual text expresses are adamantly not those of the author, at least not in any direct way, and the text, by reframing the matter it reproduces, undercuts the immediate identification of the (literary, culturally invested) reader with the text. To borrow Charles Bernstein's terminology for a moment, we can say that uncreative writing is determined to be anti-absorptive. If we come back to Adorno, we might explain all this by saying that uncreative writing's assault on what it sees as an all-too-easy, unmediated identification marks its attack on semblance.

For all that, we cannot assume that Bedient is correct when he claims that uncreative writing's lack of self-expression makes it fall into an equally easy complicity with the world, a complacency with the merely existent. On the contrary, the representation of melancholy in Robert Fitterman's *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* raises a protest against the present dispensation precisely because it is *not* therapeutic. The fact that the poem is so grating and that it refuses uplift so uncomfortably allows it to serve the other purpose that Bedient sees for poetry—opposition, if not actual militancy.

The better part of Fitterman's more recent work investigates the public performances of privacy, mediated through goods (everyday consumer items at the mall in *Sprawl*, pharmaceuticals in *Pillbox*) and services (Facebook

in *Now We Are Friends*). *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* gets rid of the pills and the mediation through consumer goods. It stays with the internet and all the good things you can find on the web. It presents comments on depression and loneliness culled from media articles about dysthymia, from song lyrics and from websites. It arranges what it finds in what appears to be a single expression of pain organized around its most frequently used word—the personal pronoun “I.” In this way, the poem resembles the long-form Romantic meditation, and, as the epigraph to the book demonstrates, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* defines itself against James Schuyler’s great first-person account “The Morning of the Poem.” To make his point hit home, Fitterman self-consciously imitates Schuyler’s lineation.<sup>17</sup>

Given its object matter, it should come no surprise that *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* makes for dreary reading:

You see, this is not the best time of the year for me; in fact,  
this is the worst. This is the time when family  
And friends get together, share in the festive spirit, get excited  
over presents, and spend time together. This is  
The time when families look forward to parties and BBQ’s and  
singing by the tree... I’ve never had any of that.  
I think that the biggest, hardest concept to accept or understand  
for us as humans is that, yes, we are all these little  
Separate creatures, so does our existence mean anything? I have been  
in the deepest well of solitude, darkness, depression,  
And have wondered why I couldn’t be happy and wondered if  
other creatures, beyond humans, are unhappy and  
Lonely too, and does this feeling go back to the beginning of  
Time...(42-3)

The collective speaker of the poem is tortured by the clichés that it takes seriously. In the section I have cited here, the speaker has turned a hateful



Christmas song — “There’ll be much misttoeing/And hearts will be glowing/When loved ones are near./It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” — into its melancholic, polar, but no less stereotyped opposite. What is perhaps most odd about this section is the inclusion of barbecues in the panorama of holiday activities, as if all the family celebrations in an American year had been rolled into one, flaccid and tormenting scene of togetherness. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity or the authenticity of the original writer’s emotions, but the high-school Existentialism (“yes, we are all these little/Separate creatures, so does our existence mean anything?”) and clichéd self-dramatization (“I have been/in the deepest well of solitude, darkness, depression”) give neither the light nor the help for pain that Bedient calls for from a poetry of self-expression. There is nothing transformative here. What is more, the text is remarkable for its flat lack of detail. (In this and other ways we shall discuss, it differs wildly from Schuyler.) When the poem says “I have a lot/Of reasons to cry,” it does not go on to explain or provide specifics. It merely says “Just all of the things in my life/that have happened,/The things that went wrong, the things that hurt me” (37).

Instead of detail, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* provides repetition. Here is one index of its repetitiveness: the word “lonely” is used 105 times; “loneliness” clocks in at 55 times, and “sad,” 80 times in a book of 78 pages. At the same time, for all these abstractions, there are relatively few objects in the poem. Books only appear eight times; TVs, seven times, trees only once and computers and flowers not at all. “I feel,” on the other hand, occurs 53 times. Whatever inflection there is, comes from the line breaks. These add little touches of intensity at the beginnings and the ends of the otherwise rather monotonous lines.

Let me be clear: this is not High Modernist repetition in the Steinian mode. These repetitions do not provide an education in discriminating “all the slightest variations,” as Stein puts it in *The Making of Americans*. They go nowhere and thus describe an emotional fixity, one that reflects the depressive’s sense of living in an equally non-Steinian continuous present.

They betray the sense of always “know[ing] the blueprint:/Past, present and future” (22), of experiencing time that does not change. (“Sorry, but every year seems/the same” [32]). The book ends with lyrics from the song “Solitary Death in the Nocturnal Woodlands,” by the black metal band Inquisition, which imagines, in a self-mythologizing, black metal sort of way, not an eternity of death as much as an eternity of *dying*: “In this endless extreme tomb of weeping sadness,/I am embraced by the cosmic force of night..../Dying alone in the woodlands isolated in my empire of solitary death./Total sadness, total darkness, total coldness, total pain” (78).

Given its undifferentiated repetitiveness, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* can serve as a gloss on Kristeva’s description of the language of melancholics:

Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed—repetitive and monotonous. Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill ... A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate ... changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies.<sup>18</sup>

Behind Kristeva’s account is Freud’s sense that the melancholic would rather suffer narcissistic regression than relinquish the lost object. This regression allows the depressive to maintain a threatened libidinal investment in the object by transferring it to the ego itself. Kristeva in turn argues that melancholy marks the “impossible mourning” for the presymbolic “Thing,” the lost Mother.<sup>19</sup> In order to guard this lost treasure, the melancholic stores it in the asymbolic realm of the Real, thus rejecting compensatory metaphors for this unnameable Thing.<sup>20</sup> By refusing attachments and substitutions, the depressive can assert an ultimately catastrophic omnipotence—nothing has been lost—which cannot help but retreat into a stuttering, obsessive and oddly uninflected form of litany.

Kristeva argues that melancholy is only overcome through the provision of new, substitute referents for the unknown (and unknowable) losses that lie

in our past. Melancholy can only be countered by making that which lies beyond or behind our language speak, however indirectly, by tying unspoken affect to new objects. Melancholy needs to be taught how to tell a story. The late Renaissance defined melancholia as “sadness without cause,”<sup>21</sup> that is, as suffering without an immediately apparent originary trauma. Without a place to begin, the depressive lives in a continuous, unchanging present, because she cannot construct a narrative: the past, present and future are indistinguishable. They all follow the same blueprint. In the therapeutic situation, then, the analyst and the patient have to “concatenate.” They must construe narratives of loss that the patient can both live with and live by. By binding depression to language, the melancholic can begin the proper work of mourning, the articulation of grief. Art, which is made of metaphor and displacements, of concatenated images and narrative, cannot help but serve this therapeutic end.

In this light, the absence of detail in *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* is telling. The *moi qui parle*, the poem’s collective speaker, has no objects to speak of. Rather, it keeps circling the place of its loss without ever figuring out what has disappeared and why (“maybe it’s all/About natural selection? [39]). That is not to say that it doesn’t look for clues:

My future is looking bleak and my past haunts me, thinking  
what could have been, or wondering  
How my life got so messed up. I think it must be my  
parents’ fault for messing up  
Our family. If I could be granted one wish in life,  
it would be a “reset” button,  
Because I cannot figure out where my life went astray,  
and I would really like to know  
What egregious misdeed I committed to validate  
my life’s current status.  
It has to have occurred as an infant, because I have  
very few happy recollections

Of my youth and even fewer as I grow older.  
I continue to grope every day  
And evening for an answer. (38)

Notice that the search for origins goes nowhere. The collective speaker's disastrous life might be the parents' fault. They messed up or they messed up the family or they messed up by messing up the family. (The line break before "our family" allows "messing up" to do double duty.) Or it might be just punishment for some "egregious misdeed" that the collective speaker committed. If so, this action had to have taken place at a very early point, before language and before responsibility. In any event, it is inexplicable.

In other places in the poem, Fitterman sutures bits from articles that look for sociological, rather than psychological origins of widespread dysthymia. Taken out of context, this section culled from Jennifer Senior's "Alone Together," which originally appeared in *New York Magazine* in 2008, indicates that the fault lies with the city itself:

But on the whole, in New York City, one in three homes  
contains a single dweller,  
Just one lone man or woman who flips on the coffeemaker  
in the morning, and switches  
Off the lights at night. These numbers *should* tell  
an unambiguous story;  
They *should* confirm the common belief about our city,  
which is that New York is an  
Isolating, coldhearted sort of place. *Maybe* that's why  
Mark Twain called it: "a splendid desert—  
A domed and steepled solitude, where the stranger is lonely  
in the midst of a million of his race."  
(15; emphasis added)

The specificity of this quotation, its lack of self-dramatizing cliché and its steady anchor in the third person (in a poem whose most frequently used word is “I”) are refreshing and give this moment a kind of explanatory authority. But notice that the poem says that the numbers *should* tell a story and that this story *might* be the reason Mark Twain called New York a “splendid desert.” In other words, it raises a doubt about the force of these numbers. And, not surprisingly for an article in *New York*, “Alone Together” does go on to argue that New York is *not* a desert at all and that living alone does not mean that people are lonely. In fact, Senior claims that New Yorkers are not particularly depressed or lonely at all. Of course, that conclusion does not suit Fitterman’s purpose. The melancholic task of the poem rests in proposing an explanation for sadness and then undermining it. It will seek origins that it will not or cannot find.

At another point, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* proposes an economic way of understanding what the poem calls, drawing on a blog post by Emily White, “the loneliness epidemic.”<sup>22</sup> Fitterman has lifted this section from “The sad lonely Men of Starbucks—the unemployed,” which was posted on Examiner.com by William Elliott Hazelgrove at the height of the recession in 2009:

...They sit in their comfort jeans trying to look  
inconspicuous. These men do not read fiction.  
They stare at newspapers or some jabber away at a laptop and  
some have the thirty-yard death stare.  
They all have a deep look of shock and disbelief. When I first  
saw these men, I thought maybe it was a fluke,  
But everyday they increased until yesterday the place was overrun.  
We might as well be sitting in a Union Hall.  
They look like they should all be in offices. You see the hands  
Reaching for something to do, expressions  
Trying to navigate the strange duplicity of sitting in a Starbucks  
in the middle of the afternoon  
When the rest of the world is working. (39-40)

These men, mostly middle-aged, are “collectively just about the saddest/Sight in the world” (39) and their problem is that they have no place in our present economy. Or at least, that is the explanation that Hazelgrove provides: “They are of the middle management variety and that is something the new economy will not carry...They are now redundant men, put out to pasture too early in a Starbucks in a small town: the sad lonely men of our time.”<sup>23</sup> Fitterman’s poem does not include these last sentences. It concentrates on what the men look like and what they are doing, while only hinting at why they are there. Even so, the poem does present an instance where a first- and third-person account identifies joblessness as the traumatic cause of depression:

Lots of folks are jobless, but that doesn’t help me.  
I just read that the ranks of  
The unemployed now total 12.5 million people.  
One of them is a guy I know  
From the gym named Al. Al was recently laid off  
from his job as a columnist  
For a small local paper. Al was describing to me  
the intense feelings of rejection  
That come with sudden unemployment. I mean  
the icy chill of loneliness  
I’ve begun to experience, too, in a culture that seems  
to be bustling on by,  
Leaving me as more spectator than participant. (28-9)

That is just one moment in the poem, though. For most of *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself*, it is hard to tell if joblessness is itself a symptom of a greater problem or a problem in its own right, as when the collective speaker writes near the end: “Basically,/ I’m in my room all day and I can’t get a job, so I can’t/Get out of my rut.”(77) The linebreak’s emphasis on “can’t” here is key, but the meaning of the sentence is ambiguous. Can the collective speaker not get a job because she is in her room all day or is she

in her room all day because she cannot get a job? Perhaps the connective “and” there indicates that both are true and mutually reinforcing. Where Al knows why he’s lonely and depressed, the collective speaker at the end does not. Perhaps that is why Al has a name and the collective speaker does not. To put it in Kristevan terms, Al has entered the Symbolic, where names, concatenation and explanation are possible.

Of course, we should be wary of treating the collective speaker of the poem as a single person, just as we should be wary of the sometimes overwrought language of post-Lacanian psychoanalysis. The *moi qui parle* of the poem, like the sources from which it draws, do not suffer from asymbolia. That collective speaker is voluble and very much lodged in the realm of the Symbolic. In fact, one of the problems that *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* demonstrates is that these folks are all-too firmly wedged there. They can only figure their emotions in unhelpful, pre-fabricated terms. They find themselves tormented by mass-mediated images of a happiness they have not achieved (as we saw with those peculiar Xmas barbecues) and tend to describe their experience in equally mass-mediated terms that provide little insight into their problems. One example: consciously or unconsciously, the lines “I can’t describe what’s going on with me...there’s this hunger so deep inside me/that I don’t know how to feel” [23; ellipsis in the original] seem rely on the song “Lies” by the Goth metal band, Evanescence.

More interesting, all these expressions of loneliness take place in public. They were quite literally mediated by the web and they are now published in handy book form as a poem. One could imagine a way in which chat rooms and sites like Web of Loneliness could be therapeutic, could serve as a relief for the isolation that besets the collective speaker of the book. After all, that is the promise that Jennifer Senior’s article “Alone Together” proposes at its end (the end that, as I mentioned before, Fitterman does not include in his poem):

[W]hat the Internet and New York have in common is that each environment facilitates interaction between individuals like no

other, and both would be positively useless—would literally lose their *raison d'être*—if solitary individuals didn't furiously interact in each. They show us, in trillions of invisible ways every day, that people are essentially nothing without one another. We may sometimes want to throttle our fellow travelers on the F train. We may on occasion curse our neighbors for playing music so loud it splits the floor. But living cheek-by-jowl is the necessary price we pay for our well-being. And anyway, who wants to ride the subway alone?"<sup>24</sup>

The collective speaker of *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* does not seem to experience any of this at all. The collective speaker enshrined here does not feel that she is interacting with anyone. In fact, you could say that the misery (and the vacuity) of the "I" in the poem comes from the poem's sense that it is really nothing more than a soliloquy, a confession without a confessor or an audience. There is no "you" out there in the first place:

And here's another really  
sad factor: I'm totally imagining who this "you" might be;  
I guess one could say it's a fantasy because I'm not really talking to  
anyone, I'm not really relating to anyone, and it's not  
Like I'm going out and meeting anyone, so when I'm saying "you",  
I really don't know who I am addressing...  
And isn't that even doubly sad and pathetic? Of course, "you" don't  
have to answer that because there really isn't a "you"  
And I don't even know who that "you" would be if there were one.  
This just adds another level to my pain and desolation. (69)

Not surprisingly, a poem that seems bereft of objects (or objects beyond a depleted self) is equally bereft of other subjects. Against the therapeutic model of poetry as a counter-depressant, as a way of overcoming the most devastating effects of melancholy (of keeping sadness on "this side of depression"), Fitterman presents the web and the poem as abject and



adamantly non-therapeutic. There is no change, no development, no uplift here, just that all-encompassing concluding line from Inquisition's lyric: "Total sadness, total darkness, total coldness, total pain" (78).

To get the full effect of Fitterman's rejection of the therapeutic, compare *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* to the poem it invokes in both its epigraph and its lineation, James Schuyler's 40-odd-page "The Morning of the Poem." In many ways, Schuyler's title contains an aural pun because it could just as easily have been titled "The Mourning of the Poem." Towards its end, Schuyler writes:

Before dawn I woke and made my oatmeal, orange juice and  
Coffee and thought about how this poem seems mostly about what I've  
lost: the one who mattered most, my best friend, Paul  
(Who mattered least) the Island, the California wildflower paper,  
the this, the that, Whippoorwill, buried friends,  
And the things I only write between the lines.<sup>25</sup>

And indeed, although the poem is in effect a diary of a month or so that Schuyler spent at his mother's house in East Aurora, New York in the summer of 1976, it is in fact a poem very much possessed of death and loss. The most important of these is the death of Fairfield Porter, his friend and sometime lover, "the one who mattered most," who had passed away the previous September. At one point in the poem, Schuyler addresses Porter directly:

...were  
You buried in your sneakers? Of course not,  
though in a tender joke you were;  
A nosegay tossed on the coffin: but this is not  
your poem, your poem I may  
Never write, too much, though it is there and  
Needs only to be written down  
And one day will and if it isn't it doesn't matter. (262)

Strictly speaking, “The Morning of the Poem” is not Porter’s. It is dedicated to the painter Darragh Park and keeps coming back to Park. It is Park’s head that Schuyler associates with Baudelaire’s skull in the first lines and it is Park’s studio in Chelsea that Schuyler imagines returning to at the end. Even so, the ease with which Schuyler hails different people in the second person (Park, Porter, a lover named Bob and the English artist Ann Dunn, amongst others) becomes something of a joke: “When you read this poem you will have to decide/Which of the ‘yous’ are ‘you’” (294). And if we take Fitterman seriously, we have to see that this is precisely the reason why Fitterman includes the complaint about the absence of a real “you” in *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself*. Schuyler has real “yous” to write of and to. Fitterman’s collective speaker does not.

In other words, Schuyler is able to write about his losses precisely because he *has* other subjects, other others to address. What is more, he has any number of objects as well. “The Morning of the Poem” describes Schuyler in what is his customary situation: sitting by a window and writing about what he sees. He is very precise:

An August morning, cool and cloudless,  
Maple leaves lightly moving, conifers perfectly still, robins  
skimming the grass where a fat black dog named  
Cornelia just took a dump, a sky not blue but white, up the valley  
from Olean a freight train passes (the distant  
Sound of breakers)... (293)

Even the dogs in “The Morning of the Poem” have names and it is an important aspect of Schuyler’s poetic that he gives due, sometimes meticulous, attention to the smallest of objects (the parts of a flower, perhaps, or Cornelia’s turds) and to fine gradations of color (an “almost autumn sky” like “a swimming pool awash/with cinnamon and gentian” [264]). Schuyler was an aesthete of the incidental and his aestheticism is all about his capacity for fine discriminations of judgment. His work is all

about differentiation much in the way that Fitterman's book is not. Where Fitterman's poem lacks other subjects and objects, "The Morning of the Poem" is awash with them. Schuyler's poetry would never find its way into *Against Expression*. It is resolutely diegetical. It points to this and to that. It is heavily referential.

"The Morning of the Poem" is therapeutic in Kristeva's sense—it *is* in fact Porter's poem. The empty space that the dead painter has left has been filled by a living one. The pronomial shifter "you" which originally and traumatically referred to Porter has in turn been shifted to other referents (Park, Dunn, Bob, the reader). But, if we are true to the implications of Kristeva's word—and I am following Darian Leader here, who argues that all acts of mourning are in fact re-enactments of previous grief—Porter stands in for an even more elemental loss. The poem thus displaces that originary loss and narrativizes it, however provisionally. It watches time pass and learns to distinguish between days. It can make a story of its past and imagine a future ("Look over/ Your shoulder into the future: one thing I want to see is heavy/snow falling in Chelsea" [296]). It is not "a monotonous melody," not a "recurring, obsessive" litany.

If I say that "The Morning of the Poem" is therapeutic, I mean this in a rather strict sense. I do not want to suggest that the poem tries to offer moral uplift or is somehow "good for you." Unlike Mary Oliver's unduly famous "The Summer Day," which addresses an anonymous reader that it knows is out there, "The Morning of the Poem" does not demand that you take stock of your life and change your ways. "The Summer Day," which Fitterman singles out by quoting in its entirety in *Rob, The Plagiarist*, does. It is all prettified, spilled religion. It hails its reader and insists that she commit herself to a total moral makeover. For that reason it has been the stuff of sermons and college entrance essays since it was first published: "Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? /Tell me, what is it you plan to do /with your one wild and precious life?"<sup>26</sup>

Schuyler makes a point of rejecting religion—spilled or otherwise—in “The Morning of the Poem.” He not only rejects the notion of sin (a notion that hovers about *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself*); he also refuses any enduring comfort, even in poetry. At one point, Schuyler imagines Whitman and Heine visiting him at his deathbed, and wishing him goodbye, not hello. They are thus not ushering him into a poetic Elysium. Far from it: they are of this world, not the next. Nor does Schuyler seek comfort in Nature. Unlike so many poems that describe trees, plants and flowers—poems like “The Summer Day”—“The Morning of the Poem” does not identify with Nature writ large. Nor, for that matter, does it see natural processes as hostile, alien forces. It thus owes nothing to either Wordsworth or Jeffers. If anything, Schuyler’s celebration of the pleasures of *otium* and his mastery of the middle style, show him to be thoroughly Horatian. Schuyler might well be the closest heir to 18th-century English Horatianism that the American twentieth century could produce.<sup>27</sup>

So, in spite of the number of losses, miseries and mishaps that “The Morning of the Poem” alludes to, Schuyler’s work presents a sweetly compelling, if somewhat archaic, image of the good life: the poet, living in contemplative retreat, content to look and to freely espouse. As if to make Schuyler’s weak materialism (or rather, his strong latter-day Epicureanism) clear, “The Morning of the Poem,” ends as it begins, with a man taking a leak, and there is nothing particularly uplifting about urination. But Schuyler is after all a poet of small physical pleasures. Significantly, he does not take sex as his index for pleasure, but rather eating (“grapes, oysters/And champagne: bliss is such a simple thing” [296]) and sight (what he calls in another poem “the pure pleasure of/Simply looking” [220]). If “The Morning of the Poem” fulfills Bedient’s demand that it offer joy, light, and help for pain, it does so by modeling a path out of sadness, loneliness and grief through a conscious libidinal investment in the world.<sup>28</sup>

*No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* refuses all this. It does not model a successful working-through of loss. Quite the opposite, it offers a portrait

of unaccountable abjection at every point. To what end? In spite of his best efforts, Bedient could not try to argue that Fitterman's poem plasters "procedures over melancholy" because it doesn't. It uses procedures to unmask melancholy, to show it in all its everyday dreariness. *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* is up to something else. Rather than deny affect, it offers it up to view. It does not work through unpleasant affect therapeutically. It presents such affect as a problem. In its way, the poem displays another stage in the modernist critique of semblance.

"The Morning of the Poem" launches its own assault on semblance by making the process of its own creation very visible. Schuyler tells us several times that he is sitting at his typewriter in either underwear or shorts, looking out his window and writing; that he spends several hours there every morning; that the keys get sticky when he has been drinking lemonade. The poem does not attempt to pass itself off as a gapless whole or as a spontaneous soliloquy. It does not present itself in reified form as a natural object but as the product of a single man's activity. It is work. In a certain way, the aesthetically arbitrary ending of "The Morning of the Poem" reinforces this point: "But Pernod, Pernod is murder. I wish I had some now, but tea/and orange juice will have to do:/Tomorrow: New York: in blue, in green, in white, East Aurora goodbye" (303). The poem does not round itself off or make its form seem necessary, but comes to an abrupt halt because after all, Schuyler is about to leave. It's not that there is no more to say or that the poem's themes have been resolved. Neither is the case. Schuyler has got to go to Chelsea. The poem, a letter to a friend, need go no further because he is going to see the friend tomorrow. Its form, if anything, is arbitrary.

Nevertheless, the poem preserves the illusion of its immediacy. "The Morning of the Poem" presents itself as the direct transcription of the vagaries of perception and thought as they happen. It clearly aims to map a single mind at work. More importantly, it does not show us the depth of grief, but grief overcome. While we can attempt retrace its methods of displacement and concatenation back to their melancholic source, we

can only assume what that source might be. In other words, to read the poem therapeutically, we have to begin start from the presumption that the poem is about grief—a fairly easy presumption, given its insistence on loss—in order to see it successfully working through that grief. We do not hear melancholy’s “exhausted, interrupted” litany, just the melody once the stutters and interruptions have ceased. So, while the poem is not a gapless whole, it would seem to present a consciousness that is. Or, better still, the poem provides the illusion of a consciousness that though it might not be transparent to itself, remains open to all its meanderings. The idea that the poem can be therapeutic, can model its victory over crushing grief is the very illusion that the poem promotes, and the flexibility of its lineation bodies forth the emotional flexibility it describes. “The Morning of the Poem” poem is about the sensual pleasure of consciousness.

Fitterman will have none of this. By suturing together an untold number of voices and statements, he has created an almost impossible poetic “I,” one that is frequently and fiercely contradictory in its statements, vocabularies and frames of reference. It is only bound together by its moods, by its brittle antagonisms and by the insistence of its first-person pronoun. The lines swell, not as a sign of a capacious self, but merely to show much borrowed language there is out there to fill them. What is more, the melancholy the poem describes is almost infinitely expandable.

While Fitterman is thus displaying a healthy allergic reaction to a certain form of semblance—the illusion of an ultimately gapless self—he cannot avoid semblance completely. It is there in his curation of his source texts, his selection and lineation of the stuff he has found on the web. It is there in the fact that he chooses this quote and not that. It is there in the fact that he gives his material form. Minimal as that form might seem, it counts as semblance. To the extent that “illusion” in Adorno is not optional, it is the form the material takes, or, to put it in the stringently dialectical terms that Adorno assumes, the subjectively mediated form that the material demands. Form, as the shaping presence of the subjective, cannot, as Adorno says,

merely be subtracted any more than the objective can. Adorno likens it to water dowsing: “[Art’s] immanent process has the quality of following a divining rod. To follow where the hand is drawn...” (*Aesthetic Theory* 115). But the illusion is precisely that, illusion. To put it in Adorno’s terms, it is an unavoidable untruth that allows the truth of the material to appear, if only momentarily. Adorno’s other term for that truth is “expression.”

Expression—and again we should remember that Adorno takes his examples from music and is thinking of the marking *expressivo* on a score—is not the expression of a particular thought. As Adorno says of Mahler: “This is not the expression of something specific...It aims at marked *intensity*.”<sup>29</sup> This change in intensity breaks the necessary illusions of form much as a dissonance might escape the impositions of harmony. It is the moment where the material reveals the fragility and untenability of the gapless whole: “Dissonance is effectively expression; the consonant and harmonious want to soften and eliminate it” (*Aesthetic Theory* 110). Expression expresses a barely differentiated state or a mood: “sadness, energy, or longing” (110). But given that Adorno thinks that the world as it stands is wrong, expression expresses life in that world as pain. It is “the suffering countenance of artworks” (111), just as the “expression of living creatures is that of pain” (110). Adorno famously remarked that writing poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric. He no less famously recanted this summary judgment when he wrote in *Negative Dialectics* that “[p]erennial suffering has as much right to *expression* as a tortured person has to howl; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written.”<sup>30</sup> Poetry, as art, as semblance that makes expression appear, makes audible the voice of suffering nature.

Now, there is more than a touch of the gothic in all this, and if we take Adorno seriously, we have to admit that his dig that psychoanalysis is only true in its exaggerations applies equally to Critical Theory. Even so, his interest in suffering nature—that is to say, his interest in what has been dominated in us—should interest us as it interests Fitterman and Schuyler.

We can hear that suffering in “The Morning of the Poem,” not as Bedient would have it, as a therapeutic text, but as a poem where fulfillment lies either in memory or in prospect. There is an asceticism that runs through Schuyler’s poem, for all its discussion of pleasure—an asceticism born of the peculiarities of Schuyler’s situations. An alcoholic who can no longer drink, an aging gay man who can no longer find partners, the poet suffers from debilitating mental illness (described as schizophrenia in the poem, though just as likely bipolar disorder), and therefore does not have money because he does not have a job. I have argued elsewhere that one of the lessons of Schuyler’s poetry is that ethics and politics do not map onto each other: the immediately ethical might be politically disastrous on a global scale.<sup>31</sup> One could also say that the hard-won wistfulness of “The Morning of the Poem” shows that what I describe as its Horatianism is bought at a considerable cost that cannot—or can no longer—be paid in full. “The Morning of the Poem” shows that the ideal of Horace’s *otium* or the *dolce far niente* of Rousseau’s solitary botanist is the privilege of the rich—though I’m not sure that even the rich can enjoy it anymore—the unemployable, and the mad. Similarly, if we go back to the beginning of this essay and look at the beginning of *Eunoia*, we can see that the self-conscious artifice that generates that poem actually undercuts its profusion of delights. It is clearly not mimetic and its pleasures are nothing but magic—a sleight of hand we would like to be true.

Fitterman’s poem has none of Schuyler’s wistfulness or *Eunoia*’s fantasies of opulence. It has a hard time imagining any specific objects of desire and its wistfulness has hardened into pain. What is more, the longings that the poem does manage to articulate reveal them to be the products of clichéd, mass-mediated fantasies (“I imagine big family/Get-togethers, sleepovers at their houses, and gatherings for/Christmas Eve dinner, maybe even watch a Christmas/Movie together, maybe look at some old photos and open presents” [43]). Where Schuyler can figure fulfillment as something that has happened once or might happen again—he can project it or remember it—the collective speaker of *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* cannot



imagine it as anything but a remote impossibility, an unapproachable horizon. This is the underside of the rhetoric of the “creative destruction” that has been the smiley-face ideology of the Great Recession: not constant innovation, but the repetition of the ever-the-same; not boundless creativity, but “another vicious cycle/That I need to get the hell out of” (74).

Bedient is right to say that poems like *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* do not express the author’s affect, but he is wrong to assume that they avoid affect. Some works of uncreative writing do, of course, flee from feeling, but then again, that is true of more traditionally “creative” writing as well. Fitterman’s poem thematizes affect, offers up emotion and its articulation as a topic for discussion. Because it is not therapeutic, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* presents loneliness and dysthymia as problems that are not merely psychological in origin and therefore not merely psychological in solution. The poem hints at sociological and economic explanations for depression and the collective nature of its “I” indicates that it is not merely a personal problem that an individual has to “get over” in seven, nine or twelve steps. The poem’s lack of resolution and its tedious repetitions are indications that something is indeed wrong, not just with the poem (it is boring and offers no answers) or with the collective speaker (she is boring and cliché-mad) but also with the world that produces them both. I will confess that I do not like the poem, but to like it, as one might on Facebook, is beside the point. This is not a poem that one can like: it is grating and that quality, an aesthetic one, is expressive, in the Adornian sense. Expression is “the suffering countenance” (*Aesthetic Theory* 111) of the poem. It registers protest. Adorno wrote:

Music admits that the fate of the world no longer depends on the individual, but it also knows that this individual is capable of no content except his own, however fragmented and impotent. Hence his fractures are the script of truth. In them, the social movement appears negatively, as in its victims. (*Mahler* 166).

The same could be said of Fitterman's poem. Adorno does not mean here that the individual is the origin of its content any more than he would say that the subject is the origin of its experience. The individual, fragmented and impotent, is where experience takes place, where the content happens. In turn, like other uncreative works, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* registers these social and historical fractures with its interpenetration of semblance and material, of the subjective and the objective. It manifests—however negatively—the hope—improbable as it may seem—that things might possibly change.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fitterman, *No, Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014) 56. All further references will be included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "The Oulipo factor: the procedural poetics of Christian Bök and Caroline Bergvall," *Textual Practice* 18:1 (2004) 31, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Bök, *Eunoia* (Toronto: Coach House, 2008) 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Perloff, "The Oulipo Factor," 34. Craig Dworkin makes the same point when he writes that *Eunoia* "could not have been written by a computer program: the subsequent rules and constraints...ensure that even if the vocabulary were automatically generated, digital automation alone could never complete the requirements for the text built from that lexicon." Craig Dworkin, "The Imaginary Solution," *Contemporary Literature* LXVII:1 (2007) 52.

<sup>5</sup> T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1997) 101. All further references will be contained parenthetically in the text.

<sup>6</sup> Lambert Zuidervart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1991) 179.

<sup>7</sup> "The illusion is created that there is no illusion; that the diffuse and ego-alien harmonize with the posited

totality, whereas the harmony itself is organized; that the process is presented from below to above, even though the traditional determination from above to below, without which the spiritual determination of the artwork cannot be conceived, persists" (*Aesthetic Theory* 107).

<sup>8</sup> "The enlightenment resulted in the subordination to that nature from which enlightenment was to free humanity be- cause, out of the terror of primitive scarcity, history became a process of self-assertion through self-renunciation. Knowledge thus separates from its material and loses its telos." Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Popular Music and 'The Aging of the New Music'" *Things Beyond Resemblance* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) 176-7.

<sup>9</sup> "The capriciousness of this legalism, however the mere semblance of objectivity in the system that is simply been decreed, becomes apparent in the inappropriateness of its rules the structural interrelations of the music as it develops, relations the rules cannot do away with the merely thought up is always also too little thought out." T.W. Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002) 187. All future references will be included parenthetically within the body of the text.

<sup>10</sup> Hullot-Kentor, "Popular Music and 'The Aging of the New Music'" 177.

<sup>11</sup> David Kaufmann, "'Isn't It All Just Bullshit:' From Neo-Conceptualism to Warhol and Back," forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> In accordance with their rather strict application of the *Bilderverbot* (the proscription of graven images) to thought and in accordance with Adorno's dispositional commitment to music, Horkheimer and Adorno make enlightenment an auditory, rather than a visual experience. They argue that true enlightenment would be "nature made *audible* in its estrangement." See Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 31.

<sup>13</sup> Craig Dworkin, "The Fate of Echo," *Against Expression*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2011) xlii-iii, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin Bédient, "Against Conceptualism," *Boston Review*, July 24, 2013, accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.bostonreview.net/poetry/against-conceptualism>. All further references will be included parenthetically within the body of the text.

<sup>15</sup> Hanif Kureishi, "The Sadness Epidemic," *The New Statesman*, February 21, 2008, accessed March 21, 2014, [www.newstatesman.com/books/2008/02/depression-leader-mourning](http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2008/02/depression-leader-mourning)

<sup>16</sup> See Darian Leader, *The New Black* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008) 21-4.

<sup>17</sup> "Another inspiration or problem for me was working in verse form — what I would call a revisit of poetic form, because a lot of what I write doesn't look like poetry. *No. Wait. Yep. Definitely Still Hate Myself* looks like poetry. Poetry is a kind of field of feeling and affect, and I wanted to call up that mechanism... Josef Kaplan told me he was really getting a lot out of Schulyer's *The Morning of the Poem* which I went back to and immediately got excited about the form he uses." Robert Fitterman, "A Robert Fitterman Interview," accessed March 12, 2014, <http://uglyducklingpresse.tumblr.com/post/76430310086/a-robert-fitterman-interview>.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 33.

<sup>19</sup> The Thing is "the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion" whose existence therefore can be felt but not named." Kristeva 12.

<sup>20</sup> Kristeva 23-4, 40-7.

- <sup>21</sup> Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 315
- <sup>22</sup> The notion that loneliness is itself an unrecognized disease can be found in a number of Fitterman's sources. See Emily White, "The Loneliness Epidemic," accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2019545/The-loneliness-epidemic-Attractive-successful-years-EMILY-WHITE-felt-profoundly-Why-honest-problem-blights-lives.html>.
- <sup>23</sup> William Elliott Hazelgrove, "The sad lonely Men of Starbucks--the unemployed," accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.examiner.com/article/the-sad-lonely-men-of-starbucks-the-unemployed>.
- <sup>24</sup> Jennifer Senior, "Alone Together," *New York Magazine*, November 23, 2008, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://nymag.com/news/features/52450/>.
- <sup>25</sup> James Schuyler, *Collected Poems* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1993) 296. All further references to Schuyler's poetry will be included parenthetically within the text.
- <sup>26</sup> Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," *The Truro Bear and Other Adventures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) 65.
- <sup>27</sup> "What [Schuyler] found in the journals of such as Kilvert and Woodforede and Gilbert White was not only a form of pastoral, but a way of writing that concentrated on the everyday and...suggested how his own poetry might avoid dealing with what John Ashbery calls in 'Daffy Duck in Hollywood,' 'the big/Vaguer stuff.'" Mark Ford, *A Driftwood Altar* (London: Waywiser, 2005) 174.
- <sup>28</sup> I would thus argue that his diegetical emphasis does not represent an outmoded understanding of language's referentiality, but rather, given the severity of his mental illness, marks a real psychological achievement, a kind of heroism.
- <sup>29</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) 21-2, emphasis added. All further references will be included parenthetically in the body of the text.
- <sup>30</sup> T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans E.B. Ashton (NY: Continuum, 1981) 362-3; emphasis added and the translation altered to conform with the original.
- <sup>31</sup> See my "James Schuyler's Specimen Days," *Jacket2*, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://jacket2.org/article/james-schuylers-specimen-days>.
- <sup>32</sup> I am here quoting Adorno's claim in "On Lyric Poetry and Society," that "[i]n its protest the poem expresses the dream of a world in which things would be different." Much more needs to be said about the nature of that "dream." In the last aphorism of *Mimima Moralia*, Adorno writes that thought requires the notion of redemption if it is not to fall into despair and that, given this need, the question of redemption's reality is "almost indifferent." As Gerhard Richter has pointed out in a close and characteristically astute reading of this passage, Adorno is not saying that the reality of redemption "hardly matters," as the standard English translation puts it. It matters a great deal. But we should pay close attention to the fact that Adorno does not talk about the possibility or impossibility of redemption here—rather, he is talking about its actualization. The fact that it is possible, though highly, even desperately improbable, the key to its importance. See T.W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature*, trans Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 2 vols, 1: 40; Gerhard Richter, "Aesthetic Theory and Non-Propositional Truth Content," *Language Without Soil*, ed Gerhard Richter (New York: Fordham UP, 2010) 131-46 and my own, "In Light of 'The Light of Transcendence': Redemption in Adorno," *Messianism, Apocalypse and Redemption in 20th Century German Thought*, ed Wayne Cristaudo and Wendy Baker (Adelaide: Australasian Theological Forum P, 2006) 220-30.

## Lindsey Boldt

*Overboard*

Publication Studio, 2012

REVIEWED BY MATT LONGABUCCO

In 2010, I went to the movies for a year. Let me clarify: I went to every movie for a year. Or at least to every movie that played at the Pavilion, a nine-screen multiplex stuffed into a not-very-large building at the southeast corner of Park Slope, Brooklyn. The Pavilion got first-run, mainstream movies and turned them over fast, so that in the course of a year I saw 120 films. These included *Avatar*, *It's Complicated*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks 2: The Squeakquel*, *When in Rome*, *Crazy Heart*, *The Wolfman*, *Shutter Island*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Hot Tub Time Machine*, *Why Did I Get Married Too?*, *Sex and the City 2*, *Toy Story 3*, *Inception*, *Salt*, *Ramona and Beezus*, *Eat Pray Love*, *Resident Evil: Afterlife*, *The Social Network*, *Jackass 3D*, *Saw 3D*, *Tangled*, *Black Swan*, and *Little Fockers*, along with about a hundred more. My self-imposed project was to write a response to each movie: a prose poem that resisted review or critique to attempt, instead, to unearth in each trip to the movies an encounter, even—I mean it—a transformative one, albeit a transformation exhausting in its repetition. My child was small at the time, and probably this project, though I'd conceived it before the child, was partly an escape from the exhaustion of parenting at that difficult stage. But like most escapes, it led me straight into the heart of what I'd thought to turn from: the deep, ongoing consideration of the world as I'd now brought a child to find it, as well as a return to the child I'd been, going with my parents, with uncritical delight, to whatever movie was playing on a given weekend for basically my entire latency period and a good part of puberty too. I realized at the Pavilion that the movies, and probably therefore the culture, remained fixated on the same stories they'd cared about in my youth and long before it: Leaving the Father and Returning to Him Again, The Battle of the Sexes, The Allure of the Other. And yet despite the narrow strictures of these narratives, I found still, as well, the promise of their

carnavalesque undoing, the power of a voice or dance number or image or gesture somewhere in the middle of a movie that, in its undeniable pleasure, exposes at least a momentary gap in the walls of ideology's maze, to reveal open air and a sliver of dark blue water waiting out beyond the madness.

I was brought back to these questions, my project, and to that moviegoing childhood, when in preparing to review Lindsey Boldt's *Overboard*, I watched (re-watched? I can't remember if I went to this movie back in 1987) the movie *Overboard*. Holy shit. The back of the DVD can hardly prepare us for "the craziest mix-up ever!", a "delightful riches-to-rags romance that's perfect entertainment for anyone who appreciates a great practical joke." The "practical joke" involves carpenter Kurt Russell telling rich socialite Goldie Hawn, whose fall from her yacht has left her with "a bad case [?] of amnesia," that she is in fact his wife and the mother of his four children. He puts her to work raising them, and doing endless chores in his dilapidated shack. They don't have sex, thank heaven, until after they finally fall in love for real or whatever. Somewhere in the region below one's facial expression of pure shock, watching this bizarre and offensive tale, comes the unbidden stir of a warm feeling. What is going on? The movie's misogyny seems irredeemable, but why, then, does it permit its own overt critique? Goldie's amnesia, after all, becomes a device through which she can never be anything but appropriately incredulous at what's being asked of her as a natural duty, even as this domestic servitude is ostensibly what provides the moral education necessary for her to swoon into Kurt's sleeveless embrace. As in earlier versions of what Stanley Cavell calls "the comedy of remarriage," at best these characters muddle together through outmoded structures in search of a more fulfilling version of genuine and mutual love. But is that genre, even as generously imagined by Cavell, itself too claustrophobic, its supposedly large ends themselves proscribed and restrictive?

Boldt's book, at first in tight clusters and then in climactic explosions of prose, probes the movie's plot, teasing out its buried implications and treating its sudden twists as moments of vexed metamorphosis:

In the water. In the water. In the water something happened. Something happened in the water and she was not what she remembered. She remembered nothing and so was not what she remembered. She wondered if she was anything or anyone if she did not remember.

Here is the sound of the uncertainty out of which anyone, quite understandably, reaches for a hand to hold, no matter what else comes with the deal. Like, you're so eager to listen to the song that when the terms and restrictions page pops up you just click "I agree." Boldt again, as Goldie, as her character Annie:

Annie's eyes opened and closed and as they opened she was each time surprised to see him and his face above hers. What she felt was that she saw her own face hovering there. There I am, Annie thought. I know you.

No wonder the subject is always so quick to give it all away. Boldt only needs quote the men in the movie, with deadpan exactitude, to reveal the insidious ways in which their language, even when they believe they are at their most conciliatory or expressive, reflects assumptions that foreclose any possibility for liberations beyond the array of false ones the men pride themselves on offering. If Goldie finds herself wondering "could I be one of those crazy women?" it is because she is hyper-conscious of the fact that almost everything everyone says to her is an assertion of a narrative in which she must play a predetermined role, such that "she could not locate a central self from which to make departures and so relied upon the stories of others..."

The further we get in the book, and the longer the poet looks at the movie, the more it starts to look back. "Goldie Hawn" increasingly impinges on the life of "Lindsey Boldt," who towards the book's end finds herself on a bus in San Francisco, shuttling between halfway-realized jobs, between

youthful ideals and adult compromises or disappointments, only to look out the window and see an enormous Goldie Hawn marauding through the city, at one point swallowing Coit Tower in her vagina. This part is wild and hilarious, but most importantly occasions a declaration:

I AM GOLDIE HAWN! I AM A SACRED MONSTER! I  
TRANSGRESS BOUNDARIES! I GET IN THE WATER AND  
I COME BACK OUT AGAIN! I DEFY CLASS, AGE, TIME,  
AND EVEN SOMETIMES GENDER! I AM A WHITE,  
HETEROSEXUAL, BIOLOGICAL, AND SOCIALIZED  
FEMALE AND I WILL EXPLODE!

The Goldie manifesto continues, at times puncturing its own seriousness—“SOMETIMES I WEAR MEN’S BOXER-BRIEF UNDERWEAR”—but also righteously insisting, “I CAN SEE THROUGH BULLSHIT! I WILL NO LONGER EAT SHIT SANDWICHES!” All-caps signifies not just loudness, here, but a critical shift out of inherited structures and anxious systems with their maddeningly even-toned explanatory mania.

Boldt chastises herself, lightly, at one point, for writing an entire book obsessed with a single pop culture artifact. But she turns to the movies, rightly, for the liberation of their messy hybridity. Her insight is that the cliché of the movie screen as outsized fantasy projection is not all that satisfying or true. Yes, the movies loom large, in a way that reminds us that, as Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman tell us in their book/hymn to negativity, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (it could be titled “Sex, or Overboard”), “relationality always includes a scenic component, a fantasmatic staging.” Goldie, massive as a body on a movie screen, threatens to destroy the city Boldt must traffic through out of necessity. But movie icons need not take on the coercive role of reflecting back our supposed fantasies, especially when, at some level, the only narratives on offer are so few and impoverished. Rather, our experience in the dark of the theater, including the dark theater of the past, can also be one of enormous need, confusion, tantrum, breakdown,



dissatisfaction, agitation, or per Berlant/Edelman again, “the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity.” Made hyper-large, attended to in our infinitely complicated yearning, we fit into the prevailing order—the city of our supposed dreams—less, not more. Like this book, we go overboard, and our inevitable too-muchness—we do well to recognize and empower rather than hide it—could be enough to undo the supposed scene of rescue, remembrance, and service to what we only thought it was our duty to choose.

Boldt’s real project here is to defamiliarize a world—Goldie “remembered everything except her place in and relation to it and all”—that needs undoing not because it informs a mainstream 80s-era comedy with absurdly dubious politics but because the limitations that should be relegated to that artifact and make it unfortunate and quaint in fact persist and manage to chase down and harrow a radical poet in millennial Oakland. The first thing we need to get over is our shock, our incredulity that all the “bullshit” continues. Anything but. Rather, it ambushes us with a smile, it encrusts our landscape, it awaits the moment of weakness or confusion when it can bring us back around and steal the revelation of our own most precious undefinedness. How often it makes you want to turn your back on all of it, and dive back in to the depths.

I C A N S E E  
T H R O U G H  
B U L L S H I T !  
I W I L L N O  
L O N G E R  
E A T S H I T  
S A N D W I C H E S !

## Steve Roggenbuck

*IF YOU DONT LOVE THE MOON YOUR AN ASSHOLE*

free pdf, 2013

REVIEWED BY CALUM RODGER

*Flarf's back – and this time it's personal.*

What happens when flarf gets personal? Perhaps this book is the answer. Flarf, born on the subpoetics mailing list in the early 2000s, was described by its inventors as 'a kind of corrosive, cute, or cloying, awfulness. Wrong. Un-P.C. Out of control. "Not okay."' The ironic distancing at work here — a 'so bad it's good' mentality — follows from the flarf method of harvesting and sculpting results from random Google searches, which necessarily pluralises the lyric-I and removes it from self-expression — tendencies rarely camouflaged in the finished poem. But what happens when The Great Flarf Archetype — that ur-flarf poem from which all flarf poems emerge according to the aesthetic principles set out above — develops its *own* voice, a flarf Neo gestating deep within the Matrix? What does it sound like? What does it say? It sounds like Steve Roggenbuck and it says something like this:

every human's original nature is to be fricked up, the mind creates an illusion that your not fricked up, but u are. *im dipping bread into my cat's water bowl iii lov it i cant stop !!* im like skrillex i jus take what i liek from my artform and then bastardize it making a fun version. EATING 2 BAGELS OH MY GOD I WAS SHOCKED HOW FUN THE BAGELS ARE. im trying to spread the rumor that snoop dogg got his name "snoop" because hes curious. i wrote "people are more beautiful than art." then i thought, they are not seperate, art is just an extension/ concentration of people. but its interesting social media has alowed such direct access to ppl, soon less intimate art may struggle to compete. the sun is gone but the undersides of the clouds are still pink. next to his

handprints in hollywood will smith wrote *Change the World*

As corrosive as a YouTube comments thread! As cute as LOLcats! As cloying as a series of life-affirming gifs! As wrong, un-PC and out of control as most of the internet — but also the irrepressible energy of a localised lyric subject, an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the numberless goings on of life and an explicit, desperate drive for intersubjectivity — even hinting towards the fusion of art and life that is the dream of the avant-garde. Forget the irony. It looks like flarf just started *meaning* it.

Roggenbuck is one of the posterboys for a scene of writers who self-stylize as ‘alt lit’, working, networking and publishing mainly online, via Tumblr blogs and Twitter feeds. The scene has its roots in Tao Lin’s Muumuu House press and the affectless, internet-obsessed, doped-up tone of his work, but while it came to mainstream attention in the press surrounding Lin’s third novel *Taipei*, its energies remain most palpable on the blogs and feeds that sustain the community, such as Alt Lit Gossip, Pop Serial, Internet Poetry and I Am Alt Lit. Arguably the first digitally-native literature, its preferred forms are the chat log, twitter feed, homemade pdf and image macro. Published, distributed and read largely online, it is work reflective of a psychology that has lived on and with the internet since childhood. As a poetry reader and general idler I find the work on the blogs mentioned above to sit in a procrastinatory sweet spot between memes and poems — between the instantaneity of the former and the subjectivity of the latter, an open-order meme that asks less ‘do you get it?’ than ‘what do you get?’ and ‘do you feel it too?’ Curiously, this kind of immersive, unguarded response depends on alt-lit being also a digitally-*naïve* literature. One blog post mused that ‘the internet is to people now as fire was to cavemen. Like everyone has it, and you know what it is, but you dont REALLY know what it is.’ If flarf — and, no doubt, the uncreative writing of Kenneth Goldsmith et al — was reverently nursing the fire with a stick, then alt-lit is dancing in the flames in a Dionysian frenzy. And after all, we don’t *need* to ‘REALLY know’, we know that it *is*, and that it’s cool, and that despite the alienated condition of our emo subjectivities we can at least realise an oxymoronic

hip astonishment at the potentialities of virtual being, that tells us that we are, and that we're cool. Or as Roggenbuck, the most fervent of the dancers attests, 'CARPE DIEM is a latin phrase that means *HASHTAG YOLO*.'

All the more power to them, I say. Poetry is the force that names things into being and the virtual needs its naiveté. But can we tell the dancer from the dance? In Roggenbuck's case it is not easy, but this is more or less the point, as he boasts in 'ALL I DO IS POST ON THE INTERNET AND SLEEP' about how many Facebook notifications he has and how he is 'branding as a jackass'. Scenester Oscar Schwarz's excellent introduction to and reflection on alt-lit, "Can I Have Your Attention Please," quotes Tumblr artist Brad Troemel describing a new type of artist — the 'Aesthetes' — who 'have transformed the notion of a "work" from a series of isolated projects to a constant broadcast of one's artistic identity as a recognizable, unique brand ... This has reversed the traditional recipe that you need to create art to have an audience. Today's artist on The Internet needs an audience to create art.' Roggenbuck is the aesthete par excellence, whose avant-gardist fusion of art and life comprises following as many people on Twitter as possible in the hope some will follow you back — not a *Gesamtkunstwerk* but a 'memeplex'. There's no harm in that — and if it's a future paradigm so much the better, it's still closer to a community than our current publishing setup. But the fallacy of Roggenbuck's work is that the tirelessly constructed aesthetic persona is less amenable to intersubjective connection than the poet would like. In terms of *IF YOU DONT LOVE THE MOON*..., at least, the subject is too comfortable in its position as ecstatic screaming ghost in the networked flarf machine; I follow, it cloy, but doesn't quite stick. Perhaps it needs a lyric-you born in the Matrix for it to really adhere. But then judging by the scene that's already happened — I'm probably just too old and/or have taken too many red pills.

—originally published in *Hix Eros*

*N.B. As of mid-2014, Roggenbuck has withdrawn this pdf from online circulation. His website states that he is 'planning to release a new/ revised version [...] sometime soon'.*

## **Kevin Killian**

*Tweaky Village*

Wonder, 2014

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH BRADSHAW

### Kevin Killian, Our Defender

Kevin Killian broke my heart. Actually, I think he broke a lot of people's hearts. I saw it happen. It was at Pete's Candy Store in Brooklyn, when he read a love poem for Dodie Bellamy. The crowded area of the bar around me became the Sob and Slobber Section for a few minutes, and we all felt that deep well of love, that decades-long love between everyone's truest gay falcon and his best Dodie. We all sobbed and slobbered our way into his next poem, one of those Jack Spicer pieces Kevin thought was too mean to include in his *Collected* (i.e., one of Spicer's best poems). It included the refrain "I want to kill myself," interspersed with descriptions of the other lost souls surrounding Spicer, who were likewise killing themselves, getting fucked in the ass with Coke bottles, writing poetry, etc. After the poem celebrating the double fantasy that is Kevin and Dodie, Kevin's reading of Spicer iced us.

That's what Kevin does: by juxtaposing love and venom he leads his audience to believe they're feeling something authentic. We listen to an ode we believe is authentic in its emotion, so that we may sob with tears we believe are actual tears. Then wait, no, here's the real thing: pain. A fucking Coke-bottle-in-the-ass. And those beautiful tears from just a moment ago? They were just a vestige of some impossibly forgone life.

I had agreed to write this review of Kevin's new book, *Tweaky Village*, about a month before the Pete's Candy Store reading, but at the time of the reading I still hadn't received my review copy from the publisher, Wonder. As I was

leaving the bar I stopped by one of the Wonder Boys, who had a heaping pyramid of copies, and I told him he still hadn't sent me mine, could I have one. He hesitated a few moments, looked at the floor, then he seemed to perform a kind of calculation. I looked at the Wonder Boy, wondering what he was figuring. Some sort of syllogism, I assumed. "If I give this book to Joseph," his lips read, then:

I will only eat potatoes for the next three weeks.

I will never get laid again.

Joseph will probably not write a review because everyone knows he's too lazy and self-absorbed to do anything productive for "the community."

It will be a wasted book.

I will have offered a kind gesture and made myself vulnerable to all kinds of other gestures that promise a false authenticity.

The Wonder Boy's lips moved for a few more seconds, before he silently handed me a shrink-wrapped copy of the book. I said, "I'll give it a great review, don't worry!"

A few days later I pulled out Kevin's other books of poetry, *Argento Series* and *Action Kylie*, and I set them beside *Tweaky Village*, which I left in its shrink-wrap for a couple weeks. Looking at this little makeshift shrine, I'd wonder: What is it that I expect from a new book of poetry by Kevin Killian?

It turns out I have a lot of expectations when it comes to Kevin's work. First and foremost I expect to be lost in many glittering layers of pop culture bric-a-brac. Then I expect an anxious fixation on death and loss. Then, I expect a fair amount of voyeuristic name-dropping. Then I expect a certain

blobby wildness of form. Then I expect a slant engagement with the work of other artists (gay, straight, Hollywood, avant-garde, and otherwise). I also expect a lot of humid and stanky sex. And, through Kevin's sly sweetness and coy humor, I expect to engage with a total confusion of the higher and lower emotions. I expect fear, love, anger and despair to all mingle together and form a headless, shape-shifting Voltron. Which should tell you another thing I expect from Kevin: that he be Our Defender. I expect him to save us from the poisoned world by feeding us, like a homeopath, spoonfuls of candy-coated poisoned world.

When I finally peeled the shrink-wrap off *Tweaky Village*, it turned out that a lot of my expectations were fulfilled. I mean, right away, in the first stanza of the first poem, "Story of Abraham," Kevin delivers:

It was like some tremendous Leonard Cohen song from the Sixties  
That first you heard Nico singing,  
Elongated drawl scratchy on vinyl, Story of Abraham.

All is implied here: the heroin chic of Nico and the quaint despair of 60s Leonard Cohen are conflated with Abraham's fear of God. The poem announces itself as a new Book of Genesis, a cover version of a fake but believable Leonard Cohen song. Yet there is no original song to be lost. There's only Nico's imagined cover and the invented nostalgia that clings to it. This, Kevin seems to tell us, is our experience of realness.

This is also a great example of what Kevin calls his "vulgar mania for citation." His poems are populated with the names of movies, songs, celebrities, friends, locales, etc.—whatever seems to have engaged Kevin's fleeting attention. There isn't a single poem in *Tweaky Village* that doesn't in some way enact this mania for citation. "Kate Bush, Wuthering Heights," for instance, starts by quoting Kate Bush's song ("Heathcliff—it's me, your Cathy," itself a paraphrase from the more famous *Wuthering Heights*). The poem proceeds with a description of Kevin's initial impressions of Kate



Bush, with a slant meditation on transformation and naming snuck in the middle:

It's me, your Cathy! She would mispronounce her own name... as  
if to say, I don't even care what I call myself, I'm beyond names,  
I am need.

I wrote a lot of my thoughts about *Tweaky Village* while looking at the piece of plastic that once sealed my copy of the book. It had fallen from my bedside table to the floor, where it was limply collecting the detritus of my body: hair, lint, dead skin become dust. I looked at that piece of plastic for like a week, my thoughts accumulating like the dust. I wondered about all the things in Kevin's poems, and the things I know (or imagine) about Kevin the man. I wondered about his carnivorous love, his legendary desire for endless cock and ass, his marriage to Dodie Bellamy, his unique position within the literary world as one of both respected elder and renegade outsider. One of the funniest poems in *Tweaky Village*, "Genital Emotion," touches in some way on all these things by throwing Frank O'Hara's "Lana Turner Has Collapsed!" poem on its head. O'Hara's famous poem ends:

I have been to lots of parties  
and acted perfectly disgraceful  
but I never actually collapsed  
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

One way of reading this is as a confirmation of O'Hara's own superiority to the pathetically collapsed Lana Turner. But Kevin springboards off O'Hara to confirm a list of his embarrassments:

Like Frank O'Hara I have behaved disgracefully,  
thrown up on Erica Jong, fainted at readings,  
confused two black poets with each other,  
been accused of not being able to distinguish

black faces, tried to talk Dodie into  
posing nude with me à la John and Yoko  
for Brains magazine, made a pass at David  
Johansen,—and Chris Johanson—and Hanson

But none of these things are as embarrassing as what Kevin calls genital emotion: “the most embarrassing thing that could happen outside death.” It’s the line that separates “sheep from goats, men from boys, pumas from cougars.” In other words, if you’re gonna have swag, you gotta have some genital emotion. And if you got genital emotion, you’re gonna get embarrassed. What this confirms, for me, is that Kevin is our True Defender: he sacrifices himself, his composure, and his grace, to serve us some pathos (and some yuks). This assures me that Kevin—though he is famous in a certain niche—remains the lowly poet dedicated to his flamboyant humility.

Isn’t that a great phrase, “flamboyant humility”? I came up with it spontaneously, thinking it’s a real blammo way to end my review. But after lingering on it for a few days I came to feel it’s too false an ending, too pat maybe. While I feel “flamboyant humility” captures some essence de Killian, my assessment of *Tweaky Village* is still not satisfactory. Writing this review has given me the opportunity to revisit Kevin’s older poetry and to linger on my fascination with Kevin the man. I’ve long admired Kevin’s openness, his curiosity, and his generosity (especially toward younger artists and writers). Reading *Tweaky Village* reminds me that Kevin is the kind of dude I someday hope to be.

Thinking about Kevin’s work always brings me back to questions of friendship, love, sex, desire—the big Life Questions. Not knowing how to finish this review, or if I even could finish it, I finally decided the best way to end it would be to get Kevin’s input on some of these Life Questions. I then devised a little questionnaire for Kevin and he was kind enough to play along. So I hereby end my review of *Tweaky Village*—and I’d say I delivered on my promise to the Wonder Boy to make it a great one, wouldn’t you?

Now, dear reader, if you'd like to follow me along into the questionnaire for Kevin Killian, Our Defender, here goes:

Me: Are you a jealous guy?

Kevin: I don't think so! Maybe I've been envious from time to time. I hear of someone winning a huge prize, I think, why wasn't that me?

Me: How do you deal with the jealousy of others (other writers, artists, lovers, etc.)?

Kevin: Jealousy is something I don't fully understand. Just as people say sociopaths don't understand human emotion but have to mime it using intense observation practices, I watch and try to feel it from within but most of the time it's just an act.

Me: How do you control the world?

Kevin: I don't have a system. I'm a Capricorn so I try to see ahead, but that is always balanced in the other direction by a crazy optimism that makes me excited to go to bed so I can wake up for the happy surprises tomorrow. Have you noticed something always does happen?

Me: How do others try to control you?

Kevin: They control me through my pocketbook I guess. I live on a very tight budget and anybody could dangle a fee at me and I'd leap at it, humiliatingly enough. From a bigger point of view, the system plays me; I've had a low-level dead-end job for a wealthy corporation for decades now, and I cling to it like Bartleby.

Me: What is sacrifice? What role does sacrifice play in your relationships?

Kevin: I do think that you have always to be the one to say, “I was wrong,” or better yet, “You’re right,” for the relationship to work. I don’t mean both people have to be that way, it just takes one. With me, my ethical valences are all over the place so I really don’t care. My masculinity, such as it is, isn’t tied to holding my ground.

Me: Do you have an independent spirit?

Kevin: I always wanted one! My parents instilled one into me in two ways, by themselves embodying sort of New Deal liberal values, working for social justice, civil rights, union organizing, all things I admired about them, and yet like any teen worth his or her salt I rebelled against what I saw as their stultifying bourgeois existence and adulation of family and church life. As I grow older I see them both reflected in me; I don’t miss them really because I have become them and can call them up at a moment’s notice or a “spontaneous” gesture or expostulation. Genes must give us everything.

Me: How do you maintain your sense of autonomy within your relationships?

Kevin: At my office I operate in two sets of consciousness, in one set I’m a drone like everyone else, but with the other set I always know I am Kevin Killian—I’m an artist undercover. As for other sorts of autonomy, I’m a white male, it clings to me even as I walk down the street, a poor man in an increasingly wealthy city. As a gay man, I guess I let my dick rule my head, and yet see Capricorn above; there has always been a time when I held back, to my shame, and didn’t throw myself fully into the immolating fire.

Me: What makes a relationship “open”?

Kevin: I wanted to have an open relationship because, how else can you make any two people adhere? Romantic and sexual attraction can take you only so far; one must have a certain amount of *laissez-faire* if one is to remain alive at all. That’s what I wanted, when I was old and gray, Dodie and I could sit rocking on our porch and say that we had never turned down

an opportunity or a challenge or anything that allowed us to grow. Without that imaginary porch it's difficult to see if this made a difference in life, but I think it did.

Me: What makes an open relationship successful?

Kevin: Ha ha, I do think it's the same thing, that both partners must agree to let the other one think that he or she is number one. The third person must never attain primacy or an edge in. I don't know. I know of many couples who have "opened" their relationships and next thing you know they had broken up, but in recent years I think "swinging" has made an enormous comeback.

Me: How do you stay in love?

Kevin: Just lucky I guess? No, you do have to work at it all the time. There's the ordinary love of kindness and agape that many people can attain, but that glow that animates the core of life, you have to find your way back into the darkness to get it—proceeding ass-backwards maybe, so you'll be maneuvering in your own shadow, but it's like genital emotion, you'll know it when you have it.

## Nick Montfort

*#!*

Counterpath Press, 2014.

REVIEWED BY AFTON WILKY

### *# : ! :: Program : Poem*

Nick Montfort's recent book, *#!* (pronounced *Shebang*), explores representation through language as an iterative system. Comprised of a series of programs, which can be run in a computer console, and poems produced by the programs, *#!* is as much a script or documentation of a performance piece as a book of poetry. As both script and document, process and poetry, *#!* models a duality that can be mapped onto writing, language, poetry, representation and metaphor in ways that carve out a future of writing informed by computational processes. In *#!*, humanistic and programming languages collide, generating poems that highlight the iterative nature of language and programs that draw connections between language and computable forms and functions.

Including both program and poem, the structure of *#!* invites comparison between elements of the literal language of the program and the humanistic language they output. For example, in "Round," readers are presented with the code for a program that computes pi indefinitely and uses digits of pi (0-9) to select a word or element from a ten-item list:

```
word = ['\n', 'in', 'crease', 'form', 'tends', 'tense', 'to', 'tone', 'vent', 'verse']  
line = ""  
pi = compute_pi()  
print
```

One of the most striking elements of the program, however, is the number of variables and the number of transformations they undergo within the function that computes pi:

```
def compute_pi():
    q, r, t, k, m, x = long(1), long(0), long(1), long(1), long(3), long(3)
    while True:
        if 4 * q + r - t < m * t:
            yield m
            q, r, t, k, m, x = 10 * q, 10 * (r - m * t), t, k, (10 * (3 * q + r)) // t - 10 * m, x
        else:
            q, r, t, k, m, x = q * k, (2 * q + r) * x, t * x, k + 1, (q * (7 * k + 2) + r * x) // (t * x), x + 2
```

This function is quite difficult to read, even if you're familiar with Python (the programming language it's written in).

The difficulty of reading the above function models, in a sense, some of the difficulty of reading a poem. In the function, instead of writing  $q = \text{long}(1)$ ,  $r = \text{long}(0)$ , and so on, the function uses an abbreviated form in which commas indicate the end of one assignment and beginning of the next. To read the line of code requires reading across six elements on either side of the equals sign. Thus, reading requires either keeping track of which element in the list you're on or retaining the values for each. In a loose sense, this is similar to the way a poem is read. Considering the first stanza of the poem version of "Round,"

form intends intense verse crease to tense form tense vent verse tone  
 verse form crease form vent tends to crease to tends form form vent form  
 crease tone verse tense

we have a series of phrases compressed that could be more readable (and heard more musically) as a series of short lines (e.g. form intends intense

verse / crease to tense form / tense vent verse tone / verse form, crease form / vent tends to crease / to tends form / form vent form / crease tone, verse tense). Beyond the compression into a single, more paragraph-like, stanza, the syntax here is missing connective language that would clarify the relationships between actions and objects. For example, while understanding the verb-object relationships in “form intends intense verse,” the same is not true of “to tends form” or “form vent form.” While it is possible and enjoyable to imagine these relationships, to allow a single reading these phrases would require connective language (e.g. “a tendency is form” or “the form vents the form”). Thus, through parallel structures, poem and program model the tendencies and characteristics of one another with difference that increases their visibility.

Further, and perhaps, more importantly, the difficulty of reading this function is because there are multiple variables and because the value of a variable is usually the result of computations on other variables (e.g.  $r = 10 * (r - m * t)$ ). What begins to be apparent is the extent to which the role of the variables in this function can be mapped onto the individual words of a poem or even metaphor itself—variables here are constantly in flux and their value (read: signification) is only in relation to the variables (read: words) around them. Behind the text that looks like a poem:

tone vent into tends

to crease vent to crease

vent verse verse vent to crease vent

form tends vent crease tense form tends crease inintone

you have a complex system of selection operating invisibly. Its result is



the poem. In “Round,” pi functions in place of semantic meaning and/or grammar. As in both, the interrelatedness and interdependence of each element is the cohesion that makes a poem (a single unit). The series of choices that shape the poem perform their role from outside the poem.

Similar to language, one of the defining features of programs may in fact be their capacity to represent elements in their abstract form. Like language, the program “Round” can point to concepts that fail in practice; for instance, infinity in the form of non-terminating loops. Specifically, “Round” is a program-poem that computes indefinitely and *is* round to the degree that it remains an infinite computation of itself; pi can only be fully circular in its abstracted form, *pi*. In practice, the program slows down as more and more steps are required to compute the next digit. Likewise, within the context of a linear space like a book or console, the repetition of computation remains distinct from repetition within the poem—even as the poem has the capacity to repeat itself, the result of repetition is always new. Thus, there is no infinite poem, only the concept of a poem that continues to perpetuate itself outside the scope of an individual poem and a program that points to the possibility of an infinite poem that either gets interrupted or exhausts itself in practice.

In such ways, *#!/* is a context within which program, poem, book, console and performance space inform and shape one another. In book form, *#!/* follows a program-poem sequence in which program and poem have the same title and in which each program is followed by the poem it wrote. For example, the 32-character Perl program, “Alphabet Expanding”:

```
#!/usr/bin/perl
```

```
{print$,$'x($,+=.01),a..z;redo}
```

and the poem “Alphabet Expanding,”:

```

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
... abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz ... a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z   a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o
p q r s t u v w x y z   a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p
q r s t u v w x y z   a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q
r s t u v w x y z
...

```

This program-poem, consists of a loop that prints the alphabet one hundred times before adding an increment of space between letters and at the beginning and end of the alphabet as a whole. With each repetition of the loop, more space is added until eventually letters become a texture. By the poem's last loops, diagonal lines made up of letters become visible and appear to rain down the page, undulating delicately. When this program-poem is run in a computer console, the computer returns letters and spaces in such a way that they fill the console with an animated static and movement that is more like a film than a poem.

By adding space, “Alphabet Expanding,” makes visible a collapsing of unit boundaries: the alphabet is expanded to the point where letters stand alone and continues to expand further until letters are encompassed again, by diagonal lines. Considering these three units—alphabet, letter and line—and their implementation in the poem, line seems particularly important. By moving diagonally, away from the left to right, top to bottom directionality of reading in English, line is the element that begins to push the poem further into the context of visual texts and out of language-based texts. Likewise, in the console version of the poem, the film-like motion and speed prevents any left to right, top to bottom reading. In this way, line and motion collapse even a fourth unit: text to be read.

What is and isn't “text to be read” seems, in fact, to be a pivotal question of #! and one that is complicated by the book's program-poem structure,

as well as the iterative nature of writing and the poems themselves. Within the context of the book, readers are presented with two versions of each piece and, thus to what extent *#!/*—and indeed any book or language in general—can be a singular representation is called into question. This idea of the multiplicity of any representation or expression, which permeates both the content and structure of *#!/*, is particularly evident in the poem, “ASCII Hegemony.”

Another of the 32-character Perl programs in the book, “ASCII Hegemony” prints the ninety-five printing characters (0-9, a-z, A-Z, plus symbols) of the ASCII alphabet indefinitely, until the program is interrupted or crashes:

“ASCII Hegemony”

```
#!/usr/bin/perl
```

```
{print " ".chr for 32..126;redo}
```

“ASCII Hegemony”

```
! " # $ % ' ( ) * + , - . / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 : ; < = > ? @ A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z [ \ ] ^ _ ` a b
c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y
z { | } ~
```

Because computers are an inherently number-based system, computing with binary numbers (where one is true and zero is false), in order to compute text computers require a set of codes that correspond to and represent text. One of the oldest and most common of these character-encoding systems is the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII). Thus, for a computer, any text is already a representation and additionally, in ASCII, characters might be represented by any one of several codes.

By titling the piece “ASCII Hegemony,” attention is focused on the representation already embedded in any alphabetic system (for both computers and people), while the letters themselves embody the program-poem / invisible-visible split *#!/* occupies. Further, the program’s infinite loop suggests that any alphabetic system will continue to be reproduced without change until there is interruption, corruption of the program, or some other kind of failure—the stopping point is always outside the code itself.

Returning to the question of what makes this a “text to be read,” “ASCII Hegemony” presents readers with a program that iterates all the visible (printable) characters in the computer’s alphabet in a grid. In doing so, the program and poem deny the reader any semantic content beyond association between ASCII and the alphabet. The grid form too, pulls the piece away from sentences and lines, syntax and grammar. What’s left is the raw material that is the potentiality and past of writing—these are the characters from which writing can and has been done. Additionally, to present the material of writing as writing, “ASCII Hegemony,” employs context and genre. By being a part of a book that calls itself poetry, “ASCII Hegemony” presents readers with a narrative in the form of a dichotomy—this is part of a series of texts categorized as poetry and yet the program looks more like a poem than the “poem” does.

Thus, by placing the piece within the context of “text to be read” (labeling *#!/* “poetry”) and presenting only the material of writing (stripping the program-poem of semantic content), “ASCII Hegemony” broadens the scope of what is “text to be read” to ASCII characters as a system and as material. As with other programs in *#!/*, applying the logic of this program to writing or poetry is suggestive. In this case, the program suggests that transformation of poetry and writing will result from forces outside the poem itself. For the program these forces are limits to computational endurance and interruption, but I’d say that what these might be for poetry are both the writing taking place right now and the writing yet to be done. In such ways, it is within the gaps between the program-piece duality

presented in *#!* where questions regarding poetry, computer generated poetry, and representation itself can begin. The nearest text-based parallel to Montfort's *#!* would perhaps be a process statement and piece, but the more useful comparison might be with script and performance, a comparison complicated by the fact that performance versions of *#!* also exist. In *#!*, Montfort engages both human and computer-based thought in order to carve out the future of both poetry and language.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**ELLEN ADDISON** is an artist and writer based in Oakland, CA.

**JEFFREY ANGLES** lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he is an associate professor of Japanese and translation at Western Michigan University. He is the author of *Writing the Love of Boys* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010) and an award-winning translator of dozens of Japan's most important modern Japanese authors and poets. He believes strongly in the role of translators as social activists, and much of his career has focused on the translation into English of socially engaged, feminist, and queer writers. He has translated two books of Itô's work into English: *Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itô* (2009) and *Wild Grass on the Riverbank* (2014), both published by Action Books.

**IDLIR AZIZAJ** (former Azizi) was born in Southern Albania, in the seacoast of Vlora in 1970. He has translated numerous books from English and French, including Joyce's *Ulysses*, which won the National Prize of Translation in 2004. He has published six novels in addition to the poetry collection *Verbstones*, which has been translated into English by Jack Hirschman.

**MARIANO BLATT** is a poet and publisher who lives in Buenos Aires.

**BRUCE BOONE** lives in San Francisco. Call me when in town — I'm always happy for company.

**STEVE BRADBURY's** translation of Ye Mimi's *His Days Go by the Way Her Years* (Anomalous Press) was a finalist for the 2014 Best Translated Book Award.

**JOSEPH BRADSHAW** is the author of *In the Common Dream of George Oppen* (Shearsman Books) and *The New York School* (Publication Studio). He currently resides in New Orleans.

**LUCIANA CAAMAÑO** was born in Mar del Plata (Buenos Aires) in 1984. She has published numerous poetry collections, including *Querida: Ahora te Llamas*

*Muchacho* and *Susie Q* (2009), *Desatinada: Soberana del Mambo* (Ñasaindy Cartonera, Formosa, 2010), *No le Digas que Murió Chabrol* (sypral jetty, Buenos Aires, 2011) and *Los Grados del Escándalo* (Sacate el Saquito, Mar del Plata, 2011). Currently she directs the publishing house *Sacate el Saquito*.

**CHEOM-SEON KIM** was born in 1946 in Kae-seong, a town located now in North Korea. In her first year of graduate school, her conceptual art was chosen for the 8<sup>th</sup> Tokyo Biennial in 1972. Soon afterwards, she stopped making conceptual art and began painting. After her first solo show in 1983, she exhibited her work in more than 60 solo shows before her death in 2009. In 1998 she published the first of her ten books, *Na Kim Cheom Seon (I am Kim Cheom Seon)*. In 2001, when overuse of her hand made gripping a brush difficult, she taught herself how to draw using a computer mouse. From that point on, much of her art was published in books alongside her diaries. The texts in this issue come from her two volume *10cm Yesul (10cm Art, 2002, 2004)*.

**JULIETTA CHEUNG** is a visual artist. Her sculptural installations, photography and text-based work have been exhibited in Belgium, Hong Kong, Paris, The Netherlands and the United States. She received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is currently Assistant Professor of Art at Florida State University.

**ASHLEY COLLEY**'s poems and reviews have appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *CutBank*, *Catch Up*, *Smoking Glue Gun*, and elsewhere. She is a PhD student at the University of Denver.

**KATE DURBIN** is an artist and writer who lives in Los Angeles.

**ANGÉLICA FREITAS** is the author of two poetry collections, both from Cosac Naify: *Rilke Shake* (2007) and *Um útero é do tamanho de um punho* ("The Uterus is the Size of a Fist") (2012), which was a finalist for the Portugal Telecom Prize, as well as the graphic novel *Guadalupe* (Companhia das Letras, 2012), illustrated by Odyr Bernardi. She lives in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

**NADA GORDON** was born in Oakland and lives in Brooklyn. Her most recent book is *Vile Lilt*.



**PIOTR GWIAZDA's** translation of Grzegorz Wróblewski's *Kopenhaga* came out in 2013. He lives in Baltimore.

**ULRICH HAARBÜRSTE** lives quietly in Dusseldorf, Germany, with his terrapin, and was recently honored with the coveted Golden Stopwatch award for most punctual citizen.

**JACK HIRSCHMAN** is Emeritus 4th Poet Laureate of San Francisco (2006-2009), founding member of the Revolutionary Poets Brigade of San Francisco (2009), and the World Poetry Movement (2011). Among dozens of books and translations, he has translated two books of poetry from Albanian: *Jabixshak*, an anthology of Albanian poets (1982), and Agim Gjakova's *Communist* (1984).

**HIROMI ITÔ** emerged in the 1980s as the leading voice of Japanese women's poetry with a series of sensational works that depicted women's psychology, sexuality, and motherhood in fresh and dramatic new ways. In the late 1990s, she relocated to southern California and since then has written a number of important, award-winning books about migrancy, relocation, identity, linguistic alienation, aging, and death. Her collection *Kawara arekusa* (translated by Jeffrey Angles as *Wild Grass on the Riverbank*, Action Books, 2014) won the 2006 Takami Jun Prize, awarded each year to an outstanding, innovative book of poetry. A selection of her early work appears in *Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itô*, translated by Jeffrey Angles (Action Books, 2009).

**PAOLO JAVIER** is author of four poetry collections, including *Court of the Dragon* (Nightboat Books). He is the former Poet Laureate of Queens, NY, where he lives with his wife and daughter.

**HILARY KAPLAN** is the translator of *Rilke Shake* by Angélica Freitas, winner of the 2016 Best Translated Book Award and a finalist for the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation. She also translated *Ghosts*, a collection of short stories by Paloma Vidali. She lives in Los Angeles.

**DAVID KAUFMANN**, who teaches at George Mason University, has just completed a manuscript, tentatively titled *Other People's Words: Subjectivity and Expression in Uncreative Writing*.

**DOUGLAS KEARNEY's** third poetry collection, *Patter*, was a finalist for the California Book Award. He lives with his family in the Santa Clarita Valley where he teaches at CalArts.

**KEVIN KILLIAN** is a San Francisco-based novelist, poet, and playwright.

**DEE DEE KRAMER** lives and works in San Francisco, CA.

**R. ZAMORA LINMARK**, who teaches at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, has a forthcoming poetry collection from Hanging Loose entitled *Pop Verite*.

**OWEN LOGAN** is a photographer and a researcher at the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen. In addition to *Masquerade*, his books include *Al Maghrib* (Polygon 1989) and *Bloodlines — vite allo specchio* (Cornerhouse 1994), and he is editor of *Flammable Societies: Studies on the Socio-economics of Oil and Gas* (Pluto Press 2012) and *Contested Powers: The Politics of Energy and Development in Latin America* (Zed Books 2015).

**MATT LONGABUCCO** is the author of the chapbook *Everybody Suffers: The Selected Poems of Juan García Madero* (O'Clock Press 2014). He is a co-founder of Wendy's Subway, teaches at New York University, and lives in Brooklyn.

**CLAIRE PARSONS LUCENA** is a teacher and translator from the UK. She has lived and worked in Brazil, Spain and Mexico.

**DAWN LUNDY MARTIN**, author of *Life in a Box is a Pretty Life* (Nightboat, 2015), is an associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh and lives in Pittsburgh and East Hampton, NY.

**ANNE MCGUIRE** lives in San Francisco but was born in the valley of the Jolly Green Giant.

**COURTNEY MEAKER** is a playwright currently in residence with Seattle Repertory Theater through 2016.

**PAUL MERCHANT** lives in Cambridge, UK, where he is working towards a PhD in contemporary Argentine and Chilean film.

**YE MIMI**, who lives in Taiwan, is the author of two volumes of poetry and a filmmaker whose poetry films have been internationally exhibited.

**K. SILEM MOHAMMAD** lives and teaches in Ashland, OR.

**JEONGHYUN MUN** grew up in Seoul and earned BA in Korean literature from Sungkyunkwan University. She lives in Waterloo, Canada.

**ERIN PIKE** is a performance artist and actor currently based in Seattle.

**MATT REECK** has won PEN-Heim and NEA Translation grants. His translated works include *Bombay Stories* (Random House India, 2013; Vintage International 2014); *Mirages of the Mind* (Vintage India, 2014; New Directions 2015); and the forthcoming *Class Warrior—Taoist Style* (Wesleyan UP, 2016). He is co-editor of *Staging Ground* and lives in Los Angeles and Brooklyn.

**TED REES** is a poet and critic currently living in Weed, CA, where he works at the Black Butte Center for Railroad Culture. Recent publications include *The New Anchorage* (Mondo Bummer 2014) and *Outlaws Drift in Every Vehicle of Thought* (Trafficker Press 2013), and he is on the editorial board of Timeless, Infinite Light.

**CALUM RODGER** is a poet, performer and scholar of poetics based in Glasgow, Scotland. He blogs at <https://allrealcultureisfree.wordpress.com/>

**KIM ROSENFELD** is the author of five books of poetry. Her latest, *USO: I'll Be Seeing You* was released by Ugly Duckling Presse in February 2013. She lives and works in NYC.

**SELAH SATERSTROM** is the author of three novels, including *Slab*, from which this work is excerpted. She makes her home in Denver, Colorado, where she is the Director of Creative Writing at the University of Denver.

A poet from Metro Manila, Philippines, **ANGELO V. SUAREZ** is the author of *Poem of Diminishing Poeticity* and *Philippine English: A Novel*.

**KO KO THETT** is a Burmese poet and literary translator. A collection of his poems, *the burden of being burmese*, published by Zephyr in 2015, is arguably the first full-length poetry book in English by a Burma-born poet. He currently lives in Yangon.

**EDWIN TORRES** is the author of seven poetry collections, including *Ameriscopia* (University of Arizona Press) and *Yes Thing No Thing* (Roof Books), and is currently maximizing his goof in Beacon, NY.

**TRUONG TRAN** lives and works as a teacher, poet and artist in the Bay Area. "Bliss" was part of a series that began as a meditative response to the death of 9,000 butterflies in Damien Hirst's 2012 retrospective. The butterflies in this piece were cut from gay pornography and old nature calendars.

**UZOR MAXIM UZOATU** was born in 1960, the year Nigeria gained independence. He is the author of *The Way We Are*, a human rights training manual on democracy (Civil Liberties Organisation 2002), as well as the novels *Satan's Story* (Pen Publishers 1989), *Day of Blood and Fire* (Lagos/Konk International 1990), and *The Missing Link* (Yemaja/Konk 1995). He lives in Lagos, where he chairs the editorial board of the newspaper *News Star*.

**NYEIN WAY** is a Yangon-based contemporary (conceptual/post-conceptual) poet who introduced conceptual-post-conceptual poetics and poetry to Myanmar. He has published four poetry books, and the poetics book *A Conceptual Poetics and a Contemporary Poet and a Book of 21st Century New Poetics (Nakanapati)*, which was published in Myanmar in 2013.

**AFTON WILKY** is the author of *Clarity Speaks of a Crystal Sea* (Flim Forum Press) and the chapbook, *Acquisition: an index* (Essay Press). She lives in Baton Rouge.

**GRZEGORZ WRÓBLEWSKI** is a Polish poet who lives in Copenhagen. His new poems appear in *Asymptote*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Nation*, and *Pleiades*.

**MAE YWAY** is from Myeik, a town on the coast of an island on the Andaman Sea in Myanmar's deep south. A resident of Yangon since she was ten, her maiden book *Courier* was published by The Eras (Yangon) in 2013.

Based in Singapore, **DESMOND KON ZHICHENG-MINGDE** has authored an epistolary novel and three poetry collections. He runs Squirrel Line Press.





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