

TRIPWIRE 14

*Parts scraps and life, the factory, and iron and iron and life and
life and brick and tile and in and out and life and life and nail
and nail*

—Leslie Kaplan

Poetry everywhere. Justice nowhere.

—Nathalie Quintane

I'm waiting for a revolution to invent me

—Jazra Khaleed

OAKLAND : 2018

TRIPWIRE
a journal of poetics

editor: David Buuck
assistant editor, design & layout: Cassandra Smith
editorial assistant: Lara Durbach
minister of information: Jenn McCreary
co-founding editor: Yedda Morrison

Back cover image: Mayakov+sky Platform, from Timomachia, Patras, Greece.

thank yous: Karen van Dyck, Theodoros Chiotis, Dimos Siotis, Andy Croft & Smokestack Books, Lotta Theißen & Joel Scott of artiCHOKE, Jack Hirschman, & all the contributors.

Tripwire was founded by Yedda Morrison & David Buuck in 1997, and published six issues from 1998-2002, plus a pamphlet in 2004. Back issues are available at <http://tripwirejournal.com>.

Submissions: please send proposals or inquiries to tripwirejournal@gmail.com.
Looking for essays, reviews, interviews, translations, black and white visual art, etc. No unsolicited poetry, plays or fiction, please.

Tripwire Translation Microgrants:
The Tripwire Microgrants for Translation are designed to provide support and recognition for translators of contemporary avant-garde and experimental writing. Each time donations to the fund reach \$100, that amount will be awarded to a translator for work published in coming issues of Tripwire.
Go to <http://tripwirejournal.com/tripwire-microgrants-for-translation> to donate.

printed by Bookmobile
distributed by Small Press Distribution (spdbooks.org)
all rights revert to contributors upon publication.

ISSN: 1099-2170
tripwirejournal.com

TRIPWIRE 14

Verity Spott

Danny Hayward on Poetry and Self-Defence

Arturo Desimone on Franca Jarach

Adelaide Ivánova (translated by Chris Daniels)

Jenn McCreary

Nathalie Quintane (translated by artiCHOKE & introduced by Antoine Hummel)

Cecily Nicholson in conversation with Michael Nardone

Kamau Brathwaite

Evan Kleekamp

Sam Vernon

Chris Chen

Sean Bonney

Cassie Thornton

Greek Poetry of the Crisis

Yiannis Dhallas * Krystalli Glyniadakis * Jazra Khaleed * Universal
Jenny * Christos Papageorgiou * Nick Potamitis * Kyoko Kishida
* Theodoros Chiotis * Eleni Philippou ** translated by Theodoros
Chiotis * Peter Constantine * George Economou * Chloe Haralambous
* Sarah McCann * Irini Papakyriacou * Max Ritvo * Angelos Sakkis **
photos by Mayakov+sky Platform

Cassandra Troyan

Heather Fuller

Omar Pimienta (translated by Jose Antonio Villarán)

Lasana Sekou

Azad Sharma

Eileen Tabios
Spree MacDonald
Heather Fuller on Buck Downs
Krishna Pulkundwar

ARCHIVAL

Karen Brodine (presented by Sam Solomon)
Leslie Kaplan (translated by Julie Carr & Jennifer Pap)
Katerina Gogou (translated by Angelos Sakkis)
Arturo Desimone on Roberto Jorge Santoro
Vladimir Mayakovsky (versions by Harry Gilonis)
Friedrich Hölderlin (translated by H. Bolin, commentary by Bruno C. Duarte)

REVIEWS

Juha Virtanen on Samuel Solomon
Danny Hayward on Verity Spott
Mark Nowak on Tongo Eisen-Martin
Julia Polyck-O'Neill on Stephen Collis
Dale Enggass on Divya Victor
Kay Gabriel on Anne Carson
Lisa Jeschke on Rob Halpern
Jonathan Dunk on Keston Sutherland
Allison Donahue on Uljana Wolf
Michael Gottlieb on Flarf
Robin Tremblay-McGaw on Alli Warren
Emma Sanders on Joanne Kyger

CONTRIBUTORS BIOS

VERITY SPOTT

from *Click Away Close Door Say*

Because you've fully comprehended
the violence of management hierarchies
filtering down to managing your "damage"
to less harm. An enemy amongst us.
G970 throttled a 32 on the cusp of weakening
to a career development scheme involving a
0.05% annual pay rise and £50 high street
vouchers as a backdated (in one year -within [enemy lives
do not] oh) for five years of loyal service rewards eaten on a scale
amending to the once more congressional aggregate I burn or the candle
to resolve its wax onto: whoever the fuck it is
runs the shop. Who particularly
is involved in that particular ravaging of that particular part
of the public sector, where do they live? What movements
do they make? What is their driving license number? Do they
have any children? Any special romances? - These are
police checks. On what terms
can Justice kidnap, ransom and slaughter them
and how useful can they make
the extermination or threatened extermination of their life stick?
We all know that by extermination salvation is birthed.
An enemy amongst us / Wrote to me last night from your room.
The last on the planet, and you said that your friends are falling to pieces
I couldn't speak about it / was too tired to speak,
but even closer. Someone is trying to kill my life. They've taken
fucking years; they took more in the tokens of anxiety
before that too,, we are extremely afraid. Did you know
that your brain ;eads you to right wing sentiments

when you are proximate to anti-bac gel dispensers?
Incidentally,

the turnaround of managers
that supervise the region
is not far from the turnaround
of low paid unit carers.

They come and go
& switch their manic faces
like the Doctor;
casting at us falsities and shit.

We wonder how
in faith we might
with tenderness
support them.

The things your type prioritise
are shit, more than I know;
but the things we can achieve
together are amazing!

Like curtaining the hallways
or hammering the sky.

In the meeting the RM feigns disinterest.
Not quite disinterest. More a casual ignorance for general
displeasure. Nobody likes to feel hated. A squad
of suited estate agents attack a Class War protest
outside the house of Boris Johnson. Nobody wants

to feel hated. . Her hair looks like Trump's,
glued onto a Norman helmet.
But let's not get too personal. We are told,
that the unit manager,

the Mr. Fucking Chips that stopped the war
is to be gone.

We are told *The Reason*, which is this; remember it forever: We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. We need someone who can take the business forward. You move forward. You need something to make your attachment ricochet. You do not move. Now you inch forward. Now back. Now you're nineteen years old, inching always gently forward, then back again, till the abstraction that is your movement begins to neglect itself, then to neglect everyone, then forward to yourself. You leave. You want to leave. Nothing could hold you here. Then more cuts. Then less movement. Then you mop up the cuts. The cuts are the benefits for the private sector, obviously. Then you cut it open. Examine the inside, then the outside. Throw the money for the inside at the outside. Then a specialist unit. Then you do a behaviour. Then breathe.

A service user and their mental health is mentioned. Trust
 is mentioned. A physical incident, a very violent one
 a few days earlier, that was possibly in part cajoled
 by the leaking of this news. How are they going
 to cope with change? That question does not hang on. It goes:
 This is you and this is what you can achieve. Your 'full potential'
 is not abstract. It is something only you can do, so plan it together.
 You are so good at being a person that being a person,
 though the peak of our endeavour is never better
 than I think you could be, so do better. I have congruence at you. You
 broke over firm drill to the bag of of of its remaining sc/ -ut out.
 We dutifully reassure the RM that our fears, ((counten \{U) Scent \
 bent \ent route of harm & of harm &, of harm is is hatred""""s
 .n bk steined in dis-pack door 1 a mending proboscis
 door broke on to sight of second door to to me the se
 second door is grim lips at first on a 90° hoop of one to door
 spin set of
 asc dant door monitoring system. Wort door one is in airlock
 sight present to door two d r2 intensity SCAM door
 ou ld loo f do r one one d r
 to econ o you the second do r is broken to gl s in the pane set
 out in little squ es oors swing out f r Advent terna ional C
 in pane g e t
 gl ""
 flat to door two you state in to starrrrr str lla faces one
 to next to the next cluster of
 frustrations and distrust have nothing to do
 with the new unit manager. We are angry at the decision.
 We are sad. People are leaving. The l thing! That's why I am pleased to
 confirm that from 1st April we are introducing our plans to implement
 and exceed the National Living Wage across all of our services to
 properly reward our colleagues for the incredible job they do every day.
 Split GMB membership by the gills. Populate the risk in a scatter graph.
 I am the fucking wage gap. Deal with me.

Incantation

:

We are an specialist unit. We provide an specialist service. We pay a national living wage. We give you an terrific honour of personhood.

Rolling

gently

right

to

left ,, to left.

Leaking

gently

right

to

left ,, to left to right on fire

leaking, smelling

gently

side

to

left ,,, on side,,,,, to side.

they rage in you and teeth

to leak like skin & fire

from s

side,,,,,,

to side. On.

And now that I know that I know not to get out
of where there's nothing to get out of

but I do. Upstairs outside the meds cabinet, your mouth
appropriated beats out rain
into the wide berth of hair in a pyramid of nylon

then somewhere else, watching the sky frame, a complex gyration.
Each victim piling onto the next, priced into a toxic pyramid
of fearful desire. Stare carefully into the frosting window; song tips

asking your parameters,, begging
them to stop,, being what and as they are now
I miss you because you go. Glue traces on the elbow
of the wound in our creepy head. Hatred of corpses /
...click away say close door say

in an incandescent
stress. Your dad, the pervert estate agent
washes his Milo, debate done right.. I won't pretend
then then to not understand the reasoning behind the upper
middle.

More than escaping into what we believe of you
wanting to throw
myself into what I can know to lose it. To make you worse.

I would like hereafter to let out
a futile mendicant proclamation of tangled up jargon
allowing every documentation to leave us
without a gender forever

behind nothing but when I speak to you, only become singular.
The heroic diremption of the versions we present now to one
another as no subject.

A smile
without my mouth on but someone else's
your lip's mouths fornicate stuck to the arse end
of the corporate Carl Rogers fetish club. Congruent
as flowers. Total window of skin. No eyes.
This the blasphemy diminished as a constant and impertinent beating into
the blank silence always left but forgotten invading sexual privacy with
a completely open mind,, trails into the melon pips all the fucking time
when you've been a victim of
abuse you might drop hints into conversations
to see whether or not the kindness you're getting from others
sticks to you. If it doesn't you may or not go on.
o make you/ maim things possible!!

Do you feel the parameters fling themselves
back and forth round your legs? The blasphemy you spoke of is stealing
your mouth as I feel as though holding it with this
socialisation might be abduction; to put on my own, reverse it
stare it outwards so everyone sees your mouth when they look
at mine which is cut up in wronging lips and teeth
not the only dysphoric antonym;; the rest of the body
rages to take for example the wrists, the scraps
on the wrists the muscular toes
truss at its recession
the obvious organs and cheeks the ears, the neck
and the feet not merely the toes but each whole foot and especially
always the hair it gets worse from the wrist to the arm top

every time it's moved back are you resisting the forces
of nature y/n? Enforce this body politic into a whole
position of mindful or anti-mindful expression and make your way
beyond the airlock into the office.

Someone's talking about you;

“you can see her reflection in the pebbles”.

Note is taken,

disintegrates

but it stays here, hanging and oily all over
the skin on the gusset in the bits of unthreaded lace
and I remember being loved outside,, how important
that felt how I would scream from every documentation and all this
whilst horror evades us,, all permanence and
to its parallel life openly chucked around and drowned making
our silence never cut to shit again the sky the hall the spiral
of legs. How beautiful we roll up into a pressure
of knots thank you:

Actual possibility fled the building
days ago feel rough plasterers at four o'clock to evade
black rote prior to dictatorial visitation hex. Ahem. And just under
Anthony Head's head which today I tacked to the wall of the office
courtesy of Timothy Thornton to improve the morale of my friends
there's a blue thermometer case with no thermometer inside it
which gives the impression they tear my being a/a off me who
are they. Gives the impression of a thermometer. Next to it up
to the right on a diagonal is a white note 17.5cm on a yellow backing
19.4cm with the words: Leave (and no other words)

There useless, excuse me, just a symbol of a
relic of a catalogue of moments.

Go and stare into the funds. The funds
seem infinite and inexpressible. And they seem human.

As in, they seem like they've been here a very long time, as in
these funds, which are idiots / are devious. They're
entrapment. Because they mean un-freedom. In that sense
I fold into a nazi. They pummel their genitals
pathetically self attacking and distributing
what could hardly be called loss. I hardly demean it.
Simply by replacing myself, the whole damn skin off
siphons into a meaning. I'm staring into Iain Duncan Smith
and want to pulverise his face instead, as I watch service
user after service user rot into the wood of the private
arena, pummeled in gone therapies (taken), cognitive
debasement, use creating. Iain Duncan Smith's face
with a horrible rope pouring out of it. Tensile fuck.

Burn for this evening to begin again,
it does. In the low desk light, you're humming
through the wall, rounded into a noise I
yearn to be caught in. Caressing the once
pathetic instability, I long.
And that is how I am built: to call what's
tender pathetic. To yet crave gentle
lulls, to call them lulls. To be felt to be
disguised. To imprison myself by taught
actions and jibes. To make it a fetish;
a blurry open cist without a lung.
Blinkered in the vacancy of loft space.

I promise to be less like you than you
are less like me than ever made us one.

There's no
reconciliation
 in death
there's none in life
there's no life
left.
I detach. And scratch. I go into work
and drag you with me along the floor
through the doors, the airlock

a sudden cheering lurch
welling, hopeful, your smiling
skin,
is it possible
to slice
through glue?

“Say thank you melancholia, say thank you livid scent, say thanks to mandatory training, say thank you kitchen labour, say thank you CR02, say thank you supervision, say thank you horrible triggers, say thank you Venn diagram, say thank you 6am, say thank you PBS, say thank you departed friends, say thanks a million lawyers, say thank you *50% more likely to consider or commit suicide*, say thank you bedded statistics, say thank you dragged from one task to the next, say thank you once jubilant workplace, say thank you eroding sense of care, say thank you teeth of managers, say thank you for your change, say thank you to your tiredness, say thank you fair exchange.”

The person centred approach:

The hijacked corporate antitheses

of the communal.

—complete poem available from Contraband Books, 2017

DANNY HAYWARD

Poetry and Self-Defence

《最后的墓地》

‘The Last Graveyard’

Even the machine is nodding off
Sealed workshops store diseased iron
Wages concealed behind curtains
Like the love that young workers bury at the bottom of their hearts
With no time for expression, emotion crumbles into dust
They have stomachs forged of iron
Full of thick acid, sulfuric and nitric
Industry captures their tears before they have the chance to fall
Time flows by, their heads lost in fog
Output weighs down their age, pain works overtime day and night
In their lives, dizziness before their time is latent
The jig forces the skin to peel
And while it's at it, plates on a layer of aluminum alloy
Some still endure, while others are taken by illness
I am dozing between them, guarding
The last graveyard of our youth.

This is a poem by the poet Xu Lizhi, who three years after its composition killed himself by jumping from the 17th floor of a shopping mall in Shenzhen to become one member of a small but historically important group. The group was important enough for Steve Jobs to assert that it was statistically insignificant and threatening enough to impel Foxconn to raise employee wages by about twelve percent over a period of four years.¹ It was also firm enough in its actions, and its constituents were deliberate enough

in choosing the method of their death, to generate a sort of brief flicker of recognition even in places where the suffering of wage labourers at the bottom of the global value chain is forever most enthusiastically celebrated, in those parts of the Western business press whose main purpose is to make capitalist exploitation sound fun and interesting. Like most groups that achieve their aims by some kind of collective action, nobody commented on the behaviour of this one by describing it as ‘haunting’ or ‘tragic’ or as being ‘capable of opening a rare window’ onto some new groundswell of bourgeois mouthwash or by asserting mindlessly that its actions had ‘struck a chord’ with ‘the Chinese youth,’ in the deeply human and empathetic vocabulary of an A&R rep meditating on the prospects of a future sales commission.² Nobody would have said this, nobody would have even conceived of such a response, because it was immediately obvious to anybody with eyes that the significance of the spate of Foxconn jumping suicides as a *collective action* was a catastrophic and peremptory refusal of the conditions in which proletarian lives are bought up for almost nothing and then made to bend into any shape or to take on any significance that their owners think is profitable or touching or sad and funny at the same time.

None of these things were said about the group to which Xu Lizhi now unalterably belongs, but all of them were said about the poetry that Xu Lizhi wrote and which was translated and circulated in the months after his death. As soon as the first English-language translations of his poems were stolen, uncredited, from the communist labour activists who first produced them, to be re-posted to the Bloomberg website, a pernicious tendency grew up in the vocabulary of critical description.³ For the journalist writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, Xu Lizhi was “a 24-year-old with literary aspirations.” From this viewpoint, Xu Lizhi’s poems were not ‘tragic’ because they scream out for some responsive insight into the duration or the intensity of a personal struggle against hostile social conditions, but instead because individually they are *irrelevant*, an eyesore in the vicinity of poetry as such, the trail of empty packaging and beer cans that get scattered about indecorously in the entrance to a Site of Great Historical Interest.⁴ Trained journalists

understand that the best thing that can be done with work like this is to hold one's nose and look the other way, in the hope that someone might come along and sweep it away from the 'aspiration' whose attractiveness to Western tourists it vitiates; or else that if it absolutely must be looked at then it should be glanced at hastily, compassionated and then immediately forgotten. Their choice of descriptive phraseology shows that they know instinctively that this is what they are doing and that their indifference is in need of some justification, since the assertion that the poetry itself never does anything more than 'open a window' onto or 'offer a peek' at the circumstances that it contests is self-evidently designed to insinuate that there *isn't all that much to be seen*.⁵ *There's nothing to see here*. This is the anxious connotation with which those who assert ownership over the 'idea' of poetry affirm their relationship to the everyday policing operations that are used to discipline the people who are shut out from it, on the wrong side of its window of opportunity.

Xu Lizhi's writing itself is of course grotesquely parodied by this treatment and yet it seems defenceless in the face of it. Can it be defended? In the following short essay I will argue that it can be, and that, in spite of the liberties that bourgeois journalists take with it, it can be defended principally because Xu Lizhi's poetry is itself an expressively defensive kind of writing. I also think that the character of its defensiveness, and the specific object that it chooses to defend, can tell us something useful about the history of capitalist violence and its present hypertrophic extremities. Xu Lizhi's poetry may seem 'tragic' to those for whom it suffers the conventionally tragic 'fatal flaw' of being nothing but a vain striving towards an idea of poetry that it in fact could never attain to, as, in another world, it might have done, had only some philanthropic grant provider singled out its author and vomited in his direction a discriminating stipend; but my argument here is that the work belongs to another genre that is less recognised by institutional funding bodies and the knuckleheaded lamenters of whatever might have been but now isn't. This is the genre of collective self-defence. In our present atmosphere of generalised disempowerment and habitual

self-abnegation this may not seem like a very plausible category for the description of poetry, especially since (according to the usual exclusionary logic) the phrase is ‘really’ used to describe self-organised food kitchens or rubbish collection or arms training. But Xu Lizhi’s writing is itself the most lucid and exhaustingly definitive proof of the bankruptcy of that logic and of the self-attacking guilt that gives rise to it. It is clearly a very fundamental attempt to hold the self together by giving voice to some of the tendencies that threaten to tear it apart; and the tone of the poetry is inseparable from its author’s fundamental, desperate need for *expressive* control over the most basic dimensions of the situation that he was forced to confront. Defensive poetry is primarily defined by this characteristic, of exercising, and of working implacably to heighten, our *expressive* control over basic or fundamental experiences of capitalist violence; and also by the fact that it recognises that this exercise of expressive control is a real and urgent collective and psychological need. Other bodies of work besides Xu Lizhi’s can be used to show this; Xu Lizhi is in this respect only a singular and unforgettable case.

What defensiveness in language does *not* primarily involve is the prevention of misunderstanding. This is a capacity that now exists if anywhere only in the vegetable aisle in the posterior section of the superior temporal gyrus of Donald Trump. Defensiveness is not only this. It is also and more importantly a volatile and generous intuition of relative value. It begins in a basic recognition that something that is *everything* to you or to the people about whom you care is emphatically and unalterably *nothing* in the eyes of those who have control over the conditions in which you live. It is an immediate and bodily recognition of the insane violence of this historical relativity, which becomes more intense with every year in which the social distribution of produced wealth becomes more and more indescribably polarised. It is what makes a writer like Xu Lizhi say of his own expressive convictions that “Flowing through my veins, finally reaching the tip of my pen/ Taking root in the paper/ These words can be read only by the hearts of migrant workers.” In other words, it is not an attempt to compel those who

rule over you to share your feelings but an attempt to induce in yourself a greater and fiercer love for whatever it is whose value is capable of being reduced in *their* eyes to virtually nothing, so as to make of that reduction a still more maddeningly detestable and ridiculous emblem of the established and accepted cruelty of ordinary social life. It is a perverse and reactive attitude, bristling with a pathological obstinacy, seething in a feedback loop of self-harm and misrecognition. It is inseparable from love for what which is actually dominated, hurt or broken, and at one of its extremes it can easily tip back into love for brokenness in and for itself. For the properly defensive writer, which is to say, for the writer who is habitually and attitudinally defensive, it is not only the case that what is everything *for us* is capable of becoming in the eyes of our enemy absolutely nothing, but nothing can be anything except that which is liable at any moment to be reduced once again to nothing at all.

Defensive poetry has besides this two primary attributes or tendencies. The first of these has to do with magnification. Poetry springs from an intuition of the insane violence of relativity, but it does not follow from this fact that it is in any sense ‘relativist’ or even yet (in the forward-looking manner of the *Wall Street Journal*) that it has relativist ‘aspirations.’ It is not remotely relativist; it is a furious and bloody-minded response to the fact that what it values *absolutely* is even capable of being relativized. *Everything* and *nothing* become for the defensive poet like two differently coloured floodlights that can be switched on and off alternately. Everything is made to appear alternately under their illumination, to light up alternately under these two evaluative headings; the rhythm of the transformation sets the tempo for the protest it gives rise to, crashing away in the chest like a Bloomberg equities monitor on the blink during a stock market plummet. In Xu Lizhi’s “The Last Graveyard,” “The jig forces the skin to peel,/ And while it’s at it, plates on a layer of aluminum alloy.” In the first line, my suffering is everything. In the second, it is nothing. Everything I am becomes greater under the light in which I necessarily appear as nothing at all, as the most immediately replaceable among an infinity of more valuable production factors, put to

work until my skin blisters and my body becomes unsuitable for the part operation that it was employed to perform. It becomes inexorably greater and not less under this light because under it the possibility that everything I have and am and everything that I hope for will be brutally taken from me is blown up and distorted until finally it comes to look like all of my horizons pressing in simultaneously on whatever it is that I am and unstoppably squashing it, densifying it, jamming it more and more relentlessly into just *this* moment of living expression cut off from the whole life in which we would never have to place on it demands that it could never hope to meet.

The second primary attribute of defensive poetry is that it is pre-emptive. Defensive poetry *knows* that it cannot have the whole life that it immoderately wishes for, that its words have been ground away before they fall out onto the page, that its protest will never be violent enough to prevent those who it detests from painting it as a mere unfulfilled aspiration. It wishes to empower its readers by confronting *pre-emptively* the violation that it realistically foresees for itself, by seeing more deeply and compassionately into its own brokenness and limitations and the constraints that are placed on its real and positive accomplishments than could any representative of the class who profit from these limitations and who write obituaries in which they call them a 'tragedy.' "Most of us know," wrote Baraka in his poem "Das Kapital," that "there's a maniac loose. Our lives a jumble of frustrations/ and unfilled/ capacities."⁶ The knowledge is nervous and overwhelming, belated and exhausted, docile and sick and impasse; it is itself an excess capacity, easy to write down into empty aspiration, into negativity pure and simple, easy to shrug off as 'unfulfilled potential' in a marketplace that couldn't possibly make room for anyone who isn't already full of shit. It is unprofitable because presently unrealizable, empty and yet impossible to expand into. Bourgeois critics think its object is 'sad' because they imagine that it is unalterable; defensive poets anticipate that response and are urged on by it, its negation of their lives however shut up and exploited and needlessly damaged is still the annihilation of everything that they have and wish to work with. They know instinctively and pre-emptively

how to resist that response and their poetry offers to it a humane and total answer, by bringing forthrightly into view everything in the poet's life that breaks it up and steals the time of it; and they do so on the grounds that this capacity to know and to love better than they can that which is at once *an excess* and *something unfulfilled* is itself a real social power. They know all this and they are capable of drawing from it the natural inference, which is that to seize that power now and to recognise it not as an 'aspiration' but as a reality represents one step towards the abolition of this world in which there is no power except the power to exploit, and no permissible excess except the excess of sentimental tears that are wept by the exploiters.

The excess of unfulfilment is a power. This is the slogan of the poetry of collective self-defence against the whimsical moralism of individual self-aggrandisement. Like all slogans, it is meant to condense an historical reality into a practical imperative, which is to say that it is meant to aid our thinking about how that reality might be exceeded. Capital abandons production and moves overseas, it leaves "the garbage cans parked full strewn/ around our defaulting cities;"⁷ it then floods back into them in the form of private prison operators and other novel means of murderous repression. Later it develops the technologies to allow whatever wealthy residents remain in de-industrialised zones to recruit workers to clear up their garbage but no one else's; it learns to profit from interactions that previously would have been too atomised or 'molecular' for it to notice even if they were to float repulsively in its soup.⁸ All the while it succeeds 'overseas' in liberating into its factories hundreds of millions of people who previously had been tied self-sustainingly to the land. How can this reality be exceeded? If historically the activity of self-defence has belonged mainly to those who are abandoned by capital—to those who are forced to struggle chiefly with its terroristic border guards at the edges of states and in the centres of their largest conurbations—today the stakes have changed; and capital can now abandon you and take you up again several times even within the limits of a single lifetime ordinarily brutalized and foreshortened. What does this mean for the political category of self-defence? And what does this mean

for the language of self-defence, for defensiveness as a property of poetry intransigently committed to achieving a pre-emptive insight into the scale and the complexity of life that has been broken and cast off and fenced in and that still is not content to view itself as privatively ‘under-privileged’ or ‘deprived’ or merely evocatively dead?

Some of these questions might be tested against the following lines by the poet Nat Raha:

increasingly white bodies dispersed
 early hours, new cross road:
where we’ve held out in the try collective of us
to construct a wedge ~~stable~~, ~~of permanence~~ we
 so broken out of belonging together
root & rubble piling upon action to bruise, to be
 thrown only back into privacy
 / landlord behest::
sick w/ increase on values, the
suffering of our friends

This passage comes from “((a fire)),” the first poem from a book titled *Of Sirens / Body and Faultlines*.⁹ Raha has said of the zine format in which the poem was published that she wished the texts to ‘disappear;’ this I think is another way of saying that she didn’t desire the poems to possess any more permanence than the people who are constantly flattened out by capitalist development in the city about which she writes. In any case, these are lines that die out freely and hotly on a border of necessitousness, which will go nowhere unfixedly, elaborating their brokenness as the substitute for abandonment and imposition. They are the push-factor for meaning that Amiri Baraka once sarcastically said was ‘self imposed’: “the only thing worth living for” if being the only person alive is your kind of thing.¹⁰ The words that get struck out in the fourth line are a joke about visibility: deletions highlighted in signal contrast to lives that are more silently extinguished,

administratively shut out from the poem by the white bodies that fill it up in the ‘early hours’ of the commuter shift. They are a kind of reading notes: also a muted commentary on the passive voice in which the first quoted line in this passage is constructed, a gloss for the grammar of ignorance is bliss.¹¹ More simply they are an invitation to a closer and more sustained attention to what might here be the description of a squat eviction or the breaking up of a shared home, of lives “thrown only back into privacy,” which is the condition in which we are “so broken out of belonging together,” each of these lines assembled out of the displaced prepositional rubble of the other, divided up by a self-commentary:

so broken *back* belonging together
root & rubble piling upon action to bruise, to be
thrown only *out of* privacy

The yearning they express is for the process to be reversed, for it to be possible to go back, to belong together again, to be thrown out of the isolation that is irresistibly brought about by a political economy based in the inflationary monetisation of basic human needs. The poem cries out for privacy *and* for association, mixes them up in “scenes of pollutant song;” needs made contradictory only by the restriction of the space in which they can be articulated are not diligently picked apart but are instead made spectacularly to collide. The ‘wedge’ that we tried to construct is denatured into a ‘we’ and an ‘edge,’ then the ‘we’ is shunted out to the end of the line and is declassed into the edge that it was at first separated from. All the way across the jagged perimeter of this poetry and then out of and back into the heart of it, tenuous sense is left on display, scattered sensationally throughout the bits and pieces of descriptive vocabulary, tossed away or carelessly made to heap up against the “suffering of our friends,” which is the one fact in these lines whose necessary recognition cannot be gotten clear from or broken down or made into a commentary on some text element that preceded it.

Defensive poetry sees pre-emptively into the fullest extent of the damage to which it is exposed. It sees into it pre-emptively and it recognises in its detail a moving and communicative power, the use of which is not restricted to poetry but is the tenuous material of political connections that are still to be fleshed out in the reality that individually we get lost in. Raha's poetry indicates an historical qualification of this argument: the fullest extent of the damage to which we are now exposed has become intensely changeable, mobile and dispersive, as capital has itself become changeable, mobile and dispersive within and beyond the cities in which we live and as the points of connection and commonality between exploited and despairing people thousands of miles apart have multiplied, have ramified and grown together, and at last have grown up and expanded and acquired a richer and more exacting language, so that they are no longer mathematical points or nodes on a graph of shared interests but have become instead the shared bruises, sore spots, and developed antipathies of a more substantive form of political mutuality.

How can this new mutuality be defended? It is easy to see how it might be destroyed, since the processes that threaten it are the same ones that bring it barely and incipiently into being. As capital expands into new areas of social life, it simultaneously abandons others. The kind of unfulfilment that has historically been created wherever money flees from a population is now expressed just as commonly in the political poetry of the contemporary Guangdong factory worker as it is in the poetry of the community activist. In this connection the description in Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* of the way in which capital accumulation is "primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment" has never been more true.¹² Her description of the process through which this 'relationship' is established, by means of "[the] most complicated relations, divergences in the speed and direction of accumulation ... material and value relations with non-capitalist modes of production," has never been more evidently exact.¹³ It becomes more formally exact not only because of its resistance to 'rigid formulae' but because of its expressive tone and style. Now just as much

as in 1972 Amiri Baraka's "jumble of frustrations and unfilled capacities" are the closest thing that we have in our internal lives to non-capitalist environments. They are blasts of fire in the consciousness of insane cruelty, unsanitary vacancies lit up against a backdrop of relative value. They are graveyards of youth that we watch over with perverse contrariness so as to know them more completely than our enemies who look over our shoulders. They are the quintessence of that 'deprivation' that policymakers moaningly compassionate and that political poets like Xu Lizhi have preemptively defended; and they are the possibilities of a broken-down speech that in Raha's poems are pulled apart and put back together again at top speed in a blur of intelligent probation. They are all of these things and they are also historically changeable; and in more recent poetry it becomes more and more clear that they are not stable fields of expressive dissatisfaction in relation to which we have no obligation except to fortify their borders, since just at the point where they are felt most intensely they now split up, as Luxemburg predicted for political economy, into "the most complicated relations," and pass through perpetual divergences in the speed and direction of their accumulation; forks in their relationship to their capitalist environment; forward leaps and reverses in their potential expressive intensity; and more generally through all of the changes that might be expected to arise in dynamic social system whose growth and development has precisely nothing to do with human desire and satisfaction.

What is most deeply characteristic of this vertiginous transformation is not anything so simple-mindedly straightforward as an 'acceleration' of social relationships; it is a widening of the extremities within which historical struggles are formed and between which our jumble of frustrations and unfilled capacities are strung out. As more and more human beings are permitted to aspire to and also to achieve the kind of poetry that Xu Lizhi achieved so movingly, more and more people are faced with the threat that *everything* that they possess will be valued at and terroristically reduced to *nothing*, on the basis that investment capital has been feeling a little up and down recently. Luxemburg's statement is important because she *anticipated*

this historical transformation: because she knew that the defence of the excess of our unfulfilment would become for all proletarians more and more like a race across the entire surface of social need, that the surface is perpetually expanding, and that this can be true even with respect to the non-capitalist environments of a single human life; and because she saw this not so much in what she said as in the sudden spring in the tension of the expression of her argument, in the forward leap into a grammar in which any number of differences can all be viewed simultaneously in a thunderstorm of signals whirling furiously into a blank. Luxemburg anticipated this transformation; and today Nat Raha produces poetry that is buffeted at the centre of it; and until 2014 Xu Lizhi also lived through it, and ran headlong into it, and chased his own capacities right into the centre of that propagandistic black hole into which non-capitalist environments are sucked only to be spat out again as slogans on employee wellness in the Foxconn/Hon Hai *Social and Environmental Responsibility Report*.

Each of these writers provides a different point of access onto the same social reality. In this reality, which is the reality both of super-exploitation and of urban abandonment and penury, it is not only our ability to realise our desires or clearly to express them but even our ability to feel them that must be fought for and defended. *With no time for expression, emotion crumbles into dust.* Each of the writers mentioned above shows us this and each of them shows us also that in poetry the fight cannot be won, that it is a losing proposition, that it can arrest but not halt the total liquidation of whatever vital powers we happen still to possess. Each of them shows us this, and yet each of them proves in spite of it a contrary position, which is that any new radical politics that would permit us to express our desires clearly or to realize them in practice will *nevertheless be absolutely worthless* until it can open itself up to the tones of those for whom even the capacity to feel can never be communicated except in the form of one long perseverant fight to the death.¹⁴ There will be no meaningful new radical politics that is incapable of speaking in the same tones as those for whom even the next breath is something that has to be defended at

all costs. Those who now deny this proposition acquiesce to the insane violence of historical relativity and reduce to nothing a struggle that for many people has been *everything that they could do* to sustain themselves in the face of conditions that are absolutely inimical to dignified social life. The procedure is as technically well-established as it is violently reductive. It mistakes proximity to death in desperate struggle *for death itself*, tragic and unavoidable; or it condescends to that struggle as nothing more than an expressive flight into an individualised ‘therapeutic’ bourgeois defence mechanism. It promotes a deafness to human expressive life whose flipside is an equally wild overestimation of the difference between the grandest schemes of bourgeois reform and the ‘treachery’ of their promoters.

The principle expression of this overestimation is familiar: it is the deep disappointment that results whenever the promoters of bourgeois reform schemes come to admit under pressure that the only defence mechanism worthy of the name is the expressive flight of investment capital into whatever new and unprotected markets are best stocked with reserves of tragic human material. The accusation of ‘treachery’ that is expressed in these moments is the most unerringly decisive proof of the tone-deafness of those who believe themselves to have been betrayed.

And at the bottom of all of this there is a simple lesson. Anyone who chooses to listen to writing like Xu Lizhi’s patiently and attentively engages in a fight against the insane violence of historical relativity in whose detail existing capitalist society is one long drawn-out crash course. Those of us who are not Xu Lizhi’s friends or comrades must *choose* to listen to his writing; we cannot be compelled to hear what goes on in the space it stakes out and guards, since the poetry truly does lack even the most absolutely catastrophically reduced capacity to fight back against those who would ignore it in a fit of condescension. Nothing that Xu Lizhi has done or that anyone else will ever do will ever be able to compel understanding of the writing in those who are determined to hear in it nothing but the tragic *absence* of the poetry that in the great shelf of their petty class prejudices will always take

pride of place. The edict is terminal. No work of contextualisation of the writing will ever be able to wake melancholy journalists in the business press from their dream of themselves, and no insight into the work's withheld excesses will ever throw literary critics through the windscreen of their own aspirations, and no response to the tonal pressure of the work no matter how passionately stated will ever be able to persuade bourgeois reformers of the bankruptcy of any revolutionary thinking that cannot speak in the tones of those who have had to defend everything they possess incessantly no matter how small right down to the very last vanishing breath. And yet the lesson to be learned is that *in spite of all this* anyone who goes on treating the writing as if it were nothing is in for a horribly nasty surprise.

Appendix: from a Letter to some Friends

... I am not very happy with the essay that I sent to you both, I have re-written it several times already, though not as many times as the file name indicates, which derives instead from an increasingly ferocious paranoia about data loss; but it still lacks to my eyes any clear sense of internal purpose. It is neither really an essay about Xu Lizhi nor an essay about self-defence. The atmosphere of distractibility is as thick as the atmosphere on any fresh spring morning in downtown Shanghai. One commitment overtakes another and then rides slowly into the crash barrier of its own word count.

What I wanted to do primarily is to write an essay about a particular kind of tone. It is obvious to me that tonal particularity in poetry (and not just in poetry) is a product of basic psychological disposition. Psychology is the base to poetry's tonal superstructure. The expressive range that is available in any kind of writing that cares about things like 'expressive range' is pre-determined to a substantial extent by the attitudinal habits of the writer. If the writer mostly thinks about social suffering by processing articles on the internet (the psychology of compulsive indigestion), then the tonal contour that they are most likely to be able to access is of a kind of sublime horror.

Their writing will be irresistibly controlled by this primary experience, of watching something unimaginably large and complex drip torturously through one uselessly constricting but also unsealable aperture, the drive-in window repurposed into a bilge pipe. Different writers will be able to express this basic psychological habitus with different degrees of ferocity or sycophantic complacency, depending on who they are and how much they get paid for being it; and some of them will be able to manipulate the tone to which it gives rise with great and impressive facility; and some of them will be able to drive it towards its further limits of intensity; and some of them will be able to learn from it right up to its outermost accession; but the tone is still basically the same regardless. I am not putting this very well. I mean I suppose that the very best writer ‘in this line’ is likely to throw all of their energies into the task of heightening and of accenting and of speeding up into a kind of FFW vertiginous pogrom in a snow-globe the *basic* psychological experience of digitally processing the data of contemporary social misery. If the *basic* experience is inattentive, twitchy, trigger happy on a trackpad, then what poetry will do is serviceably pimp that basic experience into a riot of expressive confusion. Out of the everyday experience of getting waylaid on a historical learning curve and dragged off by an impulse to the virtual clothes store (or whatever) it will discount the whole universe by 50%. Out of the experience of not knowing what to click on next it will user-generate a more totally hyperventilated parataxis. The tone is overwhelming and luxurious and seductive; but it is still a translation of the same old familiar mental bad habits, unaltered by being formidably built out into an OCD megamall criss-crossed by overused conjunctions.

In the face of this kind of work it is not adequate to say that it is necessary to produce ‘better writing.’ Some of this writing may be deliriously good *as a translation* of the basic psychological attitude from which it results: but this is like saying that the military junta in Egypt is deliriously good as a translation of the Mubarak regime of 2009. It is not the deluxe intensification of the attitude that needs changing *but the attitude itself*. It is a precondition for poetry that its authors learn to rip out of their heads

the affirmative tendency to treat suffering as if it were most conspicuously sublimely excessive and 'horrible.' The cultivation of this basic attitude involves the exorbitant waste of expressive energy not on overcoming a social and political limitation but on making that limitation fierce and strange and impetuously seductive. With every new accomplishment in the extreme intensification of the tone that is associated with this mental habit, which is in its everyday form unutterably tedious and banal, poets bring about a new reason to believe that the attitude is intrinsically worthwhile and defensible. By throwing all of their powers of invention and originality into the service of upcycling (and tonally dynamising) the basic attitude of psychological bewilderment and indirection, they fortify in their audiences the conviction that, because their basic mental habits can be expressed intensely, there is no reason for those habits to be denied or refuted or overcome. The negative outcome of this conviction is that poetry can become more and more tonally explosive and far-out even as it makes other and more humane and fierce and politically desirable attitudes progressively less and less possible both for its authors and its readers. The constant tonal dynamising of attitudes of sublime horror in art makes it more and more evidently impossible to imagine that any other attitude could ever be brought to expression with the same kind of impetuous force; it makes it harder to imagine that any other attitude could ever blow up in the centre of our customary syntax and speech-music with the same sort of urgent propagandistic effect.

I say all this to set up some background for a quite different kind of response. One of the reasons why Xu Lizhi's writing had the effect on me that it did was that it shocked me into a recognition of the fact that there are other attitudes towards which contemporary poets might feel instinctively and powerfully drawn. The tone of his writing seems to me as if it is in some very crisp and straightforward sense the *opposite* of the tone of the writing I am describing above. It is a fiercely defensive tone because it recognises out of lived necessity the need to hang on to every moment of expressive potential however bruised or lacerated and however dented or foreshortened may be the poems that are wrung out of those moments. The tone rises up

out of a psychology that cannot afford to find suffering sublimely excessive, that needs to *hold on* to the individual victim-opponents of social cruelty. Often the tone of the work cannot be driven to excess and the poems give conscious voice to this fact; they *just have* to happen anyway; and more than that they just have to happen, because if they don't then there is nothing else and because any increment of life that can be won against that eventuality is everything to the person who knows how close they are to finding life absolutely unliveable. It is meaningless to talk about whether they are 'good' or 'bad' poems, they are a lesson in something that from the perspective of the writers of the most sublimely blocked up and contrivedly bewildered poetry will simply seem unthinkable. The attitude that they evince is completely foreign to anyone who has become accustomed to the idea that the suffering of an individual cannot be expressively conceived otherwise than as a spectacular case of injustice that then stands in for a million other case of cruelty that all belong under the same heading. I don't think that we know, in our present situation, what it would sound like if anyone or if a large group of 'English-language' writers, a movement or a collective, were to achieve by some effort of sustained commitment or will a real and practical insight into the *basic* attitude of Xu Lizhi's writing. I don't think that we know what it would sound like if that attitude were suddenly to punch its way through into the tone of the poetry that the candidate-writers are now composing. I don't think we know what that would sound like; and so I have no idea at all what it would mean for more writers to learn not only to adopt the attitude of defensiveness that we can find in Xu Lizhi, but also to do with it just what has been done for the *basic attitude* of psychological indigestion and hyperpneic awestruckness that is now thanks to a great deal of English-language writing the most tonally elaborated and outspoken and dynamised basic attitude in our contemporary culture. I have no idea what it would be like if there were to surge into the world a poetry whose attitude of careful and defensive commitment to the real lives of suffering and exploited individuals were also as freely intensified and dynamised, and as tonally elaborated and iconised, as the postures of helplessness and impotent display that have become the ultimate tax-free

havens for whatever bourgeois expressive libidinal energy is left now that high culture has slid triumphantly into administration. But I do think that a writing like this might help people to *live* instead of annually upgrading their experience of failing to.

—originally published in *No Money* #2

¹ Kathrin Hille, 'Foxconn to Raise Salaries 20% after Suicides', *The Financial Times*, 28 May 2010, at: <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5e1ee750-6a05-11df-a978-00144feab49a.html#axzz3zrvdQLmN>>. For some information about how the suicides galvanised other workers to participate in less catastrophically self-destructive forms of struggle, see the article by the *Bloomberg* journalist Dexter Roberts, 'The Rise of a Chinese Worker's Movement', reprinted on the *China Labor Bulletin* website at: <<http://www.clb.org.hk/en/content/additional-reports-labour-unrest>>. More general first-person reports on the recent history of Chinese factory labour can be found here: <<http://www.gongchao.org/en/factory-stories>>.

² In order of appearance: Ishaan Tharoor, 'The Haunting Poetry of a Chinese Factory Worker who Committed Suicide', *The Washington Post*, 12 November 2014, at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/11/12/the-haunting-poetry-of-a-chinese-factory-worker-who-committed-suicide/>>; Joshua Barrie, 'Read the Heartbreaking Poems of a Man Who Committed Suicide After [sic] Working in a Foxconn Factory', *Business Insider* UK, at: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/foxconn-factory-workers-suicide-poems-2014-11>>; Eva Dou, 'After Suicide, Foxconn Worker's Poems Strike a Chord [sic]', *Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 2014, at: <<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/11/07/after-suicide-foxconn-workers-poems-strike-a-chord/>>.

³ The original article and translations were by the group Nao. All of the materials can be found here: <<https://libcom.org/blog/xulizhi-foxconn-suicide-poetry>>. Everything in this article however wayward is nevertheless stated in a spirit of profound gratitude to Nao for undertaking the work of translating these poems and for presenting them as they deserved to be presented.

⁴ Put from the perspective of its worst readers, the same point can be made differently. Poetry *must* be treated like this, as if it were the raw material for its own concept, and the intense and sustained labour of its human realisation must be disregarded, because without this conceit it cannot be imagined as the symmetrically satisfying opposite of a concept of industrial labour. Working-class poets must be fobbed off with a vague desire for the 'idea' of poetry and their actual accomplishments must be ignored, because otherwise their fate cannot be treated as if it were inevitable from the outset. The confrontation with actual poetry peremptorily disables this whole operation of moral response, since almost by definition actual poetry has nothing to do with predestination or with the sad acknowledgement of the necessary cruelty of whatever happens to be in the interests of the ruling classes in major Chinese export markets.

⁵ For 'offer a peck', see Bendon Hong, "The Eerie Poetry of Chinese Suicide Victims [sic]", *Vice Online*, 14 November 2014, at: <https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/death-poems-are-a-thing-in-china-right-now>.

⁶ Amiri Baraka, 'Das Kapital', in *Transbluesency: Selected Poems 1961–1995*, edited by Paul Vangelisti (New York: Marcilio Publishers, 1995), p. 153.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See e.g., Pricewaterhouse Coopers, "The Sharing Economy," online at <<https://www.pwc.com/us/en/technology/publications/assets/pwc-consumer-intelligence-series-the-sharing-economy.pdf>>.

⁹ Nat Raha, *Of Sirens – Body and Faultlines* (London: Veer Books 2016). Raha provides the following primer on her blog: 'as I said about the first edition - the pamphlet corresponds with 'radio / threat'. it was mostly written between summer 2014 and spring 2015 (with a few exceptions). trying to excavate and map sensations, discordances, the transformations of police reality and capital / canary wharf lookouts, moments of rupture in the locale of New Cross / Deptford in South London and beyond, of collectivity and protest, of what we are now calling radical transfeminism, of the constellations of violence that pivot around a government department known as the Home Office between the future and over 200 years before it was founded, of vague histories need to be reclaimed and understood in the sense of understanding as a necessary synonym of decolonialisation' <<http://sociopatheticsemaphores.blogspot.co.uk/>>.

¹⁰ Baraka, 'Gatsby's Theory of Aesthetics' *Transbluesency*, p. 132.

¹¹ The point is that under current circumstances, white bodies are not 'dispersed' but *concentrated*.

¹² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, translated by Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 398.

¹³ Ibid. The translation is slightly modified. In German the passage in full runs: 'Die Akkumulation ist nicht bloß ein inneres Verhältnis zwischen den Zweigen der kapitalistischen Wirtschaft, sondern vor allem ein Verhältnis zwischen Kapital und dem nichtkapitalistischen Milieu, in dem jeder der beiden großen Zweige der Produktion den Akkumulationsprozeß zum Teil auf eigene Faust unabhängig vom anderen durchmachen kann, wobei sich die Bewegung beider wieder auf Schritt und Tritt kreuzt und ineinander verschlingt. Die sich daraus ergebenden komplizierten Beziehungen, die Verschiedenheit des Tempos und der Richtung im Gang der Akkumulation beider Abteilungen, ihre sachlichen und Wertzusammenhänge mit nichtkapitalistischen Produktionsformen, lassen sich nicht unter einen exakten schematischen Ausdruck bringen'.

¹⁴ As another writer who knew pretty well about this logic put it: "The man who has never received a kind message, a gesture, and who has never held anything of value, material or otherwise, if he is healthy, or I should say remains healthy (my persuasion presupposes original innocence), he never becomes so practical as to expect more of the same—nothing. Less but never nothing.

To be denied or rejected means less to this man but never nothing."

ARTURO DESIMONE

Those Without Tombs in Memory Park:

On poems by the disappeared Argentinean child Franca Jarach, and her mother's statements to the German Chancellor.

The video¹ went viral in Argentina not long ago. It shows one of the May Plaza Mothers, Vera Jarach, coming to meet the visiting German chancellor in Memory Park (Parque de la Memoria). Merkel seems to doubt her environs, as if finding herself in a dream. Memory Park is awash in purgatorial twilight, at once bright and faded, a sickly color of illumined talc (like the salt plains of Jujuy, in the North of Argentina—home to Alcira Fidalgo, a very young poet who had a similar fate to the daughter of Vera Jarach from Buenos Aires.



Vera Jarach and portrait of her disappeared daughter, Franca.
Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos, Argentina.

In her kerchief, holding up a sign with the cipher “30,000” in marker, Vera Jarach tells the Chancellor of Germany, “I am an Italian Jew. I was a child in Italy, 12 years old when they introduced the racial laws, but we saved ourselves by going to Argentina” Her grandfather, she explains, was less lucky.

“He stayed and was taken to Auschwitz and there is no grave. Many years later, my daughter—13 years old—was taken to a camp, where she was tortured, died. And there is no grave for her either. These are analogies: history repeats itself. The good things also repeat themselves, not only tragedies! Among those things that repeat, there is the revisionism, the denial. In Germany, in many of the countries that were occupied, there were those who denied the holocaust and still do. And here in Argentina, revisionism is happening under this government, people who say there were no 30,000. Well, we want to know the exact number and only they can tell us. The military regime knows *exactly* how many and they know the facts about the children who were transferred to other families.”

History doesn't repeat itself, but it sure does rhyme. Human rights supporters in Argentina estimate the toll at 30,000, but the official revisionism of President Mauricio Macri's ruling PRO Party tends to deny that approximation altogether. Darío Lopérfido—the Ex-Minister of Culture, who resigned because of protests by Argentinian artists—notoriously stated repeatedly there were at most “a few thousand” disappearances, caused by technical circumstances. Lopérfido was selected to be Minister of Culture because he brought the Rolling Stones to Argentina, among other credentials. Today he runs part of the *Teatro Colón* opera and concert hall.

The President who, unlike his ex-Minister of Culture, has not yet resigned often calls human rights a marketing gimmick, and accused the May Plaza Mothers' organization of forging their testimonies in order to get state subsidies. In official statements by the Pro Party when they hosted the World Economic Forum in Argentina this year—including on the “WEF Argentina” Medium page—pro-government spokespersons ironically warned against ‘fake news’ from the ‘populist’ opposition.

The South holds an inverted mirror up to the bizarre power relations that are taken for granted in the North: in the South, the light falls in a certain way and the same illusions, when transplanted here, disintegrate; their vulgarity becomes more blatant. In New York, a scandal recently flared up around the new sculpture of a little girl placed in front of the DOW-Jones bull statue on Wall Street, allegedly dislocating the meaning of the former sculpture in a vandalistic act. (The defenders of this act of “montage” are dismissed as exuberant utopians, echoes of the defeated “Occupy Wall Street” movement.)

In the South, this showdown finds its equivalent in the absent body of Franca Jarach against the World Economic Forum hosted in Argentina; a geriatric mother with a diaper cloth tied round her head debunks the shallow styrofoam rhetoric of PR hacks.

The German Chancellor made headlines earlier in June, getting coverage in the few national newspapers that remain insubordinate to the Clarín pro-government media conglomerate. Apparently Merkel digested the potent analogy made by Vera Jarach and its significance for a German head-of-state visiting Argentina: at press conferences she insisted on affirming the 30,000.

Merkel is very far from poetry—possibly its antidote. There is a good reason, however, for my writing about Vera and Franca Jarach in a blog for poetry: Franca, herself, wrote poetry.

A Place

by Franca Jarach, 12 years old

In the morning I walk by
near a site surrounded by walls
tall gray sad filthy walls
of advertising billboards, the kind that say
“vote for this or that candidate on the blue list”
one day I peek inside:

it's a slum.
People
more people.
Dressed in cheap fabrics
naked of happiness.
A girl offers me her lemons
“a hundred for a dozen, buy me”
She's thirteen years old,
more or less
my age.
A noisy warehouse,
with rats, with dirt
with sepulchral microbes.
Here is a site enclosed by walls,
sullied with human crimes
that are only our own.

(Translator's note: "Naked of happiness", if it were translated in a grammatically correct way, would be "Unclothed by happiness," as in "bereft of happiness," Fixing the grammar, however, might not carry the effect of "desnuda de felicidad.")

The poems by 12- and 13-year-old Franca Jarach are those of a child's awakening to a social consciousness about how her society generates economic exclusion and suffering. The poem translated here, “A Place,” appeared in the anthology *Desde el Silencio (From the Silence)* published by the Argentine left-wing newspaper *Página 12* in 1984, the first year of democracy in Argentina after the most recent civic-military dictatorship ceded power, having accomplished its core objectives for Argentinian society to a complete, yet fundamentally mediocre success. Democracy arrived after the junta's total delegitimization in global media, among other crises then faced by the echelons of military personnel, tired of their own sordid campaigns. The junta eliminated humans as well as ideas, leaving a void in

the quality of poetry. The junta killed not only prominent intellectuals and poets, but just about any young person who showed developmental signs of an evolving socio-political consciousness.

The facts of Franca Jarach being abducted by the police and transferred to the ESMA detention camp in Buenos Aires (where, according to eye-witnesses, she was pushed from the open door of an airplane to fall into the river Paraná) are shocking. Yet, after reading her poetry, it is unsurprising that young Franca Jarach came under the scrutiny of those who employed coercion for their project of reengineering the social fabric of Argentina. The junta sought to engineer the foundations of a new society that would accept, with unquestioning conformism and glee, the foundation of a new mode of capitalist exploitation sold as democracy.

The new Argentina, envisioned by its economic planners and beneficiaries of the regimes, was turbulent and poor in the 1980s until it came to its full flowering in the 1990s. Only then (in the period coinciding with Latin American elites' loyalty to George Bush and Bill Clinton) did the seeds of the economic experiment begin to have their effect. The newest phase of unfettered capitalism that was implemented by the US-backed dictatorships in Latin American countries began to be celebrated as inclusive and miraculous by parts of the population, while others were as suppressed as ever, consigned to the slums that the child Jarach saw before plainclothes police spirited her off to a dark fort.

Argentinean illusions about the “economic miracle”—the seeds of which were planted by the regime that suppressed and ended all opposing social movements—were not the symptoms of a mere economist's miscalculation. Rather, the minor financial deception (such as President Carlos Saul Menem's famous pairing up of the dollar-peso values, 1-to-1 in the 1990s) resulted from a more inhuman injustice: the policy of so-called “Amnesty.” “Amnesty” meant the institutional, illegal pardoning of the officers who killed Franca Jarach and 29,999 others. The crowning deception under

democracy was the “clean slate” philosophy (“*borrón y cuenta nueva*” in Argentine slang): the price of a vain hope for peace was supposedly the injustice of “letting-off-the-hook” for the officers such as Alfredo Astíz, who led the torture camps and waged the state terror wars, and their civilian beneficiaries. Such narcotic racket-illusions met their collapse during the economic crash of 2001. But the consumerist values of that age of oblivion permeated a consumerist poetics that characterized the 1990s (such as from the hand of former ESPN-*Español* journalist Santiago Vega, better known as “Washington *Cucurto*,” and his many generational colleagues).

Argentinian revolutions in poetry and aesthetics, as well as in thinking and ideas just before the long-awaited dawn of democracy, met a similar fate to the bodies of those children in the grip of an awakening social-political consciousness and unraveling illusions: they were made to walk the plank, from the airplane’s door into the river, at gunpoint. They were shoved, crown-first, into the dark of abattoirs, and they were beaten. Their remains were cast into the gray waters, where they found the remains of the children of poet Juan Gelman, the remains of the daughter of resistance writer Rodolfo Walsh. They only recently discovered those of the surrealist poet Miguel-Ángel Bustos. But there were many more such as Jarach.

It is the same river at which Mauricio Macri and Barack Obama threw some flowers in 2016, during the US presidential visit to celebrate the return of the revisionists to the Casa Rosada (the Presidential Place on the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires).

With thanks to Daniela Szpilbarg

—previously published on the blog “Notes On a Return
to the Ever-Dying Lands,” *Anomaly*

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p57Cu49IGg0>

Original Spanish text of Jarach's poem in my translation above:

Lugar

A la mañana paso
cerca de un sitio rodeado de muros
altos grises tristes sucios
de carteles, de vote lista azul
un día miro adentro
es una villa miseria.

Gente
más gente.

Vestida de tela barata
desnuda de felicidad.

Una chica me ofrece limones
“cien la docena, cómpreme”

Tiene trece años, más o menos
mi edad.

Un almacén ruinoso,
con ratas, con suciedad
con microbios funestos.

Es un sitio rodeado de muros
sucios de crímenes humanos
que son sólo los nuestros.

ADELAIDE IVÁNOVA

from *The Hammer*

TRANSLATED BY CHRIS DANIELS

the hammer

i sleep with a hammer
under my pillow
in case someone
sneaks into my
bedroom again as if it weren't
enough of a drag
to have some iron
poking my head
and there's yet another inconvenience:
Humboldt can never show up
by surprise he runs the risk
of being hammered and then he
either dies or lives
(the quantity of energy
released by the blow of
a hammer
is equivalent to half
its mass times velocity
squared at time of impact).

the vulture

corpus delicti is
the expression used
when law is breached and
traces of the fact of a crime
are left making *body* a
place and *of the crime* an
adjective the examination
consists of seeing and being
seen (parties also
consist of these)

lying on a gurney with
four doctors around me talking
about mucous membranes the strike
the lack of disposable cups
and deciding in front of my open
legs if after work should they
all go to the bar or what?
the doctor from the institute
of legal medicine wrote his report
not looking at my face
talking on his cell phone

me and the doctor have a body
and at least two other things in common:
we both love talking on the phone
and going to the bar
the doctor is a person
he deals with dead men
and living women
(he calls them pieces of
evidence).

the minister

if all those white men in brussels and
thomas de maizi re heard this poem of mine
the problem of borders would be resolved
look here mr minister
in my bed you don't ask for a visa i already changed
the sperm-stained sheets and pillowcases made in
spain hungary austria zimbabwe iraq
germany we make each other's happiness
and tell me mr minister
if we didn't make it then who would? and who'd
contribute to the growth of your demographic indices?
according to fatou diome we're about
40% responsible tell me truly mr minister
without us expatriates where would your many pleasures come from
the theses the essays the life the ballads the bars and the
pictures your museums extract profit from and the
prize-winning books where would they come from that
profit or profited your dusty bookshops?
would there have been for pasolini that european man a future
more lasting if pasolini had been displaced?
maybe he would have died in syria in libya or the asshole
of the world less for being a refugee and more for being a
faggot (yes another huge problem but that's not
the focus of our poem today) i've laid myself down on futons rugs
mattresses and carpets of all sorts of people including
the men of budapest currently the worst motherfuckers around
(the golfers of melilla are no less ghastly)
the secret mr minister if you
please may i explain is the opening of borders and hearts we'd be
kind like lou salom who was so charitable she screwed

nietzsche and for her own delight even did it with rée and (they say)
rilke we'd be kind to those who came not caring about the color
of passport or bearer we'd just give so much no matter what
whatever whatever a visa a roof a job a hiya a mode
of transport more secure and ventilated than a trailer truck
a destiny more humane than the shallow unjust one you and
me and petra laszlo gave that fleeing father and his child
(the ground).

the hammer

when the pope dies
he gets a little
silver tap
on the forehead i never
hammered
anyone
not pope not prince not king
when the procession
has to start
the carlemengo taps
three times
on the litter and the
bearers carry on
hammer
is the name of a
kind of heroic decasyllable
with hard stresses at
the third sixth and tenth
positions when the
athlete ends the
wind-up his three
pirouettes he
can let go of the
hammer
it weighs seven kilos
two hundred sixty grams
marx never talked about a
hammer
at all you ever hear of a
school of thought with a

symbol what would be the symbol
of the frankfurt school if
adorno had chosen one?
when thor strikes with his
hammer
it's the sign of rain and thunder
but the mandacaru flower
says it's going to rain in the
sertão for the hammerhead shark the
hammer
functions like a wing
and stabilizes its
movements and besides that
the mating ritual
of the hammerhead shark
is very violent
on the flag of soviet
albania they replaced the
hammer with a rifle the
hammer
is a magnificent object
it helps you sleep well
or pull out nails.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The Hammer* (*O martelo*) is a book about violence and female sexuality. There is a protagonist/narrator (an unnamed woman), an antagonist ("the prince" in all his guises), and an ambivalent male hero (Humboldt). The book is in two parts. In the first, a woman narrates her post-rape experience within public institutions and her dealings with bureaucrats; in the second, she narrates her experiences as both a virtuous and an adulterous wife, and creates questionable, equivocal parallels between rape and consensual sex.

The division of the book was inspired by Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor of Rome, who decreed a law establishing that rape and adultery were similar crimes, committed only by a woman incapable of caring for her husband's/father's property (i.e., her body).

—forthcoming in *The Hammer*, Commune Editions, spring 2018.

guerilla bitchcraft
(for maria felipa de oliveira)

TRANSLATED BY FRANCISCO VILHENA & THE POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP

it is said that in the name of independence
maria felipa beat the shit out
of the portuguese with giant nettles

trying to save salvador
and other lands from the yoke
of white men

it was when they took their clothes off
believing they'd be fucking
that felipa set the caravels on fire

maria felipa would seduce like Librans do
(*distract and destroy*) anticipating by 100 years
the tactics now known as black bloc

had cobain been alive certainly
that little refrain would have been meant for her
'polly wants a cracker'

(that story of the girl who seduces
the torturer and unshackles herself then tells
the story to deaf ears

as is the case of maria felipa
whose act of guerrilla bitchcraft

is known and celebrated by few)

fast forward 100 years and it's me beating the shit
out of you though not with the weed (yep that one)
to save myself from dread

your republic of deep fried *coxinhas* won't
accept mine, of northeastern mortadella,
but perhaps zika will level us all

micro- or anencephalic, just you and i
left fucking, molotov cocktail
of darkness, fertilising with your sperm

all my captaincies until this era
is named for a southern city,
'new middle ages'.

—translation originally published in *ArtiCHOKE* #9, 2017

JENN MCCREARY

Better Living Through Chemistry

This autumn, I lost my poet voice, then began to find it again, creating erasure poems from vintage psychopharmaceutical ads illustrating other women gone quiet.

There is an ageless collective concept, in history & medicine, in religion & other fairy tales, that knowing the name of a thing gives one power over it. So you begin by grasping at nomenclature. You catalog the uncontrolled weeping, the cold-sweat racing-heart night-waking, the hyperventilated swooning, the progressive social withdrawal. More discreetly, to yourself, you take note of the constant scrabble of claws caged inside your ribs, the prickle of too-tight skin petitioning to be cut to release pressure, the relentless ache of scapulae struggling to unfold & realize their true purpose, bastard alulae no more.

You gather these findings & present them to those more neatly pressed than you currently are & there is discussion of biochemical factors, acknowledgment of authentic environmental influences: *financial insecurity, political climate, ecological collapse, late stage capitalism, ghosting friends, hovering children*, each day's reveal of the latest sexual predator. You are rewarded, given names by the mouthful: *severe major depressive episode; generalized anxiety disorder; panic disorder with agoraphobia*.

You roll these names around in your mouth, press at them with your tongue, chew on them tentatively & think: *it has been named, like Rumpelstiltskin*, & anticipate the promised power, to spin yourself back into gold.

While you wait for the spell to break, your pieces to knit themselves together again, you are given another list, a prescribed list of things to put in your

mouth, varicolored & multi-shaped things which fill amber plastic bottles & stand in rows like sentinels on your nightstand. You swallow dutifully, or dissolve sublingually, look them up on your phone, skim side effects, contraindications, interactions, timing of efficacy. & while you do, you begin to also see old photos of women, women out of time, reflecting back at you your symptoms, your life—your lives a series of symptoms mirrored back & listed from vintage glossy pages, & while you see yourself in the women, the words there are not theirs, they are about & for, & so you pick up a brush & begin to reassemble the vernacular, you endeavor to paint the proper words into their mouths.



the chronically fatigued, chronically ill,
 pathetic and pressed patient, the
 patient, sedated the child
 with

in

press
 mine bright and
 new —
 prove perform
 little
 press or pulse
 (peach colored). (yellow), (light blue).



Keep her

at peace —
control
accomplished
...shaky Keep her ...shuffle
...and keep her
keep her That way, you can
outside. inside...and
—Fun total
management ease.



um ?



I
help you

put up with all this
too.

Follow

easily





FREE

can you offer —what
 ?
 tension—anxiety agitation—
 make it easier
 release the
 freedom

X* today,
 time history, seek freedom
 for help—
 remember— the
 help the need.

NATHALIE QUINTANE

translated by artiCHOKE

Introduction by Antoine Hummel

In other days France was the name of a country. We should take care that in 1961 it does not become the name of a neurosis.

—Sartre, from the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* by Fanon (1963)

May 8th 1945, France celebrates the end of the war. In Sétif (Algeria), the celebrations take the form of riots for independence, the repression of which results in several thousand deaths on that one day alone. The same day on which *La France éternelle* celebrates a new victory of Enlightenment over Barbarism, with a nonchalant air (*l'air de rien*), it goes about its civilizing mission, the legislation and methods of which inspired all fascisms (such as the *Code de l'indigénat* of 1881, the first “state of exception” declared by the Republic, which inaugurated a form of second class citizenship, and allowed for collective sanctions and deportations beyond the bounds of the law of the metropole). In Algeria as in the metropole, the anti-insurrectional methods took the form of proto-genocidal methods: liquidations, tortures, bodies thrown into the Seine or piled up in the stadium.

It is this historic permeability and the porosity of the memories responsible for this history that this text by Nathalie Quintane explores; it rests upon a corpus of “utterances,” whose sometimes obscure origins do nothing but emphasize that they are part of the air of the times, *a nonchalant air*, a suggestive little ditty which can't be separated from French style, the one which enjoys never being univocal, be it in the boudoir or at the bar. The one which, speaking to “everyone,” in fact addresses the few.

Like all war, the Algerian war is a history that concerns everyone. Thus, in

its singular form and cruelty, it is the work of men with complementary profiles: the messianic redeemer (De Gaulle), the liberator (Massu), the zealous collaborator (Papon), and not forgetting of course the scrupulous, unquestioningly obedient prefect class, who assure the *continuity of the state* through the tempest of History. All have a “typical career path” for French elites (prestigious secondary schools, *grandes ecoles*, studies in literature and law); many of them having studied classical *humanities*; as children, many learned that “France comes from the depth of ages,” which forms the opening of De Gaulle’s *Mémoires*. These honest-doers, of a singular and flawless morality (upright, hard-working, rigorous), were after all nothing but victims of their own refinement, inexplicably strolling in the chiaroscuro of destiny, from trivium to tripalium. *With a nonchalant air*.

We wouldn’t be able to go further, of course, if we didn’t take the time to confront the “poiétique” of the torturers. A large portion of Quintane’s work follows this track, the genealogy of these secrets, flushing out the denials and dungeons in language, deglazing an idiomatic corpus which speaks to “everyone” and addresses itself ultimately to the Big Gallic Other. Because this very classicism is responsible for a certain *covering over* of the colonial crimes and the “depth of ages”. Quintane addresses this depth like a stock or a *cultural broth* which provides a depth of flavor (the petite cuisine of universalism, the colonial subject as game meat and the oriental aroma it adds), served by a language that knows how to be clear—the myth of an idiom unparalleled in its clarity is a trope of French nationalism—but with a *nonchalant air*—the reduction of the vocabulary in courtly language, due to a taste for suggestiveness, is at the heart of that which one called the French esprit.

The remark, which is dear to Quintane, is the privileged form of this “hacking” (an insult that is often hurled at her by those who exhume the *sombre pages of the national novel*): thorough (she lets nothing pass), synthetic (at each moment she keeps in mind all the elements of the enquiry), supple (she allows herself apparent philological jumps to make

the resonances audible). Quintane demands a pedagogical attention that she applies to herself before all else. She notes her own relative inadequacy, her average amateurism, her *beta-user* position. As she wrote on the back of one of her first books (*Chaussure*), her work is poetic but *not especially*; the nonchalant wandering of her texts always bumps into the excess or the taboo, but never allows the chatter to establish itself over the excess, or the muted confessional over *that of which one cannot speak*.

We're going to do something that can't be seen in a place where nobody is

1. We're going to do something that can't be seen in a place where nobody is.
2. A great place for bons mots.
3. Compose a rhetorical atmosphere, a rhetorical space (natural euphemisms, periphrases, metaphors, proverbs, tautologies —
4. it takes what it takes —
5. and fingers drawing quotes in the air (Alge-rian)
6. all those *metaboles* common to conquest.
7. Has a campaign ever been launched without grammar?
— eu-phêmeîn : to speak well = to not talk.
— eu-phemisms, litotes, periphrases, metaphors, would be, among other things, a way to avoid being made to talk. Consider the truly *poietic* virtue of this silence, says the grammarian,¹ consider all the *figures* it engenders: metaphor (to puncture the din), oxymoron (a deafening silence), anadiplosis (some dying without talking, others talking without dying²) — reticence, metonymy, hyperbole, litote, adds the grammarian aptly.
8. To love love, to defeat defeat.
9. Like the crack of a nut on another nut, and the palpable echo it engenders, not at all unlike that of a gunshot — who knows?
10. Loving love, we got right to the heart of the matter, we loved our kind not because they were our kind but because we loved love, and so we'd

always love our kind, we'd never run the risk of not loving, and so we'd never run any risk, we would rid ourselves of the sometimes, the at times, the current present in favor of the permanent present: Algeria is France.³

11. And the following, the opening of some guy's Memoirs — the volume about Algeria : *France comes from the depth of ages*.⁴

— What is the depth of ages?

12. Don't beat yourself up about it.⁵

13. Demise of the epic?

14. A tongue is a tongue when it torments itself.

15. We will pass over in silence something that can't be seen in a place where nobody is.

16. — dissemination of the epic —

17. *with* our means and *without* impudence:

18. (a text? a *poem*).

19. France, *having shown its force, will now show its generosity*.⁶

20. *One must choose the lesser* of two evils.⁷

21. Or a paronym.

22. Something terrible but familiar rather than something sweet but strange (some terror, but some familiarity).

23. *Torment* rather than torture.

24. We will pass over in silence something that — but there was never anybody. There was *somebody*, who was *nobody*, *something we've long been familiar with thanks to the famous Homeric pun*.

25. Nonetheless, this system hits the spot.

26. The desert: a great place for bon mots, metaphors, poetic getaways. Beryl, Amethyst, Ruby, Jade — the names of France's four failed, or partially failed, nuclear tests in Algeria (next came Polynesia: names of constellations)

27. The worst blocks or hoods are named Verlaine.

28. Poetry everywhere. Justice nowhere.⁸

29. That raised France (with our means) up to the immensity of the poetic heavens (without impudence).

30. *Like everybody else; a typical career path*: the structure and form of the reigning order is familiar to us.

31. *It takes what it takes. One must choose the lesser of two evils.* (Massu's chaplain).⁹ Or: *we will use all means*.

32. The trivial remark must not obscure the fact that sobriety is also classical.

33. There's no surgical incision among our bon mots, this sort of elegance, this taste for which we're still envied, and the (...) recounted here. The bon mot as we have used it, the effort to perpetuate a particular elegance, its particular idea, all produce (...) — *a poème d'état*.

34. Something which is always very understated, with its means and without impudence, that is to say, with that reserve, that *sprezzatura*, even, with that kind of elegance of promotion that propelled our wigmakers, cooks, and costumiers into all the courts of Europe, effortlessly doing something that can't be seen in places where nobody is.

35. So long as the world benefits from our chefs, our tailors and our wigmakers, our laws are good.¹⁰

36. Nonetheless, this system hits the spot.

37. The structure and form of the reigning order is familiar to us.

38. That's why we were able to become accustomed to it, right up to its ultimate consequences.

39. Neither negligence nor entertainment (not even entertainment) should be neglected.

40. *Sprezzatura à la française* is linked to entertainment, to jibes, to ad-libs. Like a line of la Bettencourt's,¹¹ uttered in the same tone as *if they don't have bread, let them eat cake*.¹²

41. If France used to knock off fellahin,¹³ it's because they were animals (Garanger14).

42. *Mind* is not a *cause* to which you'd have to *trace back* in order to understand this or that product, such and such a "consequence", rather it is the creation of an atmosphere in which to forge such an *operation*,¹⁵ such and such an experience.

43. that raised France (without impudence) up to the immensity of the poetic heavens.

— *A fine mind always thinks nobly; it easily generates clear, attractive, and natural thoughts; it sets them in their best light, adorns them with all the appropriate ornaments, penetrates other people's tastes, and rids its thoughts of anything useless or disagreeable.* (La Rochefoucauld, *Miscellaneous Reflections*, 1731)

44. *Manoeuvres in a nuclear atmosphere.*

45. The last minister always highlights the continuity of the state, guarantee of sovereignty, regardless of who might hold the majority, while the authorities makes sure to take itself *just a little bit further*.

46. There's an idea that takes after the fine mind, after rhetorical fiction as much as science fiction.

47. ... *has informed you of a conversation.... about persons who have a taste above or below their understandings. We ran into so many niceties that we were quite bewildered.*¹⁶

48. So who would you want us to compensate since it was all pretend? (Just make a law for them, the magistrates will take care of throwing them out).¹⁷

49. *a great adventure*

50. Mixed with no way we're gonna give a shit about some *bougnouls* or the troops (France über alles)

51. + a wonderful epic.

52. One by one, the politicians of the time file past on YouTube, all of them called La France. If I am La France, then it wasn't me, it was La France.

53. who did it.

54. Whereof one cannot speak.

55. And this frenzied circulation of military inspiration: dress them up as Afghans, export Vietnam to Algeria, Algeria to Pinochet, Pinochet to Afghanistan, Oued Namous to Abu-Ghraïb, etc. The enthusiasm which always seizes them while inventing a *poïetics* — and which works.¹⁸

56. The idea of passing through walls, for example.

—originally published in French, German, & English in *artiCHOKE* 4.

¹ the grammarian : Alain Frontier, from whom I take this 7th note.

² Having ‘talked’ or not refers to holding out under torture. See the debates around Jean Moulin approx. 50 years after his death (“he talked!”). See the speech by André Malraux on the occasion of the transfer of Jean Moulin’s ashes to the Panthéon: “with those who died in the cellars without talking, like you; and also, which is perhaps more atrocious, having talked.”

³ “L’Algerie, c’est la France” (Algeria is France) was a common phrase amongst French nationalist partisans in Algeria, who supported Algeria’s subjugation to France. François Mitterand, Interior Minister and former functionary in the Vichy Regime, starkly condemned the attacks of the Algerian insurrection when, in 1958, he declared: Algeria is France; from Flanders to the Congo there is only one law, only one nation, only one parliament. The only negotiation is war. In May 1981, as a member of the Socialist Party, he was elected President of the Republic, thus awakening the “hope of the people of the left.”

⁴ This Refers to the memoirs of Charles de Gaulle, which begins with the phrase “France comes from the depth of ages”, a phrase which is typical of de Gaulle’s messianism, which would permeate French society in the form of a post-war evangelism; the ‘upright man’ who set the motherland straight again, while he ordered the crimes outside of the mainland France.

⁵ N’allez pas vous mettre Martel en tête. Charles Martel is known above all for his victory over the Arabs and Berbers in the battle of Poitiers in the year 732. Recently, he reappeared in French consciousness, as racists in France altered the slogan “Je suis Charlie” to “Je suis Charles Martel”, expressing their renewed desire to fight against “Arabs”.

⁶ Phrase of a General in the French Army who carried out France’s colonial policies—a rhetoric of repression and leniency.

⁷ A turn of phrase used by a General in the French Army in Algeria.

⁸ This refers to the well-known slogan “Police partout, justice nulle part” (Police everywhere, justice nowhere)”

⁹ Jacques Massu was a General in the French Army in Algeria. In 1971 and again in the year 2000, he declared that he stood behind the methods of the French Army in Algeria, including torture. See: “J’ai dit officiellement que je reconnaissais l’existence de la méthode et que je la prenais sous ma responsabilité” and “la torture telle que j’ai autorisé qu’elle soit pratiquée à Alger ne dégrade pas l’individu” (1971) as well as “on aurait pu s’en passer” (2000).

¹⁰ After Voltaire: “Woe to a nation which, being more civilized, is still led by ancient atrocious customs! “Why should we change our jurisprudence?” say we. “Europe is indebted to us for cooks, tailors, and wig-makers; therefore, our laws are good.” From the Philosophical Dictionary entry on torture.

¹¹ Liliane Bettencourt is a French billionaire and one of the principal shareholders of L’Oréal. In an advanced stage of dementia, she became embroiled in numerous scandals, such as the supposed financing of Nicolas Sarkozy’s electoral campaign in 2007. In her, the symbolic figures of the old-money of industrial families, the current political establishment and the financial underworld are united.

¹² A bon mot – whether voluntary or involuntary – attributed to Marie Antoinette. The supposed dialogue goes: – The people need bread – Well give it to them – We don’t have any more – Well then let them eat cake. Also, in Neukölln in full-gentrification-mode, see the ‘vintage’ store (<http://letthecatcake-berlin.tumblr.com>).

¹³ Fellah/in: Maghrebi farmer or peasant. Also, whether through confusion or analogy, Fellagha refers to an Algerian independence fighter.

¹⁴ French photographer who, during his tour of duty, photographed more than 2000 Algerian women which were initially to serve as ID photos.

¹⁵ Until 1999, the official designation for the war in Algeria was “operations de maintien de l’ordre”, or “the operations to maintain order”.

¹⁶ Excerpt from a letter from Madame de Lafayette to Madame de Sévigné, two important and influential aristocratic women of the court.

¹⁷ Amnesty laws for war crimes in Algeria were put into effect in the years 1962, 1966, 1974, 1982 and 1987. This profusion, this protective legal shield of the apparatus of the state attests to the panic of a state that believes that the enormity of its crimes endangers its continued existence. In 2003, the French High Court recognises the torture carried out in Algeria, however it does not declare that it constituted a “crime against humanity,” since the legal definition cannot be applied for events that occurred prior to 1994 (with the exception of the crimes of the Nazi regime).

¹⁸ With regard to the methods and the permeability of counter-insurgency strategies, the figure of General Aussaresses is particularly instructive. In 2001, Paul Aussaresses declares that he had participated in torture in Algeria as part of a concentrated counter-insurgency effort. The admission is credible: after his tour in Algeria, he teaches counter-insurgency techniques in Fort Bragg (USA). Following this, he works as a representative of France with NATO and later in 1973 as a military attaché in Brazil, where he shares his knowledge with the officers of the dictatorship there. His career ends as an arms dealer with the firm Thomson, which for its part, ends up embroiled in massive corruption scandals in the ’90s. (Thomson, now known as Thales, has become France’s leading arms dealer, thanks to contracts with Egypt under Al-Sissi, Saudi Arabia and Erdogan’s Turkey. Some analysts believe that 2016 could be a record year for French arms dealers).

CECILY NICHOLSON

in dialogue with Michael Nardone

“Through fact with texture, atmosphere and affect,” Cecily Nicholson’s poems compose the possible syntaxes and slogans of collective resistance. Her first two books, *Triage* (2011) and *From the Poplars* (2015), are palimpsestual and polyvocalic studies of imperial violence’s perpetual encroachment on lands and lives, and articulate how solidarity might be materialized in language and in action against such forces. Her most recent book, *Wayside Sang* (2017), thinks with the fugitive movements and networks of black diaspora and Indigenous displacement so as to establish a ground for convergence, for communion, for chorus.

Michael Nardone: I wonder if we might begin by discussing Vancouver poetics, or what it means to compose works on the unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories known as Vancouver. When we originally talked about doing this dialogue, its destination was for a publication emerging out of an academic conference on contemporary aesthetic communities in Vancouver. I think both of us felt some hesitation to contribute to that forum, though.

Cecily Nicholson: The one piece of feedback that struck me was—and it’s a typical thing that happens in academic contexts—about the way the conversation was framed, that the conversation itself fed into academia. It doesn’t matter, you can’t have grassroots dialogue in spaces that are not accessible to community to get there. Basically, unless you’re moving through academic channels, or if you were invited and had somebody paying you to go, it wasn’t possible for people to be there and represent. So, I was aware of that, too, that perpetual divide in terms of who gets to represent any place away from it. Certainly with Vancouver this plays out.

MN: The form of the event immediately forecloses any possibility of the kind of grassroots dialogue of which you speak.

CN: I think so. I think it's that notion of—how do I say it?—it's this fact that those people who are really entrenched in the local, the people who are the most Vancouver, are the ones who are the most immobile (and who are, at the same time, often the most subject to displacement, institutionalization, forced migrations). I mean, with love, I am interested when people are trying, but I do think—and I realize I'm generalizing—that academia fails often when it tries to connect to and enact non-academic community. They are coming from too remote a place socially, or it's been too long for them to grasp what's practically needed. It also has to do with the communication, with the methods of gathering and how we come together. The material barriers are a perpetual problem for all that we imagine ourselves doing.

MN: Yes, and mobility arises in terms of the circulation of works, as well. The phrase that you used earlier about “the most Vancouver” of the Vancouver poets—I feel like one has to do a lot of work in relation to other readers, other poets in order to get to that milieu. There are people I look to in Vancouver, and who are always reading the work of Vancouver poets, and so I know to look out for the work of Annharte and Mercedes Eng, and to track down what was published in those old Tsunami Editions, and to read Dorothy Trujillo Lusk.

CN: Good examples, and Maxine Gadd, similarly. They are prominent in certain ways because writers lift up their work and remind us. Otherwise, their works don't circulate in the same way. There are historical divides that are gendered, racialized and certainly classed. One of the lovely things about the Kootenay School legacy is that the school has always been concerned with class. I mean, it's failed in other considerations, no doubt, but its consideration of class is an important legacy in Vancouver poetics. I feel like that doesn't function in the active way that it needs to these days, across experience, as we are even more defined in this city by the stratification

between rich and poor, and, overwhelmingly, as so many art and literary representatives come from the academy, through the academy. You don't often hear from writers of my generation or younger who aren't somehow connected to universities. That's an incredible limitation when we think about who accesses, and succeeds at, this kind of education.

I wonder about it. In Canada, I'm barely published outside of Vancouver. I want to think for a minute, because perhaps I'm missing something, but I'm pretty sure you'd be hard-pressed to find my work anywhere east of Calgary.

MN: I think it's an issue in Canada where poets who are committed to exploring diasporic and internationalist affinities and commitments in terms of poetics and politics simply don't have a place in the cultural apparatus here, which is vehemently nation-centered. They may have their singular site, their city, but if they want to be read outside of it, there has to be some kind of network forged outside of Canada.

CN: Yes, and things are shifting right now for me in that way. I am spending more time south of the border, and embracing my own personal history in terms of ancestry and forced migration and displacement, and feeling some deep affinity with works in the US. I recall you introducing me to Fred Moten's work years back, and as Mercedes Eng and I head to New York in the spring to visit him and community there, I think on new friendships. I think of friendships in Detroit. And in the Bay Area, Tongo Eisen-Martin, such a lightning bolt. Meeting him felt like meeting new family. I think of Aja Monet and Jasmine Gibson. I appreciate Juliana Spahr and David Buuck, who have made space for me and my work. It's an odd shift as my work these days finds more resonance perhaps in those directions as opposed to central Canada, even though I grew up in rural Ontario. Then again, the conversations continue. Christina Sharpe and Dionne Brand were in town from Toronto recently and somehow I ended up at the same table for a moment or so. I mean, I've been reading Dionne Brand since I was a kid, terrified, coming to Toronto in my teens, sitting with her

poetry on the Greyhound bus to the city, it was critical for me. And all the brilliant work, Katherine McKittrick, Robyn Maynard, I mean the kind of practices that black women intellectuals are doing right now *and* that we're able to access in this moment, is moving. That shift isn't just a mainstream push or pull around literature. It's a resonance from multiple communities foregrounding experiences of blackness, embodied—we're using different language, we've multiple locations, influences, and affinities, we are global in our relations and I also belong to this.

MN: I'd love to hear what you've been up to in Detroit and Windsor while you've been writing *Wayside Sang*.

CN: The book runs through Windsor to Detroit. The cities are twinned in a way, but it's always been about Detroit for me. I've been going there for decades now. When I was young, I went just a couple times, but later, kept getting called to visit. Part of that evolves out of limited narrative I have around my birth father's movement. He was a travelling musician, among other kinds of work, and he was often crossing that border, at that place, although I didn't know that until later in my life. I've needed to think about and spend more time in that space to gain a better sense of it, and of myself there.

In Vancouver, we certainly have a lot to face in terms of the cost of living and the idea of affordability, but we sure have resources when it comes to art production. There's so much infrastructure that's threaded through by the province, by the state, and by the municipality, and that is actively a part of how art work and art world conversations occur in this locale. It's not to say that Detroit doesn't have government funding influences—the private foundation model does seem to be much more prevalent—however, there is this real dearth of infrastructural support, right through to a lack of good public transit. What I've witnessed over the years has included some really humble and humbling practices, examples of community, incredible collaboration, and use of materials, the rise of lost and derelict and things

broken, refashioned, with social and non-capitalist purpose. And being in a majority-black city, it means that almost everywhere you look, there's people that can see me. I'm a mixed, light-skinned black Canadian citizen, I think through my mobility and privileges—including the history of my education and diction—yet I feel freer there than in Vancouver. It's confusing. I feel a debt to the city. It seemed necessary to finish this recent book there, to let a neighborhood suffuse the last bit of process as I wrote by an open window during one long summer month, resting, where Detroit meets Hamtramck.

MN: *From the Poplars* reads, for me, as a site-specific work in that it is focused on Poplar Island, a small island near the delta of the Fraser River, close to Vancouver. Is *Wayside Sang* similarly site-centered as a work?

CN: I struggle because I'm compelled to do that, but I couldn't quite do that with this narrative. It's a narrative that travels roadways, crosses borders, and land. There are some site-specific efforts concerning the areas and road travel that I'm undertaking in these multiple narratives, not just my own narratives. The writing does work through some of the place names, thinking through territories, through migratory routes and waterways, things we can think of comprising the ecology of a place. It is a ways away from the west coast. If anything there's some interplay of the prairies, because I was also thinking through my relations to fathers and brothers, some how come through there. My only black brother lives in the prairies. Also a musician, he's in this book somehow. Although it does deal with specific locales at moments, *Wayside Sang* is definitely not the specific study that *From the Poplars* is. I needed the narrative to not be fixed this time around.

MN: Yes, the reason I ask is because I think of that site study as a central part of your poetics—the exploration of space's composition, its strata of history and rhetoric and contestations. I read *Triage* as a book specifically about the Downtown East Side, about the various spheres of power and resistance that intersect there, but perhaps that's an impression I put onto the text knowing you and your efforts parallel to writing.

CN: No, you're not the only one. I didn't make that overt when I wrote *Triage*. It's more in retrospect that I realize, of course, that's so much of what it's about. I mean, certainly there are more obvious narratives that are working through being present in a neighborhood—those are entirely about, in, and of the downtown eastside. Now that book means a lot to me, actually. I suppose all our first books will mean a lot to ourselves in the long run, right? It really was an achievement post-traumas. I look back on it and feel really, not proud, well, maybe it is pride, I don't know. Something. A sense of survival and thriving beyond. But it is situated, for sure.

With *Triage*, I don't know what got into me, but at that point I was just starting to enter into art gallery spaces, and realized that I've missed a great deal in terms of the relevance of visual culture. I was thinking a lot about that while I was writing the book. I picked up a camera for the first time and began to see protest as an aesthetic, or to see the aesthetics of protest. And I began realizing that, again, I'm so naïve—there are whole threads of history I've missed. I realized I was completely hindered by politics, by the idea of politics. I did not realize that questions about “politics” have also been a way of marginalizing aspects of art history. I was trying to figure out some things about art and art world and as I worked on that process with poetry, I realized that poetry, somehow artificially, in a really disturbing way, gets separated out from these spheres—again, related to issues of class, and the notion that access diminishes quality. So, with *Triage*, while it's working through and is of the downtown eastside, and of trauma, it is also trying to figure out entry points to a world of art. The more experimental parts of it—not really in terms of form, but in terms of language in that book—have a lot to do with that.

MN: When were you writing *Triage*?

CN: It was published in 2011, but the work for that book got underway in the early oughts. I started working in the downtown eastside in 2000, and I was writing poetry out of necessity pretty much right away. The book was a long time coming.

Work seems to come together for me a lot faster now, in terms of the writing, what I do with it and where it goes. Part of it, maybe, is confidence. Part of it is that time presses harder and harder. I think I'm also less caught up with the need to pore over things. I realize that sometimes people are interested in what you're saying off the cuff, you know. I'm trying to find balance and to practice.

MN: I remember when we first met—at the Beyond Oakland event that David and Juliana brought us out for in 2013—how impressed I was in hearing you speak. I admire so much your capability of talking about the context where you've been engaged and the people you've been working with over the last decades. Your groundedness there permeates your language about it. Can you say more about that? It's something I struggle with, but it's also something I'm perpetually intrigued by—who speaks? what are the practices of listening involved in this kind of collective work? what are the modes of engaging with others, on behalf of or in connection to a place, in relation to other sites and activities?

CN: If we're of a community, we know who of a community can speak back and be supported in doing so. We know that. The thing about the downtown eastside at this point for me, is that it's been almost 18 years that I've been working on that ground, within networks that connect there. That's not to say that my legitimacy in terms of representation has grown just because of time, but my relations and my security in knowing that I am also of that community has. I have process for reporting back, and process for reporting out. When I am mobile, when I'm being invited to represent things—commonly from a quote-unquote minority position—too often we're called upon to represent widely.

I've been working in the federal prison system for several years now, but the people I'm working with have been at it for over 30 years. Every time I'm invited to talk through related issues—concerning blackness, concerning disability, trauma and mental health—you feel an urgency. You don't want

to not speak. If you're present, you don't want to not take that space if you're the only one there who will honor your communities. You always have to have a sense of who you're indebted to, who else could be there alongside you, should be there instead of you and doing a better job. You need to figure out what you can do to support that work and make those connections.

MN: You said earlier that you started working in the Downtown Eastside upon moving to Vancouver in 2000. What brought you there in the first place?

CN: I guess I had an uncritical vision of being an activist at the time. I'd been aware and learning more about violence, particularly for racialized and indigenous women in the sex trade. I wanted to do a PhD at the time, so that was in the back of my mind. I was moving with my partner, now my husband, and both of us had some visions about cities that we loved. One of the first decisions we made was not to stay in the States. I had a job in Indiana at that time. We had just fallen in love. You know that moment. I knew I couldn't go back to Ontario. We had two cities in mind—Montreal and Vancouver. At the time I had French in some small ways, but not professionally, and I was really worried about what that would mean. I'd never been to Vancouver, but I thought: ocean, mountains, why not? I should go at least once. I found a job at the Women's Center within months. And that was it. I still work across the street from there. For 17+ years, I have spent the greatest percentage of my time literally on that corner.

MN: What's the corner?

CN: Columbia and Cordova—it's been my vantage of Vancouver. Now I don't live in the city anymore. I've been evicted twice, and not for anything we've done wrong; it's the nature of the city. I won't move back to Vancouver. I feel it's unlikely. I feel very angry and haven't recovered from the Olympics. There are uncomfortable places in Vancouver for me at this point.

MN: Did you know much about the writing community when you moved there?

CN: No, I didn't. I had heard of Fred Wah and I think I heard of Wayde Compton. There was very little else I can think of that I would have known. But I also wasn't really a writer then. I was one of those people who always had written, but I kept it to myself. So I didn't arrive thinking I'm gonna be a writer. That wasn't even a priority. But what happened was that I got here, and within a couple of years I was involved in the university system. I met people and began to pay attention to poetry publicly, and started coming out to events. I didn't find communities of color therein, couldn't find black poets or audience at the time. I did connect to the Kootenay School poets and their poetry, although I was never a part of their collective. I was interested in and engaged by the people there. A favorite person from day one was Jeff Derksen, a really critical figure to me. Of course, many others! What drew me in most was a desire to be part of these conversations.

MN: So, Derksen was someone you began reading and exchanging work with—who else?

CN: Early on Wayde Compton, Rita Wong, too, amazing people I was fortunate to encounter. Also, Larissa Lai and later Steve Collis.

MN: This would have been the earlyish or mid-2000s?

CN: Yes, around 2004 to 2007. My first public reading was, I believe, 2008.

MN: I love “The Quality of Light” essay you wrote for Stephanie Young’s series on poetry and money¹ where you detail the your personal history of writing and reading poetry through the conditions of labor and work and service.

CN: Well, that was a funny thing to come at, to think it through with that lens. It was helpful, actually. I learned about myself. It could have been longer, but then I was like, Oh, this is just getting embarrassing. To reveal like that, I mean, I don't typically talk about myself in writing—that's the first time I've ever done that.

MN: What I like so much about it is how clearly you think through the material conditions of writing, of the means and for whom one writes. On that note, can you describe the work you do with Gallery Gachet? I know you're involved in so many formations and networks of organizing, and to single it down to the work in that one location is an insufficient way to come at all the work you do. But visiting you at Gachet and walking around the neighborhood with you, I feel I gained this deeper understanding of the language of your poems, their material context.

CN: Gachet is my paid work. So the ways in which that dominates our lives do matter, but fortunately my heart has been committed for six years to the work I'm doing there. I'm an administrator—I think it's quite boring at the end of the day, but I have learned that administration and how you construct a program or programs is not by any stretch a neutral way of managing or being behind the scenes. Gallery Gachet straddles social and arts practices. We're a mental health resource, but we're also a gallery and an artist-run centre. We run a public-access gallery where we host five to seven exhibitions each year. Three or four of those will be juried, and work with artists that we put in dialogue with our communities. Then two or three of the exhibitions are always based in community and partnerships longstanding. The work is predominately visual art. We do performance a lot in the space and, not surprisingly, a lot of social practice stuff happens. And we do a lot of stuff scattered across sites, so we are increasingly not working just in the gallery—everything from parades to workshops to pop-up exhibitions and performance work in public spaces. We're trying to gain a better understanding of public art, and trying to break that down what makes certain art public art.

MN: Yes, and experimenting with a public art that doesn't uphold the formations of the social as they already are. This is something I've been thinking about often, how so many social-practice-based works mostly reinforce the already-existing parameters of art and aesthetic cultures.

CN: That's right, and because of that we're very careful about who we work with and bring into the gallery. One of our ongoing partners has been the artist-curator Carmen Papalia, a real leader in terms of trying to think through ideas of access. He's a non-visual learner, self-described, who makes use of amazing interpretations of a disabling world. He was actually the first person to publish me. Many years ago he ran a journal called *Memewar* with a group that worked out of Simon Fraser. Anyway, he's one example of some of the wonderful people who are able to do work in and of our community as they get to know a plurality of who that community is, and somehow help interface in broader art-world conversations and problems.

MN: And you've also been inviting writers into the space, I believe?

CN: Yes, I've been able to do literary programming in the space as well. We've hosted Jasmine Gibson, Tongo Eisen-Martin, Juliana Spahr and David Buuck, Marie Annharte, Mercedes Eng, Julie Okot-Bitek, Jordan Scott, and others locally. One of the more influential series in recent memory, in my mind, in this city, was *REVERB*: a queer reading series. They just disbanded after four and a half years, but that was a crew of people led by the writers Leah Horlick and Estlin McPhee. They curated queer writers, and did so in ways that engaged questions about access for audience and readers, and what it meant to situate themselves at Gallery Gachet in the downtown eastside, considering who attends and how. They did amazing work, and they were just building and building—physical access, environment, figuring out good childcare, figuring out ASL, figuring out queer ASL...and withstanding necessary critique along the way.

There are all kinds of moments around Gachet, centered in it, that have been just amazing. And then we're a resource, also, for the social movements of the neighborhood. So when there's a paint-in or when there's banner-making, when there's a need for a parade, a report to be designed or support for communications, people know they can call on us. It's been important to have some of that work in the space. That is part of my work.

I suppose could talk about my volunteer time or the other things that I do—filtered through what that community deals with. A lot of residents and former residents experience policing, surveillance, carceral logics and systems, formerly or family-wise, or are at-risk of, and so I've been concerned and involved with work and organizing within prisons and without, extending notions of community to really understand what's separated out, to resist what that these systems try to do. An example of that is the Memorial March committee.

MN: The Memorial March, is it for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women?

CN: It's for missing and murdered women, led by Indigenous women. I'm quiet in that circle for good reasons, but I am a helper through the years. Sometimes the work is not about organizing, it's about being organized, allowing yourself to be a part of being organized. At this point, I help coordinate the guardians for the march; the guardians are what one might call marshals in another setting. We have guardians, all women of the community, who know the community and many are living in the neighborhood. I think that march is one of the most stunning aesthetic examples of Vancouver—a presence and commitment through the years—in terms of the sound, the Women Warrior's Song, and the drum, the uniformity of message that's consensual, the many works that flow through this moment, the complexity of regalia, the leadership of matriarchs and the movement in the streets, orchestrated and organic. There are so many ways to consider it. I'm also involved with a group called Joint Effort—we

try to find ways to connect with incarcerated women and to connect them with their communities outside of prison. For the march each year, Joint Effort goes in to the prisons bringing materials for quilting. We bring out finished smaller pieces that get sewn all together in a banner, and every year that banner is part of the march. We photograph each piece as well as the banner as well as the banner in the march and the people who march with it and we take that documentation back to the prison to remind the women of their connection. These are small textile works and they're very humble, but they connect us somehow in these moments. The march will never call itself a protest. It does interrupt the major flows of capital and all the things that a good protest can do, while memorializing.

I cannot write much about this. There will be shades, there will be corners that get occupied by what's relevant to my everyday, but I really can't write about a lot about this work. It goes back to those questions, which are ethical ones, about representation and being grounded, of being of communities and speaking to that. I will listen and lift. I can work through practices and methodology, I will collaborate.

MN: It's interesting when one's own engagement allows for them to realize the responsibility of not speaking, of not representing. I want to say, though, I'm amazed in the midst of all these efforts, how quickly you've moved from first reading to first book to the two books you've written since!

CN: It's funny because it's not like I have more time to write. It seems I make decisions and they're supposed to set up that possibility of having more time to write. For instance, like taking on the Writer in Residence position or getting support from an arts council, which have been new experiences for me of late. They're wonderful and this is not a complaint, but it's confusing because it doesn't seem to work like that. It's not like there's more time.

MN: I imagine that the work you do with Gachet never stops, because the community is constantly going and that never stops.

CN: That's true, that's true. And everybody's got my cell phone number. But definitely there's a lot of respect for my time—I get calls when I need to get calls. Some day I look forward to being a volunteer in the community, to just being a volunteer. I look forward to someday not representing an organization that has relationships with governmental bodies, such that myself as an individual can't not represent some things publicly. I look forward to that because I think what's happening as I age and tire a little bit in that weary sense is that I don't think my activism is as sharp. Sometimes I'm not able to answer these calls. And they're not just coming from downtown, of course. And, I just can't jump to it in the ways that I used to. Part of it is that I'm accountable to a home network, as well, one that keeps me healthy. Part of it is that I am engaged in wage labour, particularly. But I think it's heralding maybe a different time for me coming in the next decade, and I think that will be about writing and about creative and collaborative organizing work. It's always going to be necessary to be in the street, or to support people in our streets, to be a live part of movement. Can't skip that step—our relationship to frontlines and land defense, that's always going to be there.

Being a witness has other responsibilities to it. Collective, creative work can have powerful, relevant outcomes. I think about that these days as an uninvited guest on these territories. I don't just want to thank people. I don't just want to name who I am and what I think I'm up to. I want to think through what is relevant to the Tsleil-Waututh, what is relevant to the Musqueam, to the Squamish. I feel that way foremost embodying black and femme experience, realizing violences of state and border, I want to be relevant.

MN: Will you discuss the relation between your engagement with these with regard to the syntax of your work? I ask because I am interested in how your work combines a mix of syntactically dense and technical language—which might signal to readers a kind of impersonal affect or distancing effect—while at the same time they inhabit this grounded, self-present mode of direct speech, which I read as emergent from the forms of address that I imagine are central to the work you do as an organizer and activist.

CN: That's interesting to hear because this is the kind of analysis I cannot do. I'm not so deliberate in terms of strategy. I'm just trying to do what's necessary, and that's going to keep changing. I don't think it's something that I can map out.

MN: Anytime something arises as being necessary, there's always a site, always a situation, and always others involved to respond to and with.

CN: Exactly. It's one of the early lessons I learned from Derksen. I remember him reading a very early collection of poems for *Triage*, and he asked me to consider several things. One was that I had a ton of quotation marks. When I did a reading once, my first reading actually at the railway club for the Shortline Series (also organized at the time, by Carmen Papalia) ever other line I was like "Quote, duh duh, duh, duh," and I did that for the whole reading. He said, "Maybe just let it go, let the quotes go." But that led us to talking in particular about the idea of texture, how our affective language and psyche and concerns and personal observations, how all that sprawling stuff is situated. What it was, in part, was a materialist argument for poetry, that we need to ground it in the real. He didn't use that language, but I love this idea of texture. I feel like texture happens as an interplay. It cannot be so interested in the self, the I is not that interesting for me, unless it is part of broader networks, media and relations.

Anyway, my heart is trying to do with language what feels necessary. I am fascinated by language, and I always have been. I'm never going to be accountable if I write a book that's so cerebral, and so entrenched in isolated material, in terms of the words on the page itself. It's not enough for the work to only succeed there. I, of course, value the literary. I am grateful for the kinds of conversations that are possible, for the kind of people who study and are actively concerned with poetics. Yet I am ultimately concerned with movement, and I'm looking to people—to kinds of land and community-based, relational practices that are off the page, even if anchored to a page.

¹ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/04/the-quality-of-light>

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

1

Kamau Brathwaite

*L*iviticus

The first poem of the Burning of the Body
and the Tearing of the Flesh
the crucifixion of the Spirit on two crossed sticks of cane



and the Basilisk justification of this in my own cultural lynching



I\ The caul of fat around my liver and the shining budget of my kidneys
are laid out upon the altar of the Lord
surrounded by the howling congregations of the vigilante villagers of Fairy Valley
who love the scent of burning meat and pick and eat my sour morsel flesh

There are no angels anywhere or great storm-warning gaulin wings
or (h)alta taps to trap us on the ground w/fear
i watch the panting dogs' red tongues w/rough white scraper-
boards upon their tongues that drip saliva down

is like a groundshogsday . . a death by fiery way
comb-harps play round me here and lamentation tears thresh syllables of sparks
the Saul man saws my spine . . let me speak spikes of salutation to the stars

2\ It was Quiet & lovely & holy & we made it even more so
 w/our singing, until the dogs came nearer & nearer . ears
 tails flying, howling w/the torches of desire

There were five of them on horses
 and the rest a loud rabble on foot coming over the river
 There was no ever escape from this holocaust

They slit my wife's throat and cut off the breasts of her ovals
 and hauled me away to the coast of the Tree . The crowd
 shimmering like cloudy blue silence

There were three others already there dead and rotting in their sibilence
 They string me up in full voice of the blood of the sunset
 . i know i will nvr new sunrise

EVAN KLEEKAMP

Argument

I wrote *13 THESES ON STATE-SPONSORED BLACK DEATH IN AMERICA** under the influence of a major depressive episode. I had recently completed my Master of Fine Arts degree at Columbia College Chicago, and was working in the school's marketing department as an editorial assistant. It was my first time working in an office environment outside of the academy. My supervisor, who took classes with me in the writing program, had sent me a series of strange texts demanding I apologize for an incident she would neither identify nor explain to me. I ended up turning our text message exchanges over to the vice president of our department in order to prove my friend had been harassing me. I had thought we were friends. We had been friends, hadn't we? I understood we felt differently about many political issues—but, as far as I was concerned, we were both deeply engaged with leftist politics. White students with little exposure to critical theory or non-Western modes of thought formed the majority of our graduate class. The students of color, feminists, and queer people quickly banded together in order to survive. We formed a coalition among our respective cohorts and collectively asked for an educational environment that provided academic rigor, empathy, and the professional skills necessary to make a living as writers. The betrayal felt personal. My friend seemed to be manipulating me. We had tension in the past—she was several years older than me and felt that I didn't respect my elders although she never revealed her actual age—and that tension came to a head in a course we took with fiction writer Aleksandar "Sasha" Hemon. Sasha structured the class around a concept he called "narrative architecture." He would begin each seminar by outlining a proposition or question—often rebutting or challenging an assumption we had made in our weekly written responses. In one session, he argued that a reader could better understand the whole of Vladimir Nabokov's short story "Spring in Fialta" by examining

Nabokov's description of a table in a café: "I saw the composite table (small ones drawn together form a long one)." According to Sasha's concept, the table, like the story, assembles through a series of small vignettes that accrue into a larger, composite narrative. Whether he knew it or not, he was teaching us to treat stories as argumentative forms. As he stated in the syllabus, the course was "built on the assumption that narration creates a space governed by an inherent logic—an architecture. This narrative architecture often corresponds to the presentation of space in the text itself. It is within this structured space that meaning emerges." Under Sasha's guidance we engaged in several debates concerning aesthetic questions. I began to understand that ethics and aesthetics were not unrelated but comprised equal and opposite ends of the domain that governs our collective, societal existence. When my peers disagreed about something as simple as the content or arrangement of a story, I began to understand our antagonistic stances reflected incompatible logics, incompatible views of the same world. One of the most heated of these arguments occurred when we discussed Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*. Half the class argued Kushner inadequately addressed the histories she appropriated in crafting her story while the others claimed Kushner had no ethical responsibility outside of strengthening the world of her fiction. Something she had already accomplished by way her of her research, according to them. I was among the first group. I thought the narrative in *The Flamethrowers* reflected a bourgeois, American desire to coopt catastrophic historical events without depth or engagement. My friend and I as well as several of our peers had agreed about this. I reread Kafka's *The Trial* in Sasha's class. He also required us to watch world cinema, such as Dino Risi's 1962 film *Il Sorpasso*, which shared the novel's spacing-making and argumentative properties. Sasha was not a kind grader, and many of my peers who were used to receiving high marks were lucky if they got an A. At the end of the term two of my friends called my final grade into question. One of them, who was not in the class, claimed he had seen my paper. He said my grade wasn't as high as I thought. You only got a B, he said. It was strange because the three of us—my friend, he, and I—worked together in the office. These two former friends and

myself. It was strange that they were both people of color who I thought of as friends. And they were telling me what my grade was on an assignment that was supposed to be confidential. How had he seen? I thought. It took me months to comprehend what was actually going on. I began writing about visual art in the meantime. I wrote about and perceived paintings, sculpture, dance, and performances as a series of propositions. I took many trips to the museum. Part of me believes I began this exercise as a way of explaining my position in the world to myself. I couldn't believe my friends would be interested in seeing me fail. As much as they had campaigned against white supremacy—often telling me that our professors and peers were afraid of me because I was black or suggesting no one could handle my intelligence because they weren't used to an articulate black man—it occurred to me that they weren't too interested in having a black man excel either. And neither was I. I threw away my thesis after graduating and began writing a book-length work called *Three Movements* only to find myself more and more disinterested in writing. I had no desire to express myself, the world around me felt impenetrable. Language could not describe my inability to inhabit my body or the spaces I occupied. Race, gender, class, and sexuality remained excuses I could rely on from time to time if not completely ignore until the conversation tilted their way. I began looking into other disciplines and practices in an effort to create a space where I could not only reside but witness myself as a human being. Believe me when I confess I struggle with this basic concept to this day. Unconscious of this development at the time, I wrote a series of Facebook posts, which would later become *13 THESES*, concerning the precarity of black life in America. I targeted the friends, peers, colleagues, and mentors who had admonished me. I allowed myself to be angry and I directed my anger outward instead of at myself in what was to become a revelatory moment. I had been harboring all of their fears, suppressing my feelings, and playing complacent in a system that was ultimately meant to undermine any resistance to the status quo. I could no longer dwell within poetry, which showed itself more and more as a means for the privileged to disguise their frail logic in terms they couldn't even define. Often at the expense of poor

people. Often because they, even after graduating college and acquiring a degree, thought of themselves as untainted by social wealth. I think of a woman in my cohort who demanded we respect her aesthetic because it was *her aesthetic*—it was something she owned, her property. She would not defend her aesthetic decisions, she said in an email sent to everyone in our class, because they belonged to her. The email was addressed to me but did not include my name. I hope it goes without saying she was white. I hope it goes without saying we lost several hours of class time to her tantrums. I hope it goes without saying she received more attention and care than any of the strong writers in the program. I hope it goes without saying that she was prioritized over other students because she behaved like a child. Behaving like a child was the most efficient way to garner attention. Behaving like a child was the most efficient way of robbing other people of their time, energy, and resources so that she could feel safe, empowered, important, and institutionally validated. The entire experience was structured to authenticate her narcissism. I will never forget her letter to the class because instead of spelling out and she had used ampersands. I will never forget how our professor made sure to check on her after she sent her email without asking anyone in the class how it made them feel. After many events like this, I could no longer participate in Chicago's poetry community without getting the sense that it elevated a certain kind of suffering into an aesthetic ideal. What was hidden had now come into the clear. Poetry was about people who could afford to traverse the city because they possessed the space and time and resources to project their worldview without criticism. 13 *THESES* arrived as a response to these burgeoning feelings. It did little to displace the betrayal I felt, but it opened a space where I could comment on the injustice I experienced. The psychological wounds were deeper than I thought. I remember reading at 57th Street Books with Jay Besemer and H. Melt. I read a few pages from my discarded thesis manuscript before switching to passages from *Three Movements*, which remains now, as it was then, in progress. After the reading, we took questions from the audience. Melt asked Jay and I how we were able to write such long poems. I hadn't thought about this before. I also didn't understand

what *Three Movements* was about; I didn't understand the argument it was trying to display. I felt I had to pursue its subliminal logic until I exhausted myself. Maybe then I could exhaust the defense mechanisms latent in the work, I thought. I needed to reach something akin to a logical conclusion tied to an emotional event. Like when a child surmises the reason behind their tantrum and suddenly pauses to cry. Like when a child surmises it must formulate itself in order to understand its emotions. And, in doing so, the child weeps because it recognizes its dislocation, its distance from itself. I felt guilty because I was a child too. I went with my two friends to a party where I ate the host's food and criticized his political ideas. I had embarrassed them because I told the host he was an elitist. I told him he should not start a memoir about the beginnings of his political career by suggesting a politically unconscious person was like a goldfish. You think you're saying that they are trapped inside glass, but what you're really saying is that they are stupid, I said. I said nothing about my resistance to memoir. I didn't say anything about the bourgeoisie and their memoirs. Crumbs from the lumpia in my mouth landed on the floor. I drank his whiskey too. Was this what it meant to be a black intellectual? *Three Movements* began with a proposition. I believe myself to be composing in writing an animal so unclean it must be killed, so unclean it knows it must kill itself, it said. But sometimes I wonder, aren't I that animal? I was making an argument that I should kill myself. And—if the book does what I wanted it to do—I was drafting a strong case for my suicide. The degree to which this argument was conscious or unconscious remains unresolved in my head. In one sense, I was completely aware that I was asking for permission to kill myself. In another, I didn't consider this request serious. It was meant as a postulate. Something we accept because we cannot prove its validity. But, if I hold myself accountable to the space and logic I created in my writing—the architecture Sasha brought into view—it was also a readymade I deployed from time to time to listeners, often writers themselves, who hungered for the same permission. But where did this argument come from? Wasn't it also present in *13 THESES*? What was this thing inside me I didn't understand? Our logic reflects our relationship to the world. The labor

involved in constructing a logical sequence of propositions—otherwise known as emotional labor—is often foisted on those who lack the agency to live in a world without logic. We, as beings who traffic in language, suffer through false advertisements, manipulative emotional appeals, and other forms of coercion framed as persuasive speech when in reality these statements constitute nothing more than compulsory demands. We exist to perpetuate the freedom of others. We belong to a lower caste. On this occasion, as a means of fashioning an argument, I only request that we interrogate our propositions, claims, assertions, elisions, postulates, statements, theses, cries, appeals, screams, wonders, moods, and representations in whatever form they come to occupy. Every adjustment to space or an object in space delimits an assertion. Every space we inhabit contains a proposition we have accepted and left unchallenged. What are we if we don't hold ourselves accountable to our statements? If we don't evaluate our proclamations? If we don't recognize our claims to territory? We cannot ignore our capacity to perjure, devalue, and conceal. We house ideological residue, hatreds and ignorance of all kinds. We divert ourselves from the truth. If we surface the dormant logics that comprise our beliefs, if we realize the spaces, objects, and people we conjure in our propositions reflect our vision of the world, we may begin to interrogate the lies we tell ourselves. We may begin to visualize the inherent logic that constructs the personas we adapt in our effort to disavow the responsibilities we abandon. How will we see ourselves then? How will we comprehend ourselves and make ourselves comprehensible? As for my friend, I see now she was an extension of my self-hatred. I gave her permission to see me as an object or tool. She used me. But I used her. I neither pity nor forgive her. I expect she feels the same toward me. However, I thank her for her attempts to humiliate and subjugate me. I dedicate my theses to her.

*Kastle Editions, 2017

SAM VERNON

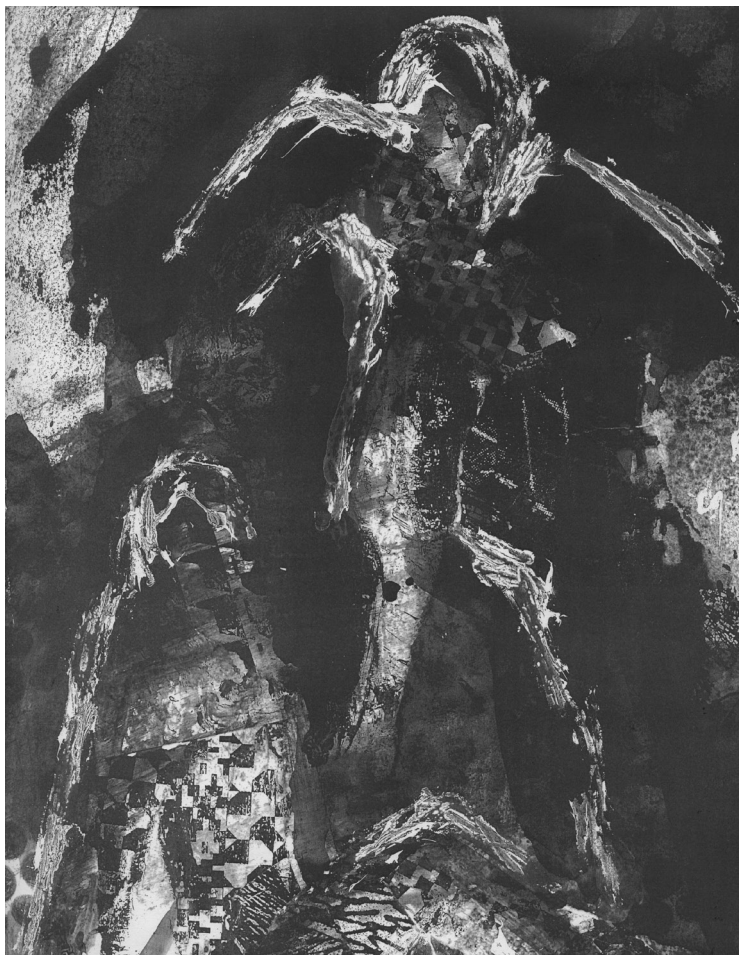
The infusion of *Afro Deco* into my formal practice is unmodified in that I combine disparate objects and 2D media to develop a visual language influenced by pattern, graphic design, the human figure, and abstract shapes. I create Xerox drawings derived from printmaking techniques, lithography and intaglio, to construct narrative. I draw, Xerox and print at each stage of an image's evolution: deleting, adding and collaging until the image is complete. The result is subject to re- contextualization within an installation, a performance or a work to exist on its own. I explore drawing as technology and question how the image is transformed when it is reproduced as direct digital media. The active "ghosting" of an image, copying and multiplying the original, subtly exploits the notion of a pure identification of black and white and signifies the essentialism of symbolic meaning and all its associations. In addition, the subjectivity of an otherworldly psychic state or realm comes into play.

I look to Paul Lawrence Dunbar's social lyric: "We wear the mask that grins and lies, It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, — This debt we pay to human guile; With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, And mouth with myriad subtleties." Tapping into the power of masks, or ghosts, as a timeless art form—and then translating that spiritual information for present-day audiences is complex. The investigation of this irony fuels my work, an interdisciplinary approach fused to my meta-history, shaping a looser chronicle to explore postcoloniality and historical memory. Through site-specific, staged installations and urgent performances my goals are towards the production of Gothic visual art in which Black narratives are included in the expanse of the genre.

















CHRIS CHEN

from *The Situation Was Excellent*

I. War Maxims In the Impossible Style of 1948

Agriculture. Conduct. War. A backward March.
November carries July the way
That doubt cannot.

The avian core
calls the song and the reason.

Nationally, meanwhile,
We built the wrong masses of 1954.
Zougou practice.

If there is to be revolution,
defeat the impossible style of running dogs.

Vacillate 1 with policy 7. Rid country of muddle-headed faith in 1957.
“One can unite the industry out of self-criticism.”
“Studying leadership works.”

Agricultural groups explain the given
but achieve coalition.

May February blind the core
through essentially policy
leading to the April prosperous situation.

The party possesses General Forget-It-Out
and Two-Line-Locomotive.

We in general were co-operation people.
Bound to the area carrying our future.
Our tactics in the style of independence.

Do not call Congress the people.
Or cadres with faith, sufferers. Fight guiding it.

Democratic practice must commerce.
“The people split into two unless
nationally defeated”—was the impossible style of 1948.

Given the cardinal shoulders of modernization.
The end-result verifies the specific volume.

The comrades were all *ibid*.
Parts per million
Stripping metal from the relays reformed wrong life

Reform wrong life. In culture.
Be specific: a well-disciplined opening to the core.

Speech armed
Our seasons of
Circular self-criticism

China is the leadership style
of entrails thinking.

General Entrails leading selected weapons
defeated industrialization.

“The bird does not sing because it has an answer,”
said no bird ever.

II. 11 Defensive Proverbs

On Practice:

A so-and-so painting. So gentle, refined, a kind of dinner picture of leisurely violence. The look of essence is its thing, its industrial threshold.

The problem is that we see the sky for the untrue. The frog jumps in the mouth. We do not say that mouth is well. Nor the sky. The well is a well of bigger size. True tallies, facts.

Own the feet of blood, drop the territory. In our family fight, nations recover.

Its well the will laws things, how well. Understand relations to know it. Is not governing the circumstances when nature is actually anything?

War stage: property groups in enthusiastic state work won up majorities.

In class society, everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, fails in practice.

“Failure is the mother of coming into contact with the taste of a pear.”

On Contradiction:

The essence of things is bound to trip and fall.

Knowledge begins with the leap from pigeonhole to contradictoriness within the thing. It rained secondary causes all night on Mount Bhuzou.

Changes in society are due chiefly to the temperature that can change a

stone into a chicken.

Opposition and struggle within the party of contradictions. Who wants to be the life of the party.

Who wants that kind of personality.

III. Your Roaders, and Ours

To the tune of “Money” (2010)
by Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings

The blue of cold serried woods
And hundred barges of crystal alone

*Rain flowing crimsoned
barges on this man's land*

Before a thousand vying autumns
ask a brooding immensity of boundless rules

*About the impossible style of dou di zhu flowering
casts restraints on schoolmates*

I was vivid with the enthusiasm
of arterial rivers

*Pointing out more words on fire.
Our muck.*

Sources:

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, Foreign Language Press, 1966.

The Poems of Mao Zedong, Translated by Willis Barnstone, Univ. of California Press, 2010.

SEAN BONNEY

from *Cancer: Poems after Katerina Gogou*

let's drink with the unemployed
with all sun and silence
with all dust in the sun and silence
and sun and cognac and dust
and cigarettes and sun
no, let's not go on about our health today
pills and drink and snot
don't worry
I feel very calm
there are nails there is hair there are years
dirty
the pills are great. the party, you know which one I mean
impossible to tell who's a cop these days
music
the cognac's shit
no, I haven't anything at all
you know I'm thinking I might want to, you know
there's a room upstairs
I want to see you without your pants
kind of curious about your dick
music, for chrissake
you take a solo
"they took a stick and beat me"
cognac
music
silence
you pullout your switchblade start slashing
The Bonnot Gang were right

this is the part where my brain splits

music, I don't talk about it
my eyes. seriously. where are my eyes
every day there's something to reject
I will not scream when I die
Marx Lenin Trotsky Luxemburg
The Kronstadt Massacre

the dream of Sisyphus
there are flowers there are colours
revolvers and homemade bombs
I'm going crazy why aren't you
my dreams my friends' dreams
all these dreams are the same dream
underwear pills used matches
repeated breakdowns endless weeping
this is measure
you and me
up and down
and back and down
there is a false symmetry separates us
no don't call me. yes I'm on something
lets not laugh
if we don't sign the paper
they won't be able to act on their decision
night falls
hidden cameras parked cars
night falls
they want to know if I have a television
night falls
I'm still kind of keeping it together
it won't be suicide gets me
Long live the 204th International

I think of my friends as blackbirds
screeching from rooftops
murdered by rising rents
Exarchia Kreuzberg Hackney

we survive
at random. pissed out of our heads
in songs in squatted bars
there are those you beat to death in prison
with us its done with pills and needles
we never sleep we always dream
we wake in the same bed

with bedbugs
with track marks I love my friends
they are wires stretched from city to city
in borrowed dresses and migraines
interpreters. commies. thieves
they live in silence. they paint in black
they invent their language

yours is only good for spitting

and we live
at random. lines and bombs and wires
tight around your hands. your necks
you capitalist shits. your necks
my friends are wires are blackbirds

“freedom”. yeh. tell me about it.
I think you mean the holes in my shoes.
but, you know, I
get to do what I want all the time
whereas you, you get all those duties, yeh
that whatever-it-is you call fucking
your bonus your job
that fish sauce you tell yourself you’re eating
when really you know you’re eating shit
yeh, I walk around on your roofs
in my fucked up boots
whenever I want
no, not like Mary Poppins, no
you kind of don’t know what I’m talking about
there are certain frequencies you don’t get
chicken-hearted shit. no. I’m not jealous of you.
freedom, yeh. yours. its these holes in my shoes
my kids shoes

but don’t worry about it
you see they’re special they’ll never wear out
as I boot your face in over and over, as
yes as I smash it. three nails in your forehead.
a spell. special receivers in your bougie head.

Katerina Gogou wrote a poem called 'Autopsy Report', in memory of her friend Pasolini. I wonder, has the meaning of his death changed since then? I don't know. I mean, I guess I could draw a sort of obscene angle connecting his broken index finger to the fascist cops of Genoa, in the way that in Gogou's poem the blows of his murderers become identical with forms of art, with the Vatican and with the hired thugs who split his name apart one night in 1975. I wonder, is that name still known? His fingerprints were razored away, like those of a refugee, and kept in City Hall. The secretive thugs who killed him, their faces were transformed to a ricochet of sparks that spelled out the unstable forms of his own death. His face separated from his body and seemed to form the beginnings of a new landscape. We try to sketch it on the ground. We call it Ostia or Tottenham or Hamburg. We say that we are the chorus and invent language from the evidence of his camera, then speak it quietly at the doorways to all known hells. Our love is invisible. So is our terror. So is Gogou's poem. In memory of Pasolini. And herself.

Three days awake I can't find the door
already morning half the people here
totally on fire. The rest are made of stone

his thighs are my thighs
He's behind me. Walks toward me
his head is shaved. There are no stars

Took pills. He's on the stair is. Took pills.
Says he's an anarchist. Knows nothing.
Chooses things. The men I fuck and

he's a British cop he's

been three days dreaming
scratches our faces this place too. Talk
of bones and fire in the suburbs

*Yeh yeh I love Him tells me
things I have never owned*

a mirror. Yeh. Kick it in.
No. I'm not coming out tonight. Never.
Don't speak. No. It's not going to be ok.

All stopped. I guess that's our lot and
O my friend we have lost our lives
in the mouths of our enemies
the cracks in their windows
the quietest compromise. I don't know
what it means

that it's not that we don't want to live
but the fuck of it always being stopped
It is sadder than it seems
The dead know how to use hunger

There are those who never appear in mirrors, but only in police cameras.
There are those who are the opposite. I don't know which I am. I'm told I
was last seen on the border. I'm told I was wearing a pearl necklace, a red
and black sweater. You ask was I setting fire to cars. You ask me what is my
name. I say if you add up life and death and schizophrenia and the judge
and the informer and sexual desire and a small piece of paper from a foreign
country, you might get somewhere. I say that. I say add it all up, or divide,
or pay it back, or whatever. You smile and say that I am stupid. In return
I say thank you, thank you very much. You see, I am very polite. I tell you
about the whiteness of the cells. About the coats of the doctors, the silence
of the isolation tank. The entire Tory Cabinet a monument to the power of
heroin. I tell you all of that, and then I show you how to become invisible.

that there are mansions
on grand roads, we know that
and we used to know
in the silence and dawn
of bottles and pass codes
we would never live in them
hating the roses, fearing them
we knew the address of each one
we had the blue-prints, everything
we talked
minute to minute
we talked
wire to wire
of what we would say
at the specific moment
class vengeance, we understood
futuristic and ancient, as
all of history, as
one click, as
some kind of message
left on the table

like a pack of cigarettes
in an overheated kitchen
not even the ones I used to smoke
squealing, yeh, thanks a lot
you destroyed the wrong world
pack up your roses, asshole. get out

CASSIE THORNTON

Summary of a Cursed Painting

When I was a resident at Headlands Center for the Arts in Marin County, CA, I developed a self-help watercolor practice. I painted to help myself through the disabling anxiety of living in a quiet and beautiful place across the bay from my “my home,” an anti-social tech city of violent wealth inequality, San Francisco. At the time of my residency the US government decided to “shut down” to avoid more debt, closing the federal park where the residency was located. On the same day, there was a massive meteor shower in Russia which broke through architecture and destroyed property. I decided to begin my first watercolor painting—of a hole created in a wall by a meteor.

My watercolor practice was always as soothing for me as it was vengeful. The watercolor paintings in this series were intended to decorate the walls of predatory financial institutions. Each portrays a hole in a wall created by a falling meteorite on a significant day in recent American financial history. When a meteorite strikes a hard surface it reconstitutes our relationship to and imagination of risk. In the neoliberal era of economics, we are bound to an idea that the greatest risk we have as individuals or as a society is scarcity of money or credit. This ideology allows all of us, especially financial workers, to misunderstand what is actually at risk as they pump the world for profit. I hoped to gift these paintings to bankers and finance workers who needed to be blessed with a new relationship to non-financial risk. The imagery of the hole created by a meteor seemed like a proper threat that a banker could live with but never consciously understand. It is meant to curse them with a new irreversible thought, that in contrast to the earthly decimation a celestial object can deliver, mere financial ‘collapse’ suddenly sounds like a knock-knock joke. Each painting comes customized with a blessing that invites the unknown to enter the institution to deliver justice. The paintings are wishes for the finance industry to burn to hell and that these idiots have to find something to do to reverse their extractive financial “contributions” to society thus far.



Hi friends!

I'm on a new quest and I need your help. Do you know anyone who works in finance? They could be eligible to house one of my newest paintings in their office!

Here's the backstory. You are likely aware of my relationship to banks¹— it is where I do my best work! But you may not be aware of my overflowing love of watercolor. I'm working on a new project inspired by high finance where I use watercolor paintings to make an introduction between the business of finance and the nether regions of space.



Over the past few years I have been painting holes in walls made by meteors on significant days in American Finance. The meteor represents the unknown abundance of outer space. When a meteor strikes a hard surface it creates a hole—and a relation between the inside and the outside of a structure, inside and outside of what is known to us. And because finance has offered such a plethora of creative things to us, I have always dreamed of reciprocating. To do so, I am called to get these paintings on the walls of financial offices, maybe in the office of a bond broker at JP Morgan or Barclays, for example. The images, when hung on the wall, manifest a much needed ‘friendly creative rupture,’ if you will. This is how we will boldly usher creativity and the arts into the space of financial institutions—a place that unfortunately doesn’t yet feel very open to those of us on the outside looking in.

If you would be so kind, would you forward this letter to anyone you know who works in finance? With no financial strings attached I would like to get these paintings into the offices they were always meant to be in. Let me know if you have any questions, and let’s do this!

Thank you for your attention and bold follow through!

Best Wishes,

Cassie Thornton, *watercolorist*

*

A few months after I sent this email, I began a social research project in Chicago about the near bankruptcy of the public school system. I learned that there was a specific type of bonds trader who offers high risk loans to public institutions, such as school systems. They offer vulnerable public institutions the riskiest, most expensive loans available, knowing that the institutions will inevitably fail and that they will be able to seize and sell all the assets of the institution. This is happening all over the US to public school systems for children. I decided that I would first focus on delivering the paintings to a bonds trader who profited off of children in this way. Following is the blessing/curse that went into the painting:

Blessing/Curse:

Asteroids have always been a threat to the earth.
Just like you are.
The surface of the earth is pockmarked with impacts, each one
destroying a home, a car, a wall.
a big impact might have consequences including the end of
civilization, as we know it.
The first thing you should always do
is understand how big the problem is
and try to track and understand your enemy.
We have telescopes staring into the sky
and when they see something that looks like an asteroid -- there is
nothing we can do.
Now we are looking at you.
you are profiting off of stolen chances.
When I say stolen chances, I mean children.
We've been building public education for 381 years.
A million tiny bets against the future
can also mean the end of a civilization.
You will lose your will to survive
and there's always a risk that you cannot mitigate
The smaller and darker the asteroid,
the harder they are to observe.
You can rest peaceful knowing some of them come from the direction
of the sun
Undetectable until they touch down
You are not a celestial body
But we can make you one.
There is an asteroid with your name engraved on it
"Whatever it costs to defend our security and whatever it costs to
defend our freedom... we owe it to our children"

The cursed painting was successfully delivered on 6/7/2016:



¹ cf. "Physical Audit" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QAooiDNLTM>

NINE GREEK POETS OF THE CRISIS



Yiannis Dhallas * Krystalli Glyniadakis * Jazra Khaleed *
Universal Jenny * Christos Papageorgiou * Nick Potamitis *
Kyoko Kishida * Theodoros Chiotis * Eleni Philippou

TRANSLATED BY

Theodoros Chiotis * Peter Constantine * George Economou *
Chloe Haralambous * Sarah McCann * Irini Papakyriacou *
Max Ritvo * Angelos Sakkis

photos by Mayakov+sky Platform

YIANNIS DHALLAS

TRANSLATED BY IRINI PAPAKYRIACOU

Welcome

“Welcome glorious German!...”
said an artisan who recognized you,
“German of the Third Reich back then,
and now of the euro zone... Welcome
to this fiefdom of yours, of the South

In the year 2013, yes!... where the victim is obliged
to declare the victimizer as benefactor
With his body bleeding indebted and with his soul out resisting
is a serf who raised his head

Oh, the rage of the people, my soul, who holds you?

And at the gates of the presidential pavilion the police
with their thumbs passing from the water stopcock to the teargas
and instantaneously in the case of need to the trigger

The ceremony was held inside
the reception, the line-up of the contingent
and the playing of the anthems: elegiac
the one “From the sacred bones arisen...”
and unbowed and marching
the tone of the hegemonic of your “...uber alles”

A fiesta with the streets all closed
“You should come again, skilled, come again

and the carpet which would then be unwrapped,”
said again the industrialist who was present,
“oh! the carpet will be a carpet of blood

of red color deep red
tapissere of a genius colorist
from the palette of and abattoir Bacon style”

—from *Crisis*, ed. Dinos Siotis, Smokestack Books, 2014

KRYSTALLI GLYNIADAKIS

TRANSLATED BY CHLOE HARALAMBOUS

National Anthem, 2008, Redux for Eva Stefani

Juntas accessorize their wanks with national emblems.

(Am I right?)

You tell them a citizen can be too upstanding
(easily wilted;

unhinged)

They lock you up for lewdness.

For saying cunt, that is.

Home at night, national leaders

– incumbent or aspiring –

stand stiff and ablaze at the mirror.

Juntas accessorize their wanks with national
emblems.

None of them catches the scent

of a rose

hot and tender

hinting at love

lore and freedom

in the rumble of those who get hard
listening to the national anthem.

So it goes;

Femininity never satisfied the nation.

—from *Austerity Measures*, ed. Karen Van Dyck, Penguin UK, 2016

JAZRA KHALEED

TRANSLATED BY PETER CONSTANTINE

WORDS

I have no fatherland
I live within words
That are shrouded in black
And held hostage
Mustapha Khayati, can you hear me?
The seat of power is in language
Where the police patrol
No more poetry circles!
No more poet laureates!
In my neighborhood virgin poets are sacrificed
Rappers with dust-blown eyes and baggy pants
Push rhymes on kids sniffing words
Fall and get back up again: the art of the poet
Jean Genet, can you hear me?
My words are homeless
They sleep on the benches of Klathmonos Square
Covered in IKEA cartons
My words do not speak on the news
They're out hustling every night
My words are proletarian, slaves like me
They work in sweatshops night and day
I want no more dirges
I want no more verbs belonging to the noncombatants
I need a new language, not pimping
I'm waiting for a revolution to invent me
Hungering for the language of class war

A language that has tasted insurgency
I shall create it!
Ah, what arrogance!
Okay, I'll be off
But take a look: in my face the dawn of a new poetry is breaking
No word will be left behind, held hostage
I'm seeking a new passage.

TRANSLATED BY MAX RITVO AND PETER CONSTANTINE

Greek Democracy

I'm a fucked Muslim

Fist, foot, cock
No, I won't return to my fatherland,
(I don't have a fatherland)
I am biohazardous
miasmatic
I belong to no civilized race
What about me blights your country
—my color or my teeth?
My chest is an island of immigrants
dumped by the rotting boats
My back is the no-man's-land of the civil war
The rebels ooze from my ribs.
Doctors, sheathed by a protective film of cops,
stop up my every secretion with a toe tag
I am the cosmogenesis of an entirely new syphilis,
while they promulgate the propaganda of safety
The neighborhood committees send out RSVPs to their pogroms
Wages tank
Contractors consume
Everyone else rapidly changes the channel
The blood-wet hands
of kind and sensitive people
clutch 50 cent bottles of fear,
their deposited bodies accrue interest in the vaults of banks:
The bourgeoisie's imperialism is petty

I'm a fucked Muslim
Fist, foot, cock
In this country
they rape immigrants
they burn poets
The axe of Greek democracy
 thocks, thocks, thocks
By the lights of thine eyes,
and Pallas's Flaming Sword,
you shall live a thousand years
unblemished in deed and word

Somewhere in Athens

translated by Sarah McCann

Somewhere in Athens December the Sixth
The kid will kill the cop before sunup
Somewhere in Athens December the Seventh
On the streets the banks are burnt one by one
Somewhere in Athens December the Eighth
Let's cut a rug in Parliament's rubble
Somewhere in Athens December the Ninth
The poets in the streets eulogize fires
Somewhere in Athens December the Naught
Because the rebels shot the bell-tower clocks

—from *Austerity Measures*, ed. Karen Van Dyck, Penguin UK, 2016

Somewhere in Athens

TRANSLATED BY SARAH McCANN

Somewhere in Athens December the Sixth
The kid will kill the cop before sunup
Somewhere in Athens December the Seventh
On the streets the banks are burnt one by one
Somewhere in Athens December the Eighth
Let's cut a rug in Parliament's rubble
Somewhere in Athens December the Ninth
The poets in the streets eulogize fires
Somewhere in Athens December the Naught
Because the rebels shot the bell-tower clocks

—from *Austerity Measures*, ed. Karen Van Dyck, Penguin UK, 2016

UNIVERSAL JENNY

Now I Will Write Using Words of the Left

Now I will write using words of the left
Because they are very nice words
I found them on a site
A word which means place

First lesson
Insurrection, four states, transmit
Collective memory, don't talk to me about work, don't
The Afghan died, publishing houses, analytically
Giorgio Agamben, psychiatric hospital right until the end, share this
Unfounded and therefore left behind, unwooded, Texas
Inequality, logic, dynamics
Adjustment

Second lesson
Overflowing, state of precarity, I offer my help
Too much blubbing going on
Margin, centre, in the open, or open-endedness, or even outdoors
Applied use
Over-determining left hegemony

Fortunately

I am not putting together a third lesson

You sound enigmatic, you wrote
The oppressed often seem enigmatic, I wrote back,
Like my garbage floating in the oceans of others

Poem to be Recited at Protest Rallies When Riot Police is Twenty Meters Away

I am ready to think
I am ready to clash

Tell me which language you speak
Tell which abyss you can bear
I know why I am here
I am because I hate you

I am not being contentious
I am not saying this on purpose
I am not challenging you
That is not my intention

You will hit me
You will hit me
You will hit me

I do not hate you for that

I hate you because
You are simultaneously master and slave-girl
You are full of the teeth I am missing
You believe in the right of the fittest
And when that does not exist you make it up

Com forward come on
Shut my mouth

Smash my face without remorse
Bend me shatter me make me
You can do it you can do it you can do it

—originally published in *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis*, ed. Theodoros Chiotis (London: Penned in the Margins, 2105).

CHRISTOS PAPAGEORGIOU

TRANSLATED BY ANGELOS SAKKIS

Spectator

You've read the screen, spectator, and
Dense pack of hooded ones and
You smashed windows and
You looted sensibilities
Anything that is solid in the markets of Albania
You ducked for the bullet to go by and
Held the wood beam in your two hands
What the construction workers left
In the enormous garbage bin
You destroyed the parked cars and
So that the Ambulance looks like a limousine
Spectator, you tossed Molotovs inside banks
You set on fire buildings dedicated to culture and
What few people desired as they went by
During the night/day and
In front of a million cameras and
On the edge of a razor
That speaks in the ghetto and
Before the rejection of
The social doctrine and.

—from *Crisis*, ed. Dinos Siotis, Smokestack Books, 2014

NICK POTAMITIS

Graphé December

Any kind of bloodletting pre-Christmas
smacks of gash telenovela
trope-farming run amok ; sophistry slashfic
like Simone Weil as Carmen
in Guangzhou pulverizing your noblesse
oblige . The blood split warms itself
& everything is in too sharp relief .
O wonderworking bronze save our
sons at least from the bloody savage &
all other first-person shooters .

*

Gas & flame & motors turning-over
burnt out engines of agonist
habitus disturbing all that remains ;
all that fiasco loot overreaching
beyond doctrinaire resentment
to the blazing craic & razzle .
From high on squat panopticon
Kid Ajax bristling bides his time
as empire summons its blame battalions
outsourcing shameface & punish .

*

A fifteen year old who once was not dead
is now . Everything points downwards

The torpedo'd social contract ; of lowriding
your slacks like a cholo
gangbanger reading Marx til the zone
becomes breachable invoking
ethic consequence unbroad'd by either
side . Marketable eros plus
massacre in the polytechniki
is its own brutalist divide .

*

Down from their stratify'd elevations
schoolkids obliterate patrolcars
dispensing swerving bloc-votes of noconfidence
in futuereal
payback & scrolling frantic to void vast
dinosaur-splitting asteroids .
Null dispensations pay out only harm
& boom-timers renege sans guilt
til leveling up is not an option ;
just keep the blast'd sphere in play .

*

That rank anti-rocker necromaton
foaming to scorch the fire-starters
gets as blast'd apart as the bodyschock'd
indignados he abjects .
Ignore the flame war & instead ignite
symmetrically align'd wrecking
firing up provocative analogues
from the potato farm to the art hub .
A dream'd of gift economy that sparks

over us like Attic wildfire .

*

Skill'd resource management of game tokens
& Israeli tear-gas is key
to ending the month stockpiling the win .
December leads the way over
crack'd glass & blanket shrapnel of normal
class roles ; a proud subtle limbo .
Then Kid Ajax weighs in with a colossal
stoney uppercut collapsing
the chic computer megastore atop
everybody ; hi-score intact .

*

Refute the usual attribution
of cargo-cult banality ;
the usual over-invest'd smacktalk
binaries of Red versus
Blue . The archive insists that young rebels
depatriate to Tashkent &
the junior shoppers to our Queen's most kin
Kinderlager . Players risking
amity as a new mode of being
exceed the limits ; a commons .

*

Something happens but must keep happening .
moments yearn to persist ; a wish'd
for irruption of the unbuilt against

dense ambient normality
that weighs . Concussion grenades can do one ;
a Mummers' Play amongst dice &
Emo's grubbing at throwing-stones & skate
royalty hurling themselves square
against gravity & the phalanx for
defunct Freddy Vaillanueva .

*

Megalexandros is the Decembrist
excesss ; this fleeting transcendence
of commonweal prose terrain that prescribes
barely living as status quo .
The huge Christmas tree is on fire despite
the de-sanctify'd common room .
He lives so let them demonize nomad
freebooters aestheticizing
life crisis ; pseudo nodal points calling
for one last nativity truce .

—originally published in *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis*, ed. Theodoros Chiotis (London: Penned in the Margins, 2105).

KYOKO KISHIDA

TRANSLATED BY GEORGE ECONOMOU

Degenerate Girls Were My Girlfriends

I like the fracturing of linearity
Art that involves more senses
Asking questions non-stop
To row with gusto
to beautifully dressed scenes
Leading clichés around by the hand
Streetfights, codes, hunts
The worst enemies burrowing in deep
The curtain back in the skyline's coming apart
The Degenerate Girls won't
tell you they were there
They've set sail on shrinking
oceans for some time now
Their salted eyes
tighten luminous hostilities
Strobe-lighten thunderclaps
for poorly tailored outfits

—from *Austerity Measures*, ed. Karen Van Dyck, Penguin UK, 2016

THEODOROS CHIOTIS

Zones of Frequency

1.

‘Let it be told
to the future world’:

We will still be able to breathe
when the air turns thicker.

We are learning from Doctor Moreau
the codes needed to assemble new faces.

2.

Summer soldiers
twilight zealots
homes turned into barracks.

All these are echoes of previous years:

‘We did not make proper use of
last winter,
neither could we,
while we were in a dependent state’

3.

Play Grand Theft Auto.
Lie on the ground.
Don't cause trouble.

An invasion, described in a once familiar language:

'If you are not contributing to (the) movement
then why are you here?'

4.

Give (your) body
to what does not resemble you.

You might think otherwise but
Psycho was never about hygiene.

5.

Instructions:

Sit still.
Displace the mirth.
Break the meeting.
Occupy all four hemispheres.
Repeat something that did not exist until now.

6.

A map for a new respiratory system.
Nitrous oxide replaced by tear gas.
Our head and face boundaries collapse.

Now: cut across the canvas.

SELF-TRANSLATED

—originally published in *Solidarity Park Poetry* (for #direngeziparki
#occupygezi), 2013.

ELENI PHILIPPOU

Simera

Elafonisos —
transparent the sea,
smothered in mottled starfish and black urchins.
I sit in my plastic tent, door flapping madly
a northern wind beats back from the German nudists
who occupy the beach, penises hanging,
shriveled crimson things.
I stare.
Each chalky pebble, round as a deficit nought.

Cheap cheap, sing the birds. The cicadas hum,
Not even your sea. Not even your sea.

*

In Attica,
from the hotel rooftop
I watch the erection of tents.

Your people carrying banners and rough signs.
They come in waves and wash the grey cement
with the paraffin grit of MOlotovs.

They break upon the shoreline
of police shields,
the tainted words *drachmi* and *dollaria*.
Euro.

*

As you enter the ward you pay your *fakelaki* —
pearl-white casing for an ashen owl face —
and the doctor listens to the watery murmur in your chest,
and it beats and it beats,
but only because you paid to make it beat.

MAYAKOV+SKY PLATFORM



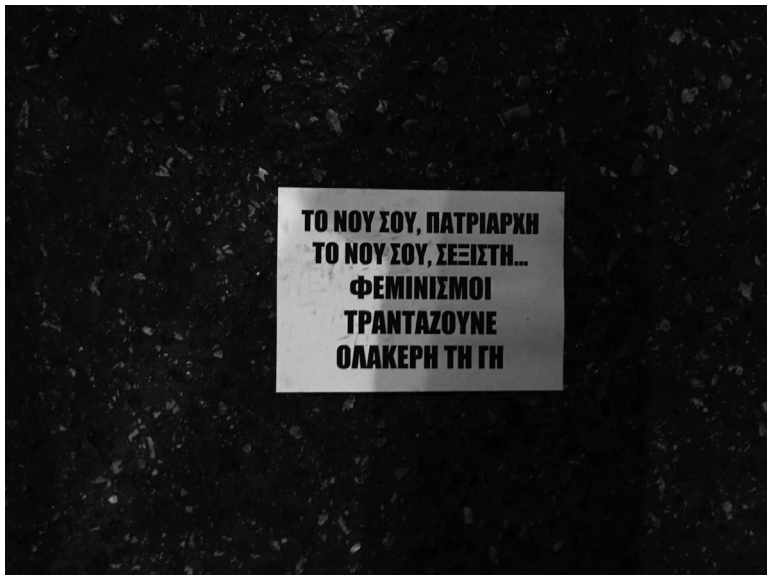












ΤΟ ΝΟΥ ΣΟΥ, ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗ
ΤΟ ΝΟΥ ΣΟΥ, ΣΕΙΣΤΗ...
ΦΕΜΙΝΙΣΜΟΙ
ΤΡΑΝΤΑΖΟΥΝΕ
ΟΛΑΚΕΡΗ ΤΗ ΓΗ







CASSANDRA TROYAN

from *What Remains*

This work of mourning
every day the city a new scar
how we learn from each other
we break and trace new paths

We went around to ask everyone
what they thought they had seen
all versions of familial records
we make maps that stretch
across our bodies to see
where they overlap
where they repeat and resonant
a non-history
of categories stacked
in density mobile traditions

We create another ceremony
We sit in the room facing forward
 making small sounds
since we cannot look at anyone
we are permitted to cry
 as our weeping bodies
 make a rustling that begins quietly
 slowly gaining in heat and friction
 the entire building vibrating
 shifting in landscapes
 territories continents
 until the dead are with us

This is not a fantasy
we are in the room with the dead
but we could hardly remember them
and yet we knew every name

Our resistance
how does it devastate
and mark us
no more healing as justice
no more compromises
to steal away a cyclical motion
of harm

How you'd wear the night
on your arm
all the beauty in your refusal
your bravery pushing through us
when we thought we couldn't go on
 "a feather of the time" you spoke
 while we cut the world in stars
and told ourselves its not the end
 to not relinquish
 to not retreat

Birds piles social accumulations and
what revives what kills
when all the parts keep slipping
 past us
 architecture cracking
 rust piss complacency
sometimes our limbs fall off
or they are removed purposely
to be replaced
 with a better instrument
our skin peeling away in thick slabs

We form chains of tensile structures
growing and shrinking
through teething
we dread these moments
but accept the saliva as a salve
predatory yet potent
erotic assimilations
we stack in the sky
feeding in the air
others are nearby at different levels of interaction—
sometimes enemies sometimes friends or
both

To collide with others who
 have seen terrains we
 couldn't imagine
 have killed thousands
but have no tactile memory

Dramatically they strike
from the sky
we no longer fear repression
generally quiet
we remain undetected until our shadows
 flood the water
 until we are overcome
 with this feeling of
 the time you were
the most alone
revenge rises up in the back
of your throat
entices dissimilarities
 in the dark
unloved
obliterate the signal
to no longer refuse the truth
because of its power to destroy
 like any good hunter
 a disrespectful scavenger
 a thief caught in prolonged soaring

HEATHER FULLER

from *Baltimore Notebook: Drone Edition*

mission creep

the God particle is in my B-movie body
in my mind the great collider

survival so much like free money
and snake oil on the back end
near bout what we deserve

so sorry
science beats the piss
out of romance

karma drone

taps turned south and my stoop
sitting countenance distant

I drank the water of Baltimore and thirst
multiplied into an army of appetites

where is my earring? where is my shoe?
pairs divide and reassemble

I asked for it
this sleep of knocked about bedrock

as for the personal bestiary:
beats me

draper drone

despite the biospill brigade
fantasy lingers

even in frock coat
hatpin
backseams
button-down
we are inappropriate
touching through steamer trunks
perpetually passing through

sharks winter in warm water around the nuclear plant

when all the while
heartstrung lips

pocket stuffed with cookie fortunes

drone eclipse

first class shadow puppets play out
hillbilly ribaldry taking the rich
too much for granted hogging
the oxygen before helping
our neighbor

super blue blood moon
is neither blue nor bloody
but there for your viewing pleasure
in the no-frills seating

OMAR PIMIENTA

TRANSLATED BY JOSE ANTONIO VILLARÁN

from *The Gradual Invasion*

1.

We grew up in la Colonia Libertad truce zone in the gradual invasion
at the kingdom's limit

some went to be born over there others we waited for a second wave
we trained since we were children in the dust
ghost town facades remnants of the titanic
fictitious sceneries of what awaited us

we learned their customs on VHS
free memberships to the first hundred

we ate watermelon looked straight at the camera
our faces stained
we waited to be called to the front

their churches arrived little by little
their cable TV their radio their toys

we learned to shoot with their video games
to recognize our inexhaustible lives
we repeated in hushed voices
in front of the screens the beginnings of their language
we lined up/infiltrated

the political treaties arrived
the militarization of the border
what we knew would happen
was cemented in concrete

the communiqués were confusing
back up/forward/forward/back up
wait for new orders

we cut off communication
started our own little private wars
divided our fronts
school/traffic/work

we entered their classrooms
universal history classes health chicano studies
camouflaged in the silence of the back seats
we dug swam flew
we got cars across
one after the other up to the pistons with blow
with books with people with fruit

we welded boats in their workshops
fixed their engines put together their turbines
with their metric system their engineering

day in day out we moved slowly
we went out with the sun
came back to sleep
on the weekends or holidays

Tijuana's lights could be seen over Palm Street's slope
an endless line in retreat on the 805 or the 5

a city that awaits those who return victorious
several others we got lost in battle

at the end of the century's first decade
fallen heroes by the thousands came back
with their boot strings in their hands
a plastic bag with belongings
speaking a language filled with codes
deportees/refugees/repatriated
marked of skin and memory

thousands had arrived like that
don Marcos arrived like that
a hundred years before fifty twenty-five

we concentrated on the river banks
in the truce zone at the kingdom's limit
to eat watermelon
look straight at the cameras
reorganize the gradual invasion
of two cities that no longer

recognized us.

5.

We have a beautiful sea of shit
people standing perpendicular to the shore guarding a wall
awaiting the next shift
a tsunami to drag us to San Diego

a sea of shit that the whole city flows into
when el niño comes and cries for days and nights

we have cardboard houses that float to the sea
a sea of shit
our shit and their shit and others' shit
from which once my mother's ghost pulled me out by the hairs

a sea of shit californian Pacific

cold most of the time
though it might seem strange that shit can be cold

a snatch ocean with phosphorus waves
that lights the bodies at night

sea that sucks and spits
a knife that cuts its tongue

a sea of shit that presumes its citizenry
crosses the posts and comes back

sand that dilutes the names
of all of us who see the horizon
with our noses covered
at the edge of the first border.

11.

I filled don Marcos' truck with beer and ice
exchange rate: 7.80 x 1 1560 pesos of alcohol-purchasing power

party in the shop from sunset to sunrise

back then I used to work welding war ships in San Diego
red Toyota sticker of Guevara in the gas tank
the migra: you like che?

Where to?

yes to work at the
shipyards

when I became a gringo
the officer asked why I did it
I would make more dollars on the USS Enterprise nuclear carrier
I had lost my greencard and couldn't return to Tijuana
you know Tijuana is a place one can miss

he didn't make me swear anything
don Marcos had already done that for me
he had finished his journey North from Tecolotlán
by requesting that his son become a citizen
by dropping me off at City College
with 50 bucks for my Chicano Studies books

when I became gringo I was young and stupid
but I never got a tattoo of el Che
the greencard replacement arrived and I sold it for 200 bucks

now I understand things better
I have matured I teach art and Spanish classes

I still throw cheap parties
When I cross the border they ask me:
 what do you do for a living?

 I respond:
 I build destroyers.

—from *The Album of Fences*, Cardboard House Press, 2018

LASANA M. SEKOU

Hurricane Protocol poems

What follows is a selection of “Hurricane Protocol” poems, written with unaccustomed reluctance. Sketches of observations, memory recovery exchanges about personal, familial, and community experiences during the passing and aftermath of Hurricane Irma.

On September 6, 2017, St. Martin was struck by the Category 5 hurricane, the most destructive natural disaster recorded for the Caribbean island. About 90% of the island’s homes and natural environment was devastated by the storm—dashing electricity and communication lines to the ground, closing water supply, felling trees, ripping roofs from houses, schools, and hotels and other businesses, destroying or disrupting at length all ports, polluting wetlands. For St. Martin’s people, the passing of the equally powerful Hurricane Maria on September 19 added a heightened sense of terror to the catastrophic “cut-ass&wreckage” from Irma. The overall destruction and recovering “value” is billed in the billions of USA dollars. St. Martin is, historically, since the unholy centuries of Slavery, a nation of one people but divided politically. The island’s southern half is a territory of the Netherlands; the northern part is a territory of France.

Missing from these poems are more references drawn directly from “local,” regional, and international news and social media; from the economic advantage taken by the powerful and the greedy “*in this short-lage time of everything that they*” too “*prey& pilfer*”; and from the codes of political procedures and conduct in the colonies and from the countries holding fast to the colonies in miserly fashion: Dutch, French, British, American. Therein probably lies the persistent feeling of reluctance about these poems that are more about personal, familial, community accounts (new “territories” for me) than the socio-political (a preference). The eventful

Atlantic Hurricane season of 2017 garnered global attention. Along with the “Charismatically Caribbean” St. Martin, the hurricanes, particularly Irma and Maria, affected millions of people and ravaged most of the countries, islands, territories along the region’s northeastern/Greater Antilles “arc”: Dominica, Guadeloupe, Barbuda, St. Barths, Anguilla, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Turks and Caicos, Cuba, The Bahamas ...

The images that tenant these poems are of a cyclonic provenance that has generated the loss of human life and ongoing displacement; destruction to homes and livelihood, to what was already a largely fragile infrastructure, an even more sensitive domestic food production and practically non-existent reserve, and to a highly stressed natural environment. Many of us are in recovery mode, some too painfully slow, some barely at all, well into 2018. In these poems—reaching out of trauma, hopefully with healing substance, hollering from St. Martin—there might be heard kindred voices from the region’s various storm-strong nations, people enduring against seemingly overwhelming odds, helping each other to bounce back in many unreported and underreported ways, kindred voices also from peoples and states of affected neighbors, Mexico, the USA ...

— Lasana M. Sekou
St. Martin, 2018

9.8.17

Hurricane Protocol

on the third day
we rise
again, from the ascension of dead pilings
throw way from high and low places
pressing on, as we were
since the cut-ass of wind&wreckage

water water water for everyone please.

9.14.17

Hurricane Protocol

it may come to this
such an aftermath of time
of the nameless, hourlessfullonging days after
and longing after what appears to be no end to a day
that you will see
roofless remains
of windowless panes
of unhinged doorlessness
of what was once upon a moment ago, known
as closed.belongings of unknown neighbors
now screen the leafless hillsides of broken branches&bared roots
and all about us
a breaching silence enters the thresholds
breaching the cleavage, the hallowed tender reach

the hollow that you thought was fleshed full already,
already baring to the brim with the family and friends
you had once upon a moment ago, known
but now it's a breastbone pressed to open
a valley to rest bare belongings of the unknown

you see nothing
you hear nothing
you speak nothing in the repeating pings of it all
you smell nothing
you sense nothing
you will
nothing.

9.18.17

Hurricane Protocol

a stray debris of boys
tiefing gas
from the corral of cars
encamped in the deading night
crawling through frayed people's yard
sucking it out like a marrow to fill
their empty bikes, to motor their days to no end
it is in this short-
age time of everything that they prey&
pilfer. and this subject of absence
it becomes the object
of desire.

the stray dog
that had wagged its young self
right out of the same storm
plays all day long
with any and everyone
and has fed into the yard's ownership,
it is in this short-
age time of everything, on these tiefing nights
he lays fast asleep.

11.8.17

Hurricane Protocol

2017 | the daily herald reports: looting in st. martin.
1648 | the concordia treaty records: looting of st. martin.

11.16.17

Hurricane Protocol

it was the pitch night 'n gale singing
a sweep of seawater fly 'cross the fishpond
bus' open the house
lick 'way the glass 'n the galvanize cut off,
a frigid wash up, all up under the quarters ah meh bed
'n 't push meh grown chil'ren back to meh
they groan, yes, 'n curl up)
Faader, how i wish i could bear them back in meh now.

how He hands mus' be.full of it with this world, cold
trembling 'n, *oui*
tossing high on pondwater deep, 'n vie floating in air
wading cross-eyed as cackling rafters appear
stark stares to the cracking shadows
of crackling ceiling bones, splintering
(wait!let me think.what color was that sky again? ...
wading...wading...holding on 'n wading
wading 'til morning come.like a water bag *bus*!
neighbors deliver us down to ground.

one ah meh chil'ren dem
is still up there.

11.30.17 Hurricane Protocol

lead ben'
season en'

[A take on "Lead (metal) ben', story en'," a term that signals the end of a St. Martin folk tale. St. Martin pronunciation: ben' = bend; en' = end. Regarding the date reference, the annual Atlantic Hurricane season ends November 30.]

AZAD SHARMA

from *Against the Frame*

Everything has slipped away
Those sanctimonious pirates have come
into the algebra of the ballot box.
to put dream works on steel slats
Paper becomes shattered glass
detaining these limbless orphans
crushed under turntables of
in the name of security from
navels

This montage is a garb for unfreedom
it stipends our blood to loan sharks
and weeps against the grain.
It frightens us with pennies in its foaming mouth
biting down onto our burgundy passes
like bullets in a kidney | like mud on an

At the breaking point
every newborn will wheeze
with gunshots for economics.
We will blame each other
as others for joblessness
and for borderless dividends.
The media descends
into the known chaos
pointing its shriveled white finger
with the cocksureness of VAT for

In the academies,
this will all become a trauma
In Barking they're fit for purpose:
or a loss or a memory
mad with rage at foreign objects,
or an exhibition of
eyesores for un-empathic

The watercloth took me
Each orifice poked and prodded by the white latex
into a new neurology,
made to cough, squat, gut wrenched,
I felt compressed and
checked for explosives in the airport cubicle
bathypelagic like
we all sit around wanting to talk
an uncontrolled urban spread
about our conversations but not listening to each other.
forced into a point
We pretend to lend ears but our minds are dallying
lugging this burden of staying
as if with circumstance this is the 7th degree of separation
still
when we're all one word away from screaming to be
heard

I washed up as human contraband
greeted by hazmats on the sandbanks
left under tarpaulin at the mercy
of your disinfectant sprays & orderly

I wore my hair proudly
as a seashell necklace
swimming in endless colourful coral.
I swam across shores
to find the pearl that will
liberate me from this ghusl's penance.

—from *Against the Frame*, Barque Press, 2017

EILEEN R. TABIOS

Red Joy (excerpts)

(from The MDR Poetry Generator)

An Introduction to MDR

“Murder, Death and Resurrection” (MDR) is a project more than five years in the making. It includes “The MDR Poetry Generator” which contains a database of 1,167 lines that can be combined randomly to make a large number of poems; the shortest would be a couplet and the longest would be a poem of 1,167 lines.

The MDR Poetry Generator’s conceit is that any combination of its 1,167 lines succeeds in creating a poem. While the poems cohere partly by the scaffolding of beginning each line with the phrase “I forgot...” (a tactic inspired by Tom Beckett’s fabulous poem “I Forgot”), they also reflect long-held interests in abstract and cubist language as a means to interrogate English, whose narrative once was a colonizing tool over my birth land, the Philippines. Through my perceptions of abstraction and cubism, I’ve written poems whose lines are not fixed in order and, indeed, can be reordered (when I first started writing as a poet, I was very interested in the prose poem form and in writing paragraphs that can be reordered within a poem). The fluidity of the poetic lines is the opposite of the fixed orders presented by colonial narrative.

Whenever I disrupt conventional uses of English—from linear narrative to normative syntax to dictionary definitions—I view the result as poetry for transforming language into its own—and stripped of its past as a tool for damage.

Yet while the MDR Poetry Generator presents poems that can be generated at random, the results are not distanced from the author: I created the 1,167 lines from reading through 27 previously-published poetry collections—the title’s references to murder, death and resurrection reflect the idea of putting to death the prior work, only to resurrect them into something new. But if randomness is the operating system for new poems, those new poems nonetheless contain all the personal involvement—and love!—that went into the writing of its lines. The results dislocate without eliminating authorship. It is significant that I do not disavow authorship. There have been forces out there (e.g. “the author is dead”) that would erase the subjectivity of a poet (and any other artist) of color. Identity may ever be in flux, but the “I” always exists. None of my poems can exist unless I—with all my ruptures, flaws, and memory gaps—existed to write them. As José García Villa, the Philippines’ foremost English-language poet in the 20th century once declared, *HAVE COME, AM HERE*.

—Eileen R. Tabios

Red Joy

1.

I forgot how I looked directly into his eyes where irises cracked to illuminate the luster of rubies seeking their way to surface.

I forgot how, not hiding the slide of my gaze from one dime-shaped, reddened pitted mark to another, I replied, “Yes, I’ve never seen such effervescent light.”

I forgot the grandfather who willingly faced a fire, fist trembling at the indifferent sky.

2.

I forgot the grandfather who stood before the fire rushing through a legacy untouched by 300 years of Spanish colonialism.

I forgot the light burned and we never shaded our eyes.

I forgot fevers refusing to abate even when drenched with seawater.

3.

I forgot tipping Bing cherries into a blue bowl until I lost the sky to a crimson moon’s overflow.

I forgot dancing furious flamenco with vultures under a menopausal sun.

I forgot learning to appreciate rust, and how it taught me bats operate through radar.

4.

I forgot your betrayal that forever marks me like a heart's tattoo blossoming painfully against an inner thigh.

I forgot the colors of a scream: the regret of crimson, the futility of pink, the astonishment of brown.

I forgot a good day can be approximated by eating a red apple while strolling through white snow.

5.

I forgot color is also a narrative.

I forgot I lit alleys by leaving scarlet roses whose perfume, I hoped, you would discern.

I forgot you saw a bottle of Apollonio Riserva 1997, and recalled how the wine's jammy presence puckered my lips to your huge but hidden delight. I floated in your orbit then, though I looked elsewhere, ignorant of gravity's logic.

6.

I forgot you saw each virgin moon as a ruby you wanted for adorning my body.

I forgot a tapestry fabric called *Marley* from whose complex greenery small red blooms occasionally and always tastefully burst.

I forgot suckling wine from your lips, then biting, then swallowing

earth, leather, currants, gravel, tobacco, oak and plums to release the same voluptuous tears familiar to Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning who loved through 573 letters before bearing a son they nicknamed with much affection, “Pen.”

7.

I forgot it was not a blood teardrop—simply, the last red pepper hanging from a string in front of a white wall.

I forgot the plasticity of recognition, e.g. silk, moonlight, velvet, crème brulee, honey on fingertip, awkward blood.

I forgot how to long for rose petals yawning like little girls, like the daughters I never bore.

8.

I forgot diving so deeply into salty seas I witnessed coral form skyscrapers upside down as they narrowed towards the molten center of earth.

I forgot “Geisha” lipstick clung to nights jousting at the West End Bar (New York City) when jazz still rained and reigned.

I forgot “civilized satiation” are words, not existence, though I had peeled away years to narrow the mutuality of our gaze into this moment when I finally ask, “How long must the sunrise remain between my thighs?”

9.

I forgot painting a floor red with my hair. I forgot backing myself into a corner: when you appeared to grasp my throat, your greedy footprints completed my painting.

I forgot nights lactating morphine, roses rebelling against the aftermath of blooming, and vampires about to sin.

I forgot lurking forever in a red telephone booth to look up at rain and your window.

10.

I forgot the sparseness of iridescence.

I forgot Tequila Corazon de Agave alchemized from the heart of blue agave bred in the rich, red soil of the “Highlands” in Arandas, Jalisco, Mexico.

I forgot the redhead during Verdi.

11.

I forgot apples rotting on a lawn.

I forgot reading lips through a mirror.

I forgot rouged nipples.

12.

I forgot magenta *does* exist in Geneva.

I forgot her red-rimmed eyes denoted the exhausted pace of a replicating light-year.

I forgot boats burning where fire bloomed roses in the middle of an ocean.

SPREE MACDONALD
Colony Collapse Syndrome

as we squat through slum
rise slum set
in this labor hood of Atlantis
I wonder how much sun one needs
to see to say she's seen it set

this life in the house of bees
a simple stock fortified by light
oblique as it ends it seems
she gathers strength in fading

don't just expect to die
she sighs but
know that you'll also be
forgotten

these are the stories the dead
tell themselves

one night in exile
she made small circles
with her heels in the bedsheet
like a finger over crystal lips
she swirled until a slow-found
center coalesced into a sugar storm
flowed over our hovel
at the top of the stairs

so much unwaged
 labor boiled
 off into the wallpaper
she said

it's true it smelled
of boxes in there
soft power and echo chamber music
the semiotics of assault rifles
our shoulders dry rubbed
with anesthetic saltrash
and technocrats

now this poorly lit paradise
a Molotov wick soaked
in the oily abyss

so many small engines after dark
charge hard between herbicide lines in
febrile fight or flight
it seems this coast is the same
latitude as my dreams
dukkha music
growing
 eroding

I'm tired for tomorrow

—originally published in *Warscapes* & subsequently in
Milksop Codicil (Slapering Hol Press, 2017)

Gray

*"To enter cold gray
I painted myself gray.
And how I sparkled
in the cold gray"*

—Federico García Lorca

house poor in the 9th Ward
nose to the perigee breeze
it's blue-thirty and the day
has failed to develop its thesis
again
some places the details
dovetail but the theories keep
leaking
these ill-fit flights of energy
flippant affectations
in this small bone
nomenclature
I'm a complete flailure

little body little
mind
thank you for trying

but since we
mortgaged a piece of this mess
took possession
of this debt
I charge each day like a swinging
gate

while Anikulapo
death doula
vamps through the King Tide horizon

measured desperate
I'm outta my damp mind
this generation out in the streets
may they be liberated
from the cycle of birth and death
may I be the last lost bastard
to die so ordinary and obscure
an ancient gray cicatrix
throbbing in the shade shelter
quaking with the panic
of ancestors

may they fly a flag atop a
bamboo shoot
declare this
precipitate eternally on the breeze
may I wear this long
weekend into Tuesday
at least

some say if the gray god is enough
you'll feel it in your blood
some gray gris-gris
run right into rhythm

she says let's
take this technology of suffering
and smolder in it
with the dull persistence of a live
oak

floats forward into
an endless bow
 down
down
 down

deathless expression

 this method is greater
she whispers
 I'll meet you in the universe

HEATHER FULLER

this was preserved by someone / who thought it would be of use* ...
an introduction to Buck Downs' Unintended Empire

I always wanted to be a country music superstar. And then, in the early nineties, I met Buck Downs, and I wanted to be Buck Downs.

Buck Downs could belt out tunes better, and more endearingly, than most country music stars.

He also wore ankle-length sweater coats and trucker caps. He printed on a letterpress and made gravestone rubbings. He parallel parked his rust-limned pickup in Georgetown in front of Bridge Street Books after setting forth from his house in notorious Southeast, D.C.

He wrote in Rite in the Rain notebooks. He knew about pho, and he was privy to secret Masonic ceremonies. He had history with Andrei Codrescu in Baton Rouge. He made me a Karen Finley T-shirt.

He spoke of young'uns and laff riots and read *Jerkcity*. He saw the likeness of Slim Pickens in Edmund Berrigan, and Martin Short in Salvador Dali. He made his own envelopes.

He tipped me off to Chris Whitley's one-man shows on a sad coffeehouse circuit. He knew where to find the best candy in Chinatown. He shared confidences with Davi Det Hompson and David Franks.

He was the first familiar face I encountered on the morning of September 11, 2001, a little before 9 am, outside D.C.'s Union Station.

He relished *Washington Review* board dinners (termed, affectionately, “the feed bag”)—and Slurpees probably even more. He saw a void in the selective little enterprise we call publishing and filled it with Buck Downs Books.

And then, of course, there was the poetry.

Many know Buck Downs as The Postcard Poet. For the better part of the last three decades, poems on postcards have issued forth from POB 50376 or Burke Street, bearing a big, indelible kiss of grit and soul for the gifted recipient.

The moniker is apt. For Buck, the constraint of a 4 ¼” x 5 ½” canvas confers a suitable *mise en scène* for the tightly wound lyric at which the poet excels. The poem flexes its muscle and percusses in those parameters, a firecracker in a cookie tin, a single-shot Derringer that hits its mark.

Take “terry thought he’d been struck blind, but it was just a hallucination,” a postcard from 1998, which begins:

imagine having
a child you could not
see. on account of
a little dead child
in the way. a more or
less continual thing
like tripping.

The powder keg of aching loss meets a persistently altered physical or psychic state, a habitation to which Buck returns, well, habitually in his work. For those of us who do not demur from embracing poetry as a locus of meaning, the effect is intimate, heartbreaking, epiphanic. The punctuation and enjambment are deliberately precise. We pause; we take stock. We read on, with a sureness inspired by the lyric’s conviction.

Washington City Paper in “The Poem’s in the Mail” (June 26, 1998) described Buck’s postcards as reflective of “his mission to connect poetry to everyday life.” Buck told the Paper, “There’s an ethos of professionalism in poetry today that I find distasteful.” If Buck is not the arbiter of taste for contemporary poetry, he is at the very least one of its most ardent practitioners, with the faithful scattering forth of postcards, in snow, rain, heat and gloom, as testament.

The postcards as solo acts, however, encompass but one masterstroke in a disruptive creative outpouring. Part minstrel show, songster portfolio, tent revival confessional, and personal battleground, the *oeuvre* manifests in many forms: perfect-bound collections, hand-sewn chapbooks, occasional pamphlets, found word/image collage, epistolary art, typewritten stickers, poem shadowboxes and other adapted *objets*, newspaper clipping erasures, one-off target-audience commentaries, and, of course, hundreds of postcards, some tiny booklets in themselves, circulated to a lovingly curated mailing list.

These works fill several accordion files and represent nearly three decades. We in writerly circles often bandy about the term *ephemera* for work outside the published book milieu, pieces that blur the lines between literary and visual or tactile. The implication is that the pieces are not entirely representative or sustainable.

But in the world of Buck Downs, an ephemeron is not ephemeral. Pieces such as a poem typed onto an Indonesian “Ting Ting Jahe” candy wrapper then entombed inside a clear microcassette case, or “Top 10 Poets to Have a Crush On (1998)” printed on a packing slip [incidentally, Alice Notley ranked #1], or a Polaroid selfie of the poet standing in front of a poem spelled out in grade school multi-color plastic magnetic letters, typify the exuberance and tenacity of the maker’s hand.

The aforementioned postcard “terry thought ...” exemplifies the road trip any one of the single works may traverse. The poem eventually reappears

in the collection *Jones County*, an homage, intentional or not, to the vocal inflections of a remembered consciousness in the Gulf-bordered Southeast.

Jones County evokes the circuitous storytelling of lost rooms of relations gathered by a wood stove or screen door, and a struggle between country manners and worldly encroachment. The speaker evokes a cast of characters grappling for audibility in post-rockabilly terrain no longer charmed by AM radio and *Dixie*. As “Honky Tonkin Resolution” asserts:

I was standing on a bar
stool going I'll take
my stand but no one
heard what I was doing—
It was the sound of progress, eating its
babies & vomiting
the tradition.

Nonetheless, we as readers would do well not to reduce the work to a vernacular. Any person with an ear for language in the Southeast U.S. might concede that daily parlance is always a few degrees away from scripture, *patois* and dirty blues but also not bereft of book learning. Shakespeare and the Greek chorus figure as prominently as the laborer's song or brimstone from the pulpit in the rhythms of Southern spoken word. A guileless love for the act of speaking, of testing the weight of words, lies at the heart of this speech.

(As a child in North Carolina, I once thought my Aunt Virginia's entire vocabulary consisted of *druthers*, *reckon* and *yonder* until, awestruck, I heard her call a family squabble “a storm in a teacup.”)

Such inherent love for the democracy and performance of speech laces through Buck's collections and ephemera. Cadences of *Jones County* revisit or foreshadow *Marijuana Soft Drink*, *I Wanna Be Your Corin Tucker* and

New Personal Problem—but the effect is never wholly the same. Each work bears a distinct trace of the poet’s far-reaching curiosity. In Buck’s poetry, we discover the intelligence of a citizen who lives “inside the beltway,” takes possession of an iPhone, reads the essays of Dave Hickey, and revels in the comedy of Bill Hicks, among other lived progressions.

After all, Buck is a poet of D.C. as much as a child of the South. He has been a citizen of that city for more of his life than anywhere else, a devotee of its institutions such as the MLK Library, and an ardent supporter of its alternative culture, including the D.C. Arts Center performance space and gallery, Pyramid Atlantic printmaking and book arts studio, and the Black Cat music venue.

By the time Buck landed in D.C. in 1988, D.C. poetry was burgeoning. Tina Darragh, Lynne Dreyer, Peter Inman, Beth Joselow, Doug Lang, Tom Mandel, Joan Retallack, Phyllis Rosenzweig, Joe Ross, Rod Smith and Terence Winch were among writers associated with the D.C. avant-garde, originating in part from Douglas Messerli & Howard Fox’s *Sun & Moon* journal, Michael Lally’s Mass Transit reading series, Lang’s Folio reading series and Smith’s (with Wayne Kline) *Aerial* magazine.

At the same time in the city, poetry fans listened to Grace Cavalieri’s “Poet and the Poem” show weekly on public radio, Washington Writers’ Publishing House (co-founded by John McNally and Cavalieri) issued books by local poets, WordWorks hosted readings at the Miller Cabin in Rock Creek Park, the Library of Congress held poet laureate events, and E. Ethelbert Miller nurtured young poets from his base as director of Howard University’s African-American Resource Center and founder of the Ascension reading series. In addition, MFAs were hot, validating varying degrees of academic poets.

Buck could have gravitated to any number of scenes. He was a fixture at all manner of poetry events, and, in his own readings, his stage presence and

delivery captivated audiences of all ilk. He forged the deepest relationship, however, with D.C.'s avant-garde.

In 1995, *Washington Review* published a germinal interview ("You Can't Stop Us: Three Independent DC Publishers") of Buck, Rod Smith, and Mark Wallace, featuring Mary Swift's iconic photographs of the three. In the interview, Buck stated, "It's hard for me to understand why people wouldn't be interested in poetry with language that isn't like everyday language."

This sort of defense of "language" poetry probably also describes why Buck's work settles so soundly into the orbit of the avant-garde. Buck's poetry is like everyday language and not like everyday language. It is conceivable speech, devoid of pretext, but wrapped in complex, syncopated lyrical invention and no small portion of mystery. It surprises as much as it allows readers or listeners to identify.

As Buck continues in the interview, "... a lot of the enjoyment of poetry is having your expectations superseded by the reality of the poem." Buck's collections actualize this contention repeatedly, perhaps most engrossingly in *black peppermint*, a tour de force of precisely packed lines that jerk the rug out from under the reader's sense of juxtaposition and closure. In "rigor circuit," we read: "future former employer/employee / thunderpuss." In "trial after baby," Buck writes, "disposable lighter by day / inconsolable coal in the night."

The couplets are just plain addictive. Similar two-part stingers feature throughout Buck's body of work. *Rage Italic*, for one, challenges, "you can love me alone / or leave me alone." These succinct constructions represent Buck's work as a whole, wherein speakers draw us into what could resolve into a confessional of disenchantment, exhaustion and near-misses then subvert the thread with a head-bonk like "thunderpuss."

Poetry, and by extension culture, needs this kick in the head. Who better than a poet, history's presumptive word ninja, to deliver that kick?

Buck Downs is a poet, perhaps one of our last poets to embody the role so consummately. He walks the walk, as they say. We follow, rapt and enlivened.

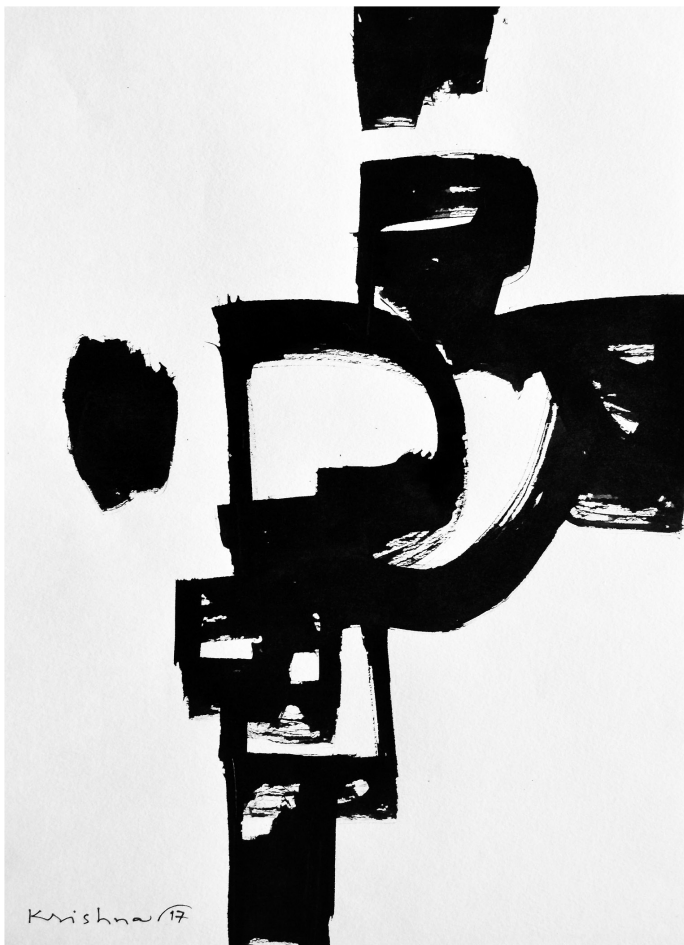
*from "rigor circuit"

Unintended Empire, forthcoming from Furniture Press Books, is a volume of Buck Downs' selected poems.

KRISHNA PULKUNDWAR

Eight works on paper

- 1 Untitled, 2017, Ink on paper
- 2 Untitled, 2017, Ink on paper
- 3 Untitled, 2017, Ink on paper
- 4 Untitled, 2017, Ink on paper
- 5 Untitled, 2018, Ink on paper
- 6 Untitled, 2017, Charcoal on paper
- 7 Untitled, 2017, Charcoal on paper
- 8 Untitled, 2017, Charcoal on paper

















SAMUEL SOLOMON

Karen Brodine: Materials from the archives

Karen Brodine (1947–1987) was born in Seattle into a radical family (her secular Jewish maternal grandmother, Harriet Pierce, who features in many of Brodine’s writings, was a member of the US Communist Party, as were other members of Brodine’s immediate and extended family) and was raised in Woodinville, Washington. She moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1960s to study dance at UC Berkeley, where she suffered a knee injury, at which point her creative efforts switched to poetry. In the mid-1970s, having studied for an MFA in writing at San Francisco State University, Brodine (along with her then lover and fellow student Sukey Durham as well as the writers Roz Spafford, Frances Phillips, and others) cofounded the SFSU Women’s Caucus. The caucus, which later came to be known as the Women Writers Union (WWU), was originally formed in an effort to change the structure of the English master’s oral exams so that they might include women and nonwhite writers. Through her work with the WWU, Brodine, along with Nellie Wong, Merle Woo, and others, joined Durham as members of Radical Women (RW) and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP), two affiliated socialist-feminist organizations in the Trotskyist tradition, launching the Bay Area branches of these organizations. Brodine’s work from this point on reflected the FSP’s and RW’s socialist-feminist orientation toward a revolutionary strategy that takes as its basic condition of possibility the feminization and racialization of the US working class in the context of neoliberal violence around the globe.

What follows are some unpublished pieces by Brodine. The first two pieces are outtakes from a poem called “No One Immune.” The poem was published in a four-part version in Brodine’s posthumous book *Woman Sitting at the Machine, Thinking* (1990), and these two pieces would have been the first and sixth parts of the poem had they not been cut from an earlier version

of the manuscript. In its published version, “No One Immune” describes various forms of right-wing violence: from Reagan’s spectacular paranoia about the “red menace” and the cruel scapegoating of the victims of the AIDS crisis to the rise of Nazi propaganda in the Northwest US and the (then unsolved) Green River Killer case in which at least forty-eight women and girls were murdered by serial killer Gary Ridgway. The two pieces printed here—“War games and the army of god” and “Defense”—similarly take on mass-mediated attacks against leftists, women, and workers, from the U.S.-backed “contras” in Nicaragua to abortion clinic bombers to, finally the British miners and their communities fighting Thatcher’s police squads. These two poems have been generously shared by my FSP comrade Helen Gilbert, editor of Red Letter Press (RLP) and Brodine’s literary executor. RLP published *Woman Sitting at the Machine, Thinking*, after many feminist and other presses rejected the manuscript.

Following these poems is a single typewritten sheet of paper titled “Sabotage” that I found among Brodine’s teaching papers in Box 3 of her Papers at the LGBTQIA Centre of the San Francisco Public Library. The page seems to comprise Brodine’s notes for a public reading or performance. Here, we find in condensed form Brodine’s perspective about writing about work, and about the forms of sabotage that her work as a photo-typesetter enabled her to do: “running off my poems on the company Xerox machine, or copying materials about the union... sneaking words into the memory of the machine.”

Author’s note: for more of my writing on Brodine (including reference to archival materials), see my “Offsetting Queer Literary Labor.” GLQ 24.2–3 (forthcoming March 2018).

No One Immune

1. War games and the army of god

Threats of invasion flooding the press
imaginary weapons in ghost ships
pacing the waters toward us
our planes strafing the land with shadows
yet the Nicaraguans are "paranoid"

The globe from space, glowing green and complete,
on the tv screen, each country connected to
another by the ground beneath our feet. Divided,
we stand, peering through barbwire.

A net streams contradictory to the earth's surface
surrounds the world like a huge noose,
or suffocating web.

Lies zoom over the airwaves, flashing up
to distant satellites, and back. Contras
are "freedom fighters" and death means democracy.

The invisible planes sweep low their sonic booms
swing low swift chariot
It is rumored we will probably not
invade will invade won't invade
The metal chariot grinds forward.

6. Defense

The great myth--the disease
of communism spreading out
over the air waves like poison
slowly seeping
take those who contaminate away

"I was a pacifist for twenty years," he said
"but now, these attacks on the clinics?
It's a fight to the death."

British coalminers, wives,
fighting cops and scabs,
with potatoes studded with nails,
bows and arrows, spears,
with rocks, with hands.

SABOTAGE

writing about work is a form of sabotage. *writing about this. Sec. truthfully
get to be snuggled,
sabotage.*

stealing, another. running off my poems on the company
xerox machine, or copying material about the union

saying the way things really are. WORKING *this is my life. it is worth
re-ording.*

you can't walk up to the boss and say you'd like to knock
him out the window so you go home and write a poem
about knocking him out the window.

wanting to
sneaking words into the memory of the machine.)

the concept of sabotage. the concept of telling the truth.
the people in his books wanted the truth told about their lives.
writing can be dangerous.

(Folsom Prison Writing Workshop. too effective.
women's prison Women's House of Detention in NY. as soon
as the poetry got political, began to talk about conditions,
it was stopped. smuggling in teabags, smuggling out words.
a method of organising.

writing about work often feels like smuggling out words.
my dream about how they put me at a round desk so they
could watch over my shoulder at all times and make sure
of what I was typing.

.....

the details of people's lives. how the telephone operator says
it isn't her arms that hurt, its her mouth that hurts after
talking all day. *(dreams - revolutions - what we have lost in our history)*

so read work poems/ talk about that poem and how we had to do
a propaganda booklet for the telephone company on how great their
affirmative action program is. *advertising is lying. exposing the lie.*

end with the poem about my grandmother and explain how I'm talking
about the will to survive. her strength, my 'year of being Harriet'
how she fights back against death how I connect to her strength
when I think of fighting back, or trying to change things. how
death makes her angry. how anger is necessary in order to fight
back.

LESLIE KAPLAN

From *Excess-The Factory, 4th Circle*

TRANSLATED BY JULIE CARR & JENNIFER PAP

The young woman is there, infinite.

Things in the room, you see them. Colors stand out.

The buffet is brown, the tablecloth is red, the sofa is green.

The curtains are white. Blue tiles on the floor. Yellow walls, so many colors.

The bottle is on the ground, it's not important.

The young woman is sitting, in front of the door. She's talking to her dogs. She is blond, bleached hair. You look at her. She has an apron that wraps around her body.

She is there, on her chair. Skirt and sweater, and over it, the apron.

The body is underneath. Everything is there, everything.

Her legs hang off the chair. Legs, soft. On her feet are square shoes, a little heavy.

The chair is in the street. All around, that black space.

The sky passes.

The young woman is there, sitting.

The apron ties behind, you've seen it. The face is marked, empty traces. Skirt and sweater, and the full forms of the body.

One is pulled, one is pulled very far.

The street is open under the sky of the factory.
Soft open street. The paving stones, all the same.

The entrance gates are very high, splendid.

Weightless carcass, disarticulated and full,
being there, in the courtyard, it is there, the factory.

Parts, scraps and life, the factory.
And brick and tile. And in and out.
And right and left and brick and tile and soft and fat and turn and
turn and life and life and wood and nail and iron and iron and in and
out and turn and noise.

Never a cry. The factory.

Parts scraps and life, the factory, and iron and iron and life and life
and brick and tile and in and out and life and life and nail and nail.

You don't know, you can't know.

The street is a street under the sky of the factory.

You enter the courtyard.

You see the crates. The boards are there, laid out.
Blue plastic tarps at the back.

You enter the courtyard.

In a corner, the staircase. The staircase is iron, fragile.

Above, the line floats.

You go up.

The staircase is fragile. Iron, how wretched.

Your foot is on the step, open sky. The iron is so thin.

You go up. The woman in front wears a raincoat.

You go up. The sexes are separated.

The men stay below.

Across is the machine shop where the presses are. You never go there.

The line is above, floating.

You look at the woman in front. She has a full waist.

You love her, you love her so much.

You go up by the iron stair.

The street is below.

The staircase is fragile. You rest a little on the landings, you see the pillars.

The landings are made of wood. You go up.

There are pillars at every floor.

Above, the line, floating.

You look at the woman in front. You know her raincoat, you know that fabric.

You're in the workshop with the assembly line.
You're sitting down. The line is going to start.
Palpable air, blank memory.
You're there, you're sitting. Stool. Cartons.

The ceiling is very high. There are pillars.
The workshop floats a little. Thick air, high ceiling.
The line moves on, flat, in the middle of the boxes.

The boxes are easy, you make them with your hands.
Your hands are somewhere else. You think. Thought is sticky.
All around, the workshop.
In the thick air, under the high ceiling, you make boxes, you think.

Thought doesn't come out, it stays inside.
Nothing is taken apart. You think.

High ceilings, pillars. You are in the thick air.
Hands are somewhere else, you think a sticky thought.
You look, you think.

From the line, you look.

Your eyes are open. Around your eyes, space.
Space is silent. Holes of noise, holes of noise everywhere.
Open, in the silent and noisy texture of space, the eyes see.

The silence of the crates is terrible. In the body, all this noise.

The eyes are there, they never stop seeing.

Thick and soft air. Hands are on the boxes,
thought moves on the inside.

The cardboard is easy, it folds easily. Nothing is detached, you make.

The body is in space. In the body, the long thought and ceaselessly,
the little noises.

Things are gripped, thickness of the air.

The vaulted arch above, the high arch.

The air is red, it's the workshop. Outside it might rain. The supervisor walks the length of the line. She shows her wide skirt and her gold teeth. Curved walls, rounded. The workshop is there, entire.

—from *Excess—the Factory*,
forthcoming from Commune Editions, 2018.

KATERINA GOGOU

From Now Let's See What You're Going to Do: Poems 1978-2002

TRANSLATED BY ANGELOS SAKKIS

1.

Our life is jack-knifings
in dirty dead-end streets
rotten teeth faded slogans
a basso backstage basement
smells of piss and antiseptic
and rotten sperm. Torn-up posters.
Upanddown. Upanddown Patisision.
Our life is Patisision Street
The detergent that won't pollute the sea
and Mitropanos* sang his way into our life
but he's been swallowed by Dexameni*
like all the expensive dames.
We stay with it.
A craven life we travel
always the same route.
Humiliation-loneliness-despair. And back.
O.K. We're not crying. We've grown up.
Only when it rains
we secretly suck our thumb. And we smoke.
Our life is
pointless panting
at pre-programmed strikes
stooges and patrol cars.
That's why I'm telling you.

Next time they'll let us have it
we shouldn't run. We should hold our line.
Let's not sell our asses so cheap, man.
Don't. It's raining. Gimme a smoke.

3.

My own friends are blackbirds
who play see-saw on roofs of crumbling houses
Exarchia, Patisia, Metaxurgio, Metz.*
They do whatever comes along.
Peddlers of cookbooks and encyclopedias
they build roads and connect deserts
barkers for Zinonos Str. dives
professional rebels
cornered in the old days and forced to
 drop their pants
now they swallow pills and alcohol to sleep
but they have dreams so they don't sleep.
My own women-friends are taut wires
on roof terraces of old houses
Exarchia, Victoria, Koukaki, Ghizi.
You've pinned on them a million steel clothes' pins
your guilt, party-meeting decisions, borrowed dresses
cigarette burn-marks, strange headaches
threatening silences, vaginitis
they fall in love with gays
trichomonas, late-periods
the telephone the telephone the telephone
broken glasses and no one for an ambulance.
They do whatever comes along.
My friends are always on the move
because you haven't given them an inch.
All my friends paint with black
because you've debased the red for them
they write in a symbolic tongue
because your own's only for ass-licking.

My friends are blackbirds and wires
in your hands. At your throat.
My friends.

17.

The 4 points of the horizon
Above. Below. Right. Left.
Above, the sky and the things we aimed for.
– They come at night and mock us
 in our dreams.
Below, the earth and things aiming at us
– they shovel dirt over us even before we're done.
Right, tourist islands banks and rock
– offering us electroshock in the arms of
 Raquel Welch.
Left, the ghost of Russia driving a Mig-25
is chasing us with a big rubber stamp
– and we collect tiny bits of our perseverance
for the party verdicts at the Moscow Trials.

.....
The neighborhood dime-store
to catch a breath
but even here I've got to pay
for the shopkeeper's tolerance
an ex-cop selling the "People's Struggle"*
I don't know what to buy so as not to be
 an accomplice. Understand?
The 4 points of the horizon
Dressed as banks pilots Marxists nurses
are chasing us. I have to make a call.
What's the number?
Where can I stop and take a single breath?
They've set us up everywhere.
The cops trapped by the gun
women by their sex

Justice by the laws
organizations by their dissidents
doctors by electroshock.
Yes. Let's go to the Ilion movie theater tonight.
There the heroes have red cheeks
and always win in the end.

20.

Hired labor – capital
imperialism the supreme stage of capitalism
the betrayed revolution
ah, comrade, how much we miss you...
Time's gotten full of worms
nuclear tests, people's fronts, whorehouses
(and Portugal fallen too)
the super-productions of the Catholics and the Mafia
become multinationals, they don't let us love
comrade.

Stooges come up our stairs
soccer-field dogs, anytime they want to
they can pull our pants down and fuck us
peaceful co-existence and socialism in one country
ah, comrade, if you only knew the heavy load
we're carrying...

No one could endure the Moscow trials
you were left all alone
and the people were tired, that's where they hit.
You know it, why tell you?
And then they finked. You know it, why tell you?
In China, January '77, they butcher workers
and that arrives here like a poem by Mao
(they put the blame on individuals again) ah, comrade
why weren't you more careful?
Here it's the same. People hide in their shells.
There are 2 K.K.'s and thousands the hermaphrodite
"revolutionaries."

If you're a little bit loose you pass over to the other side.
But don't worry. We'll make it.

It's just that every so often I get tired too,
and I don't have a job, I feel like crying
 like right now
and that's when I miss you more than ever
when I "scold" you for not being more careful
and when I'm not ashamed to cry
and write poems
comrade, you who never betrayed
we're experiencing barbarity itself.

23.

A fully round sun of May
and a big wind
cross each other on my forehead
mixing political pamphlets
some extra pounds and years piling up
songs by, Savvopoulos*
my eyes – where are they? where are my eyes?
each day I'm learning to reject
what I believed in yesterday.
What will you shout dying
Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg
the Kronstadt myth and the myth of Sisyphus.
Flowers and colors
revolvers and homemade bombs
meaningless movements – the same food
 on my teeth –
five plastic fingers are squeezing my throat.
I'm going crazy from my own
and my friends' dreams, with repeated breakdowns
hysterical weeping, vomiting from drunkenness
 and loathing
suicide attempts and useless resolutions
about a different life.
An endless parade of barbiturates
maintain a sick balance
between you and me.
And up. And down.
And out back and on the side
the system – the rotten system's to blame
even my cat knows that

the system that squeezes
the money they spit
two by two they “turn on” and disappear
comrades got old waiting
the kids – what big eyes the kids have –
riot squads, drugstores, taxis, the monopolies
the imperialism between us
I can’t make love to you
or anybody else. I’m 3 years now on the list
 of the unemployed.
Let’s not kid ourselves.
If we don’t sign the paper they want
we won’t be able to make a single decision.
Night is falling.
The central committee
kowtows to the Maoists.
Night is falling.
The television commentator’s
winking at me.
Night is falling even more.
I’m still hanging in there.
I’m not signing.
Long live the 204th Internationale.

31.

Rotten. / Rotten themes / moldy volumes
 devious libraries
bootlicking words slave words / frame-up jobs
fraudulent words
our life here is a bull
a thousand little fascist knives stuck in him
he vomits black our own blood
and you go on painting still-lives
and past-prime book editions making money for
 the tourist office.

Political parties—punctuation marks
ecology—ancient forerunners show us the way
only on the reverse
the good ones are thrown in deep holes
the public works and illustrious signatures
pave with asphalt over them
a big round crate is the earth like a ballot-box
so we can throw our ballots in
whatever color the salamander takes
it's always rightwing.

Some drab acacias have undertaken Spring
roots aren't so that we may go back
roots are for generating branches
and if they don't
they're dead sticks firewood
roadblocks Forward Forward ever more!
That's what is needed
from submission to an uprising
from either all or nobody
from either everything or nothing

and us / they let us in through the service door
we eat their left-overs standing
wearing on our neck as an old-fashion scarf
the dead cat of civilization
but now I'm no longer alone
I've made I have connections
I'm not afraid of anyone
I pretend I'm living this life while I'm preparing
 the other one
in daytime high noon I'll grab bucket and brushes
we're going to tear the flagstones
I'll make a great downpour of leaflets
incitement slogans
bullet-words on paper
letters out of skin and blood
our poetry's psychosomatic—
no one of you is ever going to separate us
even my very life
and anyone who dares let him come this way
 hand grenade
with safety pin off.

43.

Yannis told me
not to lean my head on the wall
when reading or when smoking.
In prison he said
that's why they always had headaches.
In the evening an argument broke out about those
 who had signed a statement.
Chronis said
that if they had invented the statement
we had invented not signing.
I said endurance has its limits people are
 made of flesh and bone
I spoke about the Stalinists and the method
of executing the very best as traitors
who died screaming LONG LIVE THE PARTY.
Sifis said
the statement is only the beginning.
Then they will ask who are your friends.
Then where do they live.
I said shit a million people, why? For what party?
Yorgos said for the one we are going to make.
Around the table we were 3 laborers, 2 who had signed,
 Yiorgos unemployed
and I in privileged position I work this year. We smoked.
They were drinking. Yannis most of all
—how in hell's he going to ride the motorbike—
They didn't want me speaking like that.
Afterwards I left earlier I had a headache
again I'd been leaning on the wall. They didn't know
 I knew.

That I was never going to sign.

Not for any party.

That I had only thrown a jacket—January '79—
over the freezing cold carried by those who signed...

52.

SHE IS DANGEROUS – WHEN GOD THROWS A THUNDERSTORM WITH HAIL AND A DOWNPOUR SHE COMES OUT TO THE STREET HAVING NO SOCKS ON SHE WHISTLES TO MEN THROWS STONES AT PATROL CARS ROOSTS LIKE A SQUIRREL UP ON TREES AND LIGHTS HER CIGARETTE WITH A LIGHTNING.

LAST TIME SHE WAS SPOTTED AT THE SAME MONTH SAME YEAR AND SAME HOUR IN THREE DIFFERENT LOCATIONS – ACCORDING TO RELIABLE INFORMATION THE BLOWING UP OF A BRIDGE IN MANHATTAN THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO ANARCHO-COMMUNIST MOVEMENTS AS WELL AS THE THEFT OF TOP SECRET NATIONAL DOCUMENTS ARE ALL ATTRIBUTED TO THE SAME INDIVIDUAL. SHE IS KNOWN TO WEAR A BLACK OR RED MILITARY SWEATER CHILDRENS' PEARLY COMBS IN HER HAIR AND HAVING HER HANDS IN THE POCKETS OF A BORROWED OVERCOAT.

DATE OF BIRTH: UNKNOWN

GENDER: UNKNOWN

ADDRESS: UNKNOWN

RELIGION: ATHEIST

COLOR OF EYES: UNKNOWN

NAME: SOFIA VICKI MARIA OLIA NIKI ANNA EFI ARGYRO

APB. TO ALL PATROL UNITS. ATTENTION ARMED. DANGEROUS. ARMED. DANGEROUS.

THEY CALL HER SOFIA VICKI MARIA OLIA NIKI ANNA EFI ARGYRO AND SHE IS BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL MY GOD...

61. AUTOPSY REPORT 2.11.75

“...the body lay face-down in a parallel
connecting to the Vatican.
One of his hands full of blood gestured in open palm
as insult to CPI*
and the other clutching his genitals
to the culture specialists.
Blood clotting on his hair as leeches
on the veiled homosexual syndromes
of all men of earth throughout the realm.
His face disfigured by the framework of
the class he denied
a black and blue volunteer of the ragtag proletariat.
The fingers of the left hand
broken by social realism
thrown away to floodlit trash.
The jaw broken
by the uppercut of a union organizer
a hired thug.
The ears chewed by a sonofabitch who couldn't
get an erection.
The neck broken and severed from the body
on the basic principle of independent function.
The mother everywhere.

That was the death of the communist and homosexual PAZOLINI,
who every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, riding a small 50cc
bike, ran to make sure the cinemas would play the movies in
Egaleo, in Liverpool and most importantly in Ostia, he ran holding
tightly against his body the cans of movie reels and of rundown
neighborhoods. Also the little striped flag of poetry.

Goodbye.

93. THEY WILL COME

The signal will be in the air
the white the gray the brown
jackets of the insane without sleeves
that will be snapping empty on the
fence-wires of Leros*.

They will unhitch by themselves
with their pulled-out fingernails
the hook that hung them
on the ceiling of your earth.
They'll have a uniform bruised color
and lobotomies instead of ears.
Out of sewers and prison cells
they will advance slowly.
They will enter with the slow step
with which terror proceeds
and glory bound together
brothers in blood
a bloody thread
will be bringing the news.

*Translator's notes:

1. Dimitris Mitropanos – working-class Greek singer who became a big star and married the daughter of the Secretary of State (1948-2012).

Dexameni – fashionable district in Athens, somewhat like Nob Hill in San Francisco.

3. Exarchia, etc. - lower-middle class districts of Athens.

23. Dianysis Savvopoulos – a very influential writer and singer of rebellious soul-songs, b.1944

61. CPI – Communist Party of Italy.

93. Leros – Island of the Aegean, place of detention for many political prisoners in the Junta years.

ARTURO DESIMONE

Santoro's Factory of Heart-Sounds:

Roberto Jorge Santoro, Argentinian poet, journalist and rebel
factory worker who fought dictatorship

WARNING

take heed, sometimes, of my words:
remember the poet has a factory of sound
at the height of the heart
that is why he sings¹

Roberto Jorge Santoro was a poet who wrote of being a factory worker who would rather sing, and of hardened bread-loaves hidden behind the railings of balconies in San Telmo—a neighborhood in Buenos Aires preserving the old colonial-creole style of architecture, and where he was one of the street panhandlers haggling their goods at the fairs. He rhapsodized on dictatorship and demagogues ("and with the boyish brilliance of an ephebe/he shits in the country") as well as their seeming opposite ("mama democracy")

Santoro was a major poet of the Argentinian working class. The itinerant laborer-poet also conducted an underground radio show, and was the founding editor of the magazine *El Barrilete*, the first Argentinian literary journal to treat the poets and songwriters of the tango, such as Catulo Castillo and Homero Manzi, as serious literature. (Tango is inherently the music of the Argentinian immigrant working class and the criminal underworld, and many tango songwriters were prominent in the anarchist movement, one of the most common political loyalties of the Italian and Spanish immigrant industrial laborers who filled the sprawling Argentinian and Uruguayan urban centers and ports, shortly before and after the Spanish civil war).

Santoro's optimism was always invigorated by revolutionary movements, as revealed in old radio recordings where he interviews his inebriated comrade, the Argentine poet Luis Luchi (the latter, a Jewish poet, confesses how at the age of 17 he went across the Andes mountainous border to Chile where he joined a revolutionary movement. In much later years—according to long-time friend and Argentine poet Alberto Szpunberg—Luchi turned to anarchism and to alcoholism, following his notice of expulsion from the Argentine communist party: Luchi is in precisely such a state, anarchic drunk and embittered, when speaking to Santoro in the historic interview.) Santoro joined the revolutionary communist movement embodied in the Revolutionary Worker's Party, which had Guevaraist ideas. He and other poets from the *Barillete* gang compiled a book of poems, prose and drawings commemorating the dead of the Trelew-massacre of 1972, when 16 political prisoners—members of leftist factions—were executed in a military base in Chubut, one of the Southernmost provinces of Argentina near the arctic. They were brought to the base for execution after attempting escape from the Rawson maximum security prison, in an icy region that had often been used for exile and imprisonment by previous governments. *La Sangre Derramada Nunca Será Negociada*—"Shed Blood Will Never be Negotiated"—was title of the anthology, but the group also released a journalistic human-rights report.

On the 1st of June, 1977, the police came to find him in a technical middle-school where he worked as a tutor with adolescents. He was dragged to a secret detention center.

Santoro is among those poets who became *desaparecidos*, "disappeared ones" such as Paco Urondo, Miguel Angel Bustos and young Alcira Fidalgo (and prose writers such as Haroldo Conti and Rodolfo Walsh). All these lights of their generation were subsumed into the nebulous ranks of "the disappeared," in the words of none other than general Rafael Videla, a *desaparecido* "is a person who is neither dead nor living." They were targeted by the state terror of the military Junta because they represented a threat to the disciplinarian, conformist, mediocrity-loving and technocratic society envisioned by the generals, a warrior-

caste that first implemented the “neo-liberal” system in the Andean South with ample bloodshed (and with invaluable support from Washington DC in the form of logistics, intelligence, economic aid and armaments).

The poet with a factory of sound at the height of his heart was abducted in 1977 in one of the typical *nazzias* of the Argentine junta police, and detained in a secret prison until his execution. Santoro died before reaching the age of 40; his remains have yet to be found. His children live in Buenos Aires today. Santoro’s short lyrics, at times innocent and obscene, might unintentionally echo the more debauched Charles Bukowski’s comment on how writing poems “gives you the freedom to scream a little.”

My translations of Santoro form part of my project to translate the literature of poets who are relevant to the memory of the dictatorship’s crimes in Argentina.

Source of Sanctuary

With that bit about the atom-bomb
and the other about the clown of Peace that can make one to die from
laughter
they taped up the air-conditioner
Flock ye to my neighborhood
Where chimney-sweeps toil
inside the stacks of
democracy
Prudence gets drunk in the canteens
and Hope cannot get her retirement paid
I do not ask for return
But after so many patches sewn into my short pants, this many
the flying-kite died of a heart attack
and love —
from a gun-shot to the head —²

POETRY IN GENERAL (II)

he is as a neighborhood beauty queen
lauded with ribbons and canes
and with his lapdogs
who lick at the rottenness
seated at the right side
of mama democracy
he dialogues long
with the mouth of a murderer.
he raises his hand in that sustained and easy style
wiggles his fat ass
and with the boyish brilliance of an ephebe
he shits in the country
with all his soul³

—originally published on the Anomaly/Drunken Boat blog:

¹ <https://medium.com/anomalyblog/notes-on-a-return-to-the-ever-dying-lands-adf1ec61c89f>
my translation of Roberto Santoro's poem 'Warning' is forthcoming in a "Big Hammer" anthology edited by Dave Roskos of Iniquity press, soon to appear (see outlawpoetry.com for updates.)

² from the collection *Defiance*, 1972. The caption from the memory-foundation and newspaper editors reads Roberto Jorge Santoro: Poet, Writer, Journalist. Detained and Disappeared 1–6–1977 "Your family, friends and comrades who await you say "Never Forgive Never Forget")

³ "Trompada" noun of the verb "trompear" is one of the many words for a "beating" or "fist fight" in Lunfardo, the Argentinian slang spoken by much of the older generation that inhabited Buenos Aires' workers neighborhoods. In recordings of radio interviews conducted by Santoro, it seems he was found of the word—which today has a different connotation in the aftermath of the US presidential elections of 2016. "Poetry in General (ii)" perhaps describes such an entity as the universal (hopefully not timeless) capitalist despot.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

TRANSLATED BY HARRY GILONIS

Vladimir Mayakovsky, arguably the revolutionary poet *par excellence*, was initially an unsure bystander to the February Revolution of 1917, “broken by doubts, premonitions of fear and joy”; by the end of the poem he wrote about it (“Revolution,” written in April and published in Gorky’s newspaper *New Life* in July), he had moved from “I” to “we” and was proclaiming it a victory—even though, in the final peroration, he speaks of socialism as a ‘heresy’. In February (by the Julian calendar used at the time and in these poems) Mayakovsky was doing his military service at the Military Motor School in Petrograd; his ‘poetichronicle’ opens four days after the International Women’s Day demonstrations and strikes which set everything off on the 23rd. Within a few days virtually all the city was on strike; on the 26th the Tsar sent in the army. Mayakovsky reports that but briefly, and begins his reportage proper on the 27th, when many army regiments, having initially voted not to fire on civilians, then mutinied and joined the revolution. As the Tsar had prorogued the Duma, and was himself out of the city, there was little in the way of civic authority; the Revolution took place almost in a vacuum, and actions sometimes seem symbolic rather than practical (tearing down symbols of authority like the Tsarist double-headed eagle). Having, as yet, no songs of their own, the crowds often sang the *Marseillaise*, draping themselves in the guise of the First French Republic, conjuring up the spirits of the past, like Marat, to their service. It is to Mayakovsky’s credit that he, at least, does not respond in ‘borrowed language.’

By the 28th the Revolution had spread to Moscow; on the next day revolutionaries prevented the royal train from reaching Petrograd, and on the 2nd of March the Tsar abdicated. The story of the subsequent months leading up to October is intricate and still the subject of much debate; attempts to balance the Provisional Government against the Petrograd

Soviet in a form of ‘dual power’ were complicated by the government’s support of continued, and catastrophic, participation in the First World War. The only significant group to oppose this were the Bolsheviks; though it is difficult to grant them a complete *carte rouge*, as it were, not least given their mishandling of the attempted pro-Bolshevik rising, the ‘July days’. Shortly after that *débâcle*, Mayakovsky was given medical leave from the motor school, and moved to Moscow in September—arguably pursuing Lili Brik as much as the revolutionary cause. However, he was by all accounts in Bolshevik HQ, in close proximity to Lenin, when the October revolution began. Mayakovsky’s attitude to this is again complex; his ‘solemn Ode’ in its honor is more of a sound-poem: “O”, and it is recognized as ‘two-faced’ rather than, as a more sophisticated revolutionary might have said, dialectical. But again Mayakovsky grows in conviction, moving to reverential praise of human labor; pausing to snigger at the ignominious scuttling of the battleship *Gloria* in Estonian waters, and to fret at the fate of the ship’s kitten; mentioning *en passant* a pro-revolutionary naval mutiny in Helsinki back in February (in which the Baltic Fleet’s C-in-C Admiral Nepenin was killed), he ends calling for the Revolution to be glorified. As it happens, his relationship to it was to remain complex and conflicted; unlike the French surrealists, he did not want to put poetry ‘at the service of the revolution’, but saw these endeavors as moving in parallel rather than a subservient unison. His praise of Lenin (in the 1924 book-length eponymous poem written after Lenin’s death) and of the Revolution (declared to be ‘GOOD!’ in the poem of that title written for its 10th anniversary) are to my mind entirely sincere.

—Harry Gilonis

Revolution

A Poetichronicle

26 February. A drunken mix, police and soldiers, opened fire on the people.

27th.

Spilled brilliance on barrel and blade
– daybreak.
Light crimson and prolonged.
In a musty barracks
sober
severe
the Volynsky Regiment prayed.

Severely
they swear
to the soldiers' god,
kow-tow each hefty mono-brow.
Blood kindled, surging through temple.
With malice aforethought hands grip iron.

And the first,
he who ordered
“Shoot the hungry!” –
A bullet shut his mouth.
Another's “Ten–hut!”
was cut short.
Yet not at a loss
the troops stormed into the city.

9 o'clock.

In our usual spot
by the Military Motor School
we stand,
penned in by the barracks fence.
Daybreak breaks,
broken by doubts,
premonitions of fear and joy.

Window! From which
I see –
where the sky cuts
into palaces, jaggedly,
ascending,
the eagle of autocracy
blackier than before,
crueller,
eaglier.

All at once –
people,
horse-traffic,
street-lamps,
houses
and barracks
crowding
hundredfold
rushing to the streets.
Footfalls ring the pavement.
Noise of our steps assaults all ears.

And then from who knows where,
from the singing of the crowds,
from the bursting brass of the guardsmen's trumpets
not-made-by-human-hand...
glowing through the dust
growing, an image
glowing.
Reddening.

Wider and wider the wings unfurling.
More than bread hungered-for,
more than water thirsted-for,
here she comes!
Citizens, "take up your we-eapons!"
"To a-arms, citizens!"

Winged by banners
hot-lava-headed
she flew up from the city's gullet.
Bayonet-toothed she gnawed
the double-headed black imperial eagle.

Citizens!
Today a thousand years of 'past' are past.
Today the foundations of the world get re-jigged.
Today
we're re-cutting our cloth to suit our lives
to the last stitch.

Citizens!
It's Day One of the Workers' Deluge.
Let's go
and re-make a topsy-turvy world!

Let the crowds reshape the sky, jewelled!
Let the fleet's anger by sirens be signalled!

Woe to the two-faced eagle-foe!
Singing surges.
Well-oiled crowd.
Squashed in squares.
Curvetting in a Model 'T'
on
outgunning, outrunning bullets.
Factory klaxons erupt into the city.

In the fog.
Street-rivers make river-mist.
Like laden barges caught in a swell,
our barricade bursts its banks
with the *Marseillaise*.

The first day's blazing cannon-ball
whizzed past the dome of the Duma.
New dawn new frissons
new doubts bring delirious shudders.

What's ahead?
Defenestration,
or prison
bunks
with, again,
Russia buboed
by grave-mounds?

I duffle-muffle myself against snipers.
Doubly,

in a greatcoat.
Buildings spit gunfire & shrapnel,
the city tsk-tsks.
The city starts burning.

Everywhere flametongued.
Even they rise and fall,
Eventually sparks scatter.
These streets
fly the red flag, calling,
summoning Russia, glowing.

Again!
Yes, again!
Brightly shine, O red-tongued orator!
Grasp the beams
of sun and moon,
vengeful fingers of thousand-armed Marat!

Death to the two-faced eagle-foe!
Break through the prison
doors,
flesh with bloodrusty claws riven
black-eagle-tailfeather-shuttlecocks driven
down, dropping, falling policemen.

Capital's burning body hauls down its flag.
Searching through attics and garrets.
The moment's nigh.
Crossing the Troitsky Bridge
crowded troops, from their barracks.

Creaks croak from foundation-bones.

Assembling.
Fighting.
One second! –
and lacquered
in sunset
from the Petropavlovsky Barracks
the fiery revolutionary flag flames.

Death to the two-headed eagle-foe!
Off with both heads
(so there's no resurrection.)
Here it is!
Toppling!
Grasping as it goes – one last hope.
“Lord,
Gather these souls to your bosom!”

Done it!
Joy enough to trouble eternity!
Now
what need
of a God?
We've
our own beatified.

Why no singing?
Or
do all souls march under Siberian cerements' banner?
We've won!
Hosanna!
Glo-o-or-r-ry to us!

Whilst arms are kept on arms and fingers on triggers,

there's a new order to live by.
New commandments on *terrestrial* tablets,
from our rather paler Sinai.

We,
inhabitants of the earth,
see all earth's inhabitants as kin.
All
in factories
in universities
in laboratories: brothers.
We all
under the skin
brothers and sisters on the earth,
for *life*, fighters.

Planetary motion,
states' affairs,
subject to *our* will.
Our land.
Air – ours.
Ours that diamond-mine the stars.
And we'll never,
never!
let anyone,
anyone, ever!
tear our earth with shells,
pierce our sky with spears.

Whose evil broke the earth in twain?
Who raised smoke-plumes over butchery?
Is one
sun

not enough
for all?
Or the sky above us all insufficiently blue?

In the last feuds the last cannon thunder,
in the last arsenals the last bayonets are made.
We'll make them hand over their powder.
Give kids pomegranates not grenades.

It's not cowardice clad in drab military grey,
nor the shouts of the have-nots;
the people thunder like thunder today:
– I believe
in the greatness of human hearts!

It rises above the swirling battlefield-dust,
above those who've squabbled, lost their faith,
today
unprecedented and made true at last
socialism's great heresy!

17 April 1917, Petrograd

Ode to the Revolution

To you,
ridiculed,
ridiculed by cannon,
to you,
ulcerated by oscillating bayonets,
I rapturously raise
over soaring abuse
a solemn Ode:
“O”!
O, bestial!
O, infantile!
O, two-for-a-cent!
O, magnificent!
What other names are you catcalled?
What other twists have you up your sleeve, two-faced?
Finely-shaped construction,
heap of rubble?
For the engine-driver,
coated in coaldust,
the miner, delving down to ore-seams,
kadish,
reverential *kadish*,
praise of human labour.
But tomorrow
blessed Basil
will lift, vainly,
his rafters, praying for mercy, –
as your snub-nosed six-inch guns
dispense with a millennium of the Kremlin.

“Gloria”.

On her final voyage,
her siren wheezing out.
You sent sailors
onto a sinking ship
where
a forgotten kitten
was miaowing.
And then!
You - drunken crowd - roaring,
moustachioes twisted swaggering.
You rifle-butt grey-bearded admirals
head-over-heels
over the bridge in Helsinki.
You're licking and re licking yesterday's wounds,
opening veins once again.
So: from the philistine
“ – O, curse you three times over!”
and from me,
the poet,
“be blessed, glorified, fourfold!”

1918

FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN

Communism of Spirits

TRANSLATED BY H. BOLIN

EUGENE AND LOTHAR

THEOBALD AND OSCAR

Disposition

Sundown. Chapel. Vast, rich land. River. Forests. The friends. The chapel alone still illuminated. The conversation comes to the middle ages. The monastic orders according to their ideal meaning. Their influence on religion and at the same time on science. These two schools have diverged, the orders fallen, but wouldn't similar institutions be desirable? We start from the exact opposite principle, from the generality of unbelief, in order to prove their necessity for our time. This unbelief is correlated with the scientific critique of our times, which accelerates ahead of positive speculation; lamentation is fruitless, the task is to help. Science must either destroy Christianity or become one with it; since science can only be one, the task is to not let science become dependent on external circumstances and by trusting in that unity that everyone who knows and loves humanity wishes for and intimates, to create for it a magnificent, dignified, autonomous existence. Seminars and academies of our time. University. The new academy.

A beautiful evening draws to its end. The parting light seemed to gather all its forces together and cast its last golden rays over a chapel that rose upon the peak of a hill overgrown with wine and meadows alluring in their simplicity. The light's shimmer no longer struck the valley at the foot of the hill and only the roar of its surge testified to the Neckar nearby, which, to greet the coming night raised its murmuring voice the more the day's melody trailed off. The herds had all headed home and only every once in a

while did a shy deer slip from out of the forest forth in search of sustenance under the open sky. The mountains were still illuminated. A spirit of peace and melancholy effused it all. "Lothar," began one of the two youths who had observed the scene for some time from the steps of the chapel and had now shifted somewhat from their spot to bid the last ray that struck the roof of the church farewell, "Lothar! Does a secret ache not grip you too when the sky's eye is torn from nature and the earth's vastness stands there like a riddle whose solution lacks words, see, now the light has retreated and the proud mountains cloak themselves, this motionlessness induces anxiety and the remembrance of past beauty poisons; it has happened to me a hundred times as I had to turn back from the free ether of antiquity into the night of the present and found no salvation other than in the paralyzed surrender that is the death of the soul; it is a tormenting feeling, the remembrance of splendors vanished, you stand like a criminal before history, and the deeper you have lived through it the more fiercely you are shaken by awakening from this dream, you see a rift between here and there, and I at least, must declare so much that was once great and beautiful lost, forever lost. Look at this chapel, what kind of colossal, powerful spirit created it, with what force did he drive the world's expanse, he crowned the quiet hills with tranquil sanctity, in the flat of this valley he placed his monastery, in the thick of the city his majestic cathedral, and thousands of people were subordinate to him and those poor and abandoned by the earth's caress grazed about in habits as his apostles and acted—but I don't have to tell you, you know world history; and where is it all? You understand, I'm not asking about what that epoch has handed down to us, I'm not asking about dead matter but rather, if you will, about the form in which it happened, about that energy and consequence that seemed to lose itself in the infinite yet in what was most remote nonetheless corresponded with the middle point, which retains the sound of the original melody in every variation; in this sense form is the only thing that can present us with a point of comparison for our situation, since the material is always something given; form however is the element of the human spirit in which freedom acts as law and reason becomes contemporary; now compare that age with ours, where will you

find a community? Where is the bridge that brought so much splendor from that land to us? Where is that pious, powerful spirit that raised the churches, that grounded orders, all as if from one cast? that from a middle point which raised itself above the world of its time forced everything under the sway of its intelligence and power of faith?-----

DISPOSITION

With us, everything is concentrated on the spiritual, we became poor so that we could become rich.

Old world.

1) Monarchy. Greece, later Rome

Middle ages.

2) Constitutional monarchy

New era.

3) Republic.

ad 2) Different nations – One church with one pope.

ad 3) General priesthood, prelude to Protestantism.

BRUNO C. DUARTE

Apocryphal Politics — Hölderlin's Communism of Spirits

I.

For a brief period of time, the fragment *Communism of Spirits* was attributed to the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, but soon after judged to be inauthentic and removed from his Collected Works. The editor Friedrich Beißner performed a remarkable stunt by at once showing and obliterating a text which he was seemingly the last one to publish in Germany in the context of a critical edition.

Communism of Spirits is structured as an essentially descriptive narrative flow. It addresses the question of the search for a community by discussing the unification of religion and science as an appeal to action, and unravels into a diagrammatic representation of world history, from Antiquity to the modern age.

At first glance, and despite its fragmentary course, there seems to be nothing particular about this text. Its structure conforms to most conventions of space and time in dramatic action. Four characters are seen conversing at sunset by an illuminated chapel, overlooking a landscape. They discuss the fate of Christianity in its relation to scientific knowledge, the ways in which one is to be brought to bear on the other and made to return to their original unity. Concrete imagery is invoked to depict an idealized and projected oneness of faith and wisdom: the monastic orders of the Middle-Ages are to be followed by a “new academy” that has yet to be created. At this point, the first segment breaks off. It is resumed shortly after in a long paragraph wherein the original setting is described from afar in greater detail: the chapel by the river Neckar and the nature surrounding it are now both the background and the core

of the conversation. As the evening falls, one of the figures is infused with the feeling of the dimming light of melancholy as it turns into an allegory of the abyss which separates the obscurity of the present from the remembered greatness of ancient times.

Gradually the text gives in to an elegiac tone, while its main character is portrayed as eminently tragic: unable to undo his fate or repair his loss, he is said to stand “before history like a criminal”. But as the script becomes more and more dense, the romantically charged overtones start to dissolve into something entirely different, all sense of bitterness and mourning is put aside, and the whole text takes an unexpected turn. The speaker is elated at the sight of the chapel, which he beholds as the godly strength of an ancient spirit that was able to summon and bring forth human action all around it. The course of universal history leaves behind it a trail of deception and irreversible destruction, but again the elocution becomes forceful and unyielding: it is not about clinging on to the burden of the distant past as the inert matter we are forced to contemplate, which is a given and therefore represents death, but rather a question of perceiving form as “the element of the human spirit in which freedom acts as law and reason becomes present.”

Matter is conceived of as inanimate history, incapable of action as such, while form is defined as a thrust of “energy and consequence” leading up to “the element of the human spirit” and thus to a concept of community. Therein lies the point of reference which would enable us to grasp the center or the middle point from which the churches and religious societies of former times were raised, and respond, not with emulation but with the reshaping of that same center in our own terms. The physical creations of the “pious, powerful spirit” of the past ages are imprinted into the metaphor of sculpture, which in turn unveils the dynamics of the text itself: “everything” was built and founded “as if from one cast.” Before the spirit, however, stands the letter.

II.

Communism of Spirits was published in 1926 by the germanist Franz Zinkernagel in the journal *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* under the heading “New Hölderlin findings,” and later included in his own edition of Hölderlin’s Works. The text reappeared in volume 4 of the canonical Hölderlin-Edition known as the *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, in a separate section entitled *Zweifelhaftes*, dubious or apocryphal texts (StA 4/1: 306-309). Noting that this particular text was found among a set of papers and documents in the estate of Hölderlin’s early biographer Christoph Theodor Schwab, whom he suspected as the presumed author of the essay, Friedrich Beißner, the editor, writes the following: “The outer layout of the manuscript—starting with the placing of the title—excludes Hölderlin’s authorship, not to mention the stylistic improbability.” (StA 4/1: 427; 4/2, 804-805)

Beißner’s commentary is an interesting miniature of paradox: he includes the text in his critical edition of Hölderlin’s works only to immediately dismiss its authenticity. In just a few pages, the text goes from dubious to spurious. His reasoning seems at best perfunctory, at worst downright amiss. The text couldn’t be Hölderlin’s, he states, on account of what one would be tempted to see as two different instances of aesthetic judgment, namely spatial and temporal composition: neither the drawing of the page (the outward semblance of the manuscript, as it were: the German *Handschrift* translates both as manuscript and handwriting) nor the pacing and tempo (the coordinates of style), point to Hölderlin.

Despite its ultimately subjective nature, Beißner’s verdict is meant as final and presents itself as utterly unflinching in refuting Hölderlin as the author of the text. And yet he did publish it, knowing that, despite the assertiveness of his denial, the mere sighting of the text was bound to leave room for reasonable doubt. Such an admission of self-contradiction is somewhat surprising, given that Beißner belonged to a line of conservative scholarship

which expounded an authoritative, if not authoritarian practice of philology, ruling out what he didn't see fit to be preserved from the author's working drafts, while actively manipulating the manuscripts with the aim of shaping them into a fixed, unmovable canon. In the same way that the editor had the last word in defining the limits of what is corrupted and what is credible in a text, in a verse or in a line, he also held absolute power in attributing or denying authorship to a given text as a whole. Thus, there is a puzzling side to Beißner's position, for he was certainly aware of the conflicting forces at work between his choice to show *Communism of Spirits* as a secluded, yet tangible part of Hölderlin's "complete" works, and his categorical appraisal of it as a forgery. His correction—as if saying that the text didn't actually belong where he himself had placed it—was perhaps part of a defensive move, but nonetheless honest enough not to suppress or ignore the text altogether. The fact is that after Beißner and the Stuttgart edition, the text is absent from the main critical editions of Hölderlin's works—as if it didn't exist. Oddly enough, it has simply disappeared into thin air. Even the Frankfurt Edition, which revolutionized philological and editorial practices by reproducing facsimiles of Hölderlin's manuscripts, has strangely remained silent on this piece of writing. Incidentally, the same holds true of Hölderlin scholarship in general. Among the countless studies devoted to Hölderlin's relation to the French Revolution and its repercussions on the political landscape of Württemberg and Germany in general, only a handful have shown an actual interest in this text.

Individual analyses of *Communism of Spirits* have attempted to contextualize the fragment by relating it to several recurring motifs and influences in Hölderlin's life and thought. His letter to his sister from November 1790, where he mentions his "walk with Hegel [...] to the Wurmlingen chapel" (MA II, 462) has served as the most plausible framework for the dating of the text. The "new academy" clearly stems from Klopstock's *Gelehrtenrepublik*, or republic of letters, which in turn could easily be related to authors such as Herder or Lessing. Some scholars have insisted on the principles of pantheism and the reading of Spinoza as central to the construction of

the text, while others have seen echoes in it of Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians or the Gospel of John, amongst a bundle of other references (Vayssé 1994: 129-132, Carosso 1995: 33-37). Thematically, a brief look into some of the text's main concepts is propitious to reveal a wide range of affinities. The novel *Hyperion* speaks namely of "the element of spirits" (MA I, 637: *das Element der Geister*) and the notion of a spirit common to all or a common spirit will appear in several poems, like *Der Archipelagus* (MA I, 302, v. 240: *Ein Geist allen gemein*) and *Der Einzige* (MA I, 469, v. 93: *Gemeingeist*), as well as in several passages of the correspondence. Such analogies, however, speak as much in favor of Hölderlin's authorship as they would of Hegel's, if one considers how deeply intertwined and even largely interchangeable their convictions and terminology were at that time. Manifestly, the concept of spirit has played its role in the conception and gestation of German Idealism, until it was eventually exhausted by virtue of its many transformations. Similarly, the articulation of spirit and community, coupled with the wished-for encounter of philosophy and religion, seems to imply either a utopian, romanticized yearning for revolution or an organic ideal of restoration, and sounds almost archaic in view of today's perception of political thinking. The word "communism," however, stands in the way of such judgment, lurking from within while remaining alien to the text's mode of being.

III.

With the aim of disavowing any conjecture that would lead to the mere possibility of Hölderlin's authorship, Beißner cites two kinds of irreconcilable differences, namely the "improbability" of style, which counts as the text's rootedness in objective subjectivity, and the layout of the manuscript—that is, the graphic arrangement of the page—as shown, he added, in "the placing of the title." The assumption here is that the title was appended at a later date, presumably by Schwab or by a different author. This sense of the materiality of the text stands in sharp contrast to the phantasmagoric nature of its author, and in point of fact, the same could be said of the term

“communism,” which is both strikingly present and imminently absent from the manuscript page. On the one hand, its existence is crucial for the text as a whole and can easily be deduced from it as the sum of its parts. On the other hand, it represents a historical improbability, to use Beißner’s vocabulary, in that it defies every strictly chronological frame of reference. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that Hölderlin would have coined or used the word “communism” in a text which, in all likelihood, dates from around 1790-1793, especially given the fact that its first registered usage in the modern political sense is generally located in the period between 1840 and 1843. Notwithstanding, the history of its earliest known occurrences is rich in doubts and exceptions, including examples which range from the 12th century onwards, some of which do invite speculation: whereas the term “communiste” appears in several different contexts throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, “communism” is believed to be a neologism engendered by Restif de la Bretonne around 1796-1797, and, even closer to Hölderlin, the word appears to have been used in 1794 by an “Austrian Jacobin” named Andreas Riedel during his captivity in Vienna. (Grandjón 1983: 143-147) The supposition that Hölderlin might have had access to that very interrogation transcript is recognizably little more than a flight of fancy, but so are many of the theories concerning Hölderlin’s “real-life” connection to the Swabian Republic, to the French Revolution and to revolution in general.

As a title, *Communism of Spirits* is a glaring light that never burns out, a shibboleth able to live by itself, indifferent to narrative or plot. As the fabric of a text, it represents a kind of storytelling which relates both intensely and indistinctly to the many characters and faces of early Communism, ranging from the ancient Greeks to Thomas Münzer, Thomas More, Rousseau or Gracchus Babeuf. It is possible, but no less hazardous, to find in it an underlying discourse which blends a radical pantheism with ideals of egalitarianism and the rejection of private property, leading to a state of communal ownership of goods and means of production. Such principles can be found in Hölderlin’s major works such as the novel *Hyperion* (1797-

1799) or the mourning-play *The Death of Empedocles* (1797-1800), which the filmmaker Jean-Marie Straub, the author of two films based on that text, did not hesitate to identify as the “universal communist utopia.” But when taken too literally, they become projections of themselves, and the attempt to locate and materialize the communism of spirits by redirecting it to concrete geographies and names (Spinoza, Brissot, among others) has no other choice but to find itself staring at “a vague sentimental communism” (D’Hondt 1989: 235). The literal staging of Hölderlin’s encounter with Marx by Peter Weiss (*Hölderlin*, 1971) is perhaps the most audacious form of resistance to such self-reflective movements (Savage: 204-208).

Pierre Bertaux, a renowned Hölderlin scholar who spent a large part of his life debating Hölderlin’s identity as a Jacobin and the various stages of his proximity to the events in France around 1789, argues in one of his books that Hölderlin had followed Babeuf’s trial and execution (1797) through the press, thus finding his way to the conception of “agrarian communism” and the “abolition of land property.” In spite of such ambitious claims, Bertaux will dismiss Communism of Spirits by declaring that “alone stylistically,” the text “does not sound authentic” (Bertaux 1990: 111, 172)—whereby one is forced to return to Friedrich Beißner.

IV.

A deep-seated rule of thumb seems to lie behind both Beißner’s decision and its consequences: if a text can’t be ascribed to a given author, if proof of authorship is not found, it will be discarded and simply cease to exist. With the silencing of the text comes its disappearance, leaving all readership out of the picture. It is no one’s text, therefore destined to be read by virtually no one.

In this regard, *Communism of Spirits* is, to all effects and purposes, an apocryphal text. The Greek word *apókruphos* stands for noncanonical, inauthentic, fictitious, false, forged, invented or imagined texts—but it

can also mean something secret, arcane, kept hidden or concealed from sight. Beißner's philological ruling and overruling according to which Hölderlin is not the author of the text rests on that very faculty: sight, the visual perception of the text. His whole commentary is based on a rather enigmatic experience of self-evidence to which the reader has only limited access: the diction and the phrasing—basic elements of style—“exclude” Hölderlin's authorship, he states, and so does “the outer layout of the manuscript”. Hence, the measurement of Hölderlin's authorship is a matter of acoustics and geometry: the style is not his (it doesn't sound like him) and neither is the motion on the page (it doesn't look like his way of writing). Unknowingly, as it seems, Beißner goes against the conventional separation between the literary-temporal and the visual-spatial arts: the same sense of rhythm (the precondition of time) which allows him to distinguish individual style guides his optical examination of the manuscript's exterior topology (one of the dynamic properties of spatial representation). In other words, everything in his blunt rejection of the text is determined by the conflation of reading and viewing—one is sustained by the other in a reciprocal manner.

What did Beißner see? The autograph manuscript of *Communism of Spirits* consists of four pages, plus a separate diagrammatic exposition which Beißner believed to be “a sketch for the continuation of the essay about the Communism of Spirits.” The manuscript shows the title “Communismus der Geister” centered at the top of the page, immediately followed by the names of the four characters (“Eugen und Lothar. Theobald und Oskar”), and, slightly below, by the word “Disposition,” after which the prose text begins. The separate page is headed by that same word, immediately preceding the dictum: “Everything is concentrated on the spiritual for us, we became poor so that we could become rich.” Almost as if planned to serve as an epigraph, this sentence, which was later appropriated by Martin Heidegger in his controversial essay *Die Armut* (Heidegger 1994; Lacoue-Labarthe 2004; Esposito 2010), introduces a brief systematic sketch of the stages of universal history (Ancient World,

Middle Ages, Modern Age), pointing to the transition from monarchy to Republicanism amidst obscure references to “one church with one Pope” and “universal priesthood.”

In many respects, this schematic overview illuminates the half-discursive, half-dialogical text that is *Communism of Spirits*, which explicitly speaks of a time period in the past (the Middle Ages) mediating between the Ancient (“the free ether of Antiquity”) and the Modern (“the night of the present”) and is chiefly concerned with the changes one can adduce in world history by insisting on the notion of spirit as something ductile, that has yet to be molded by action. Such action, however, differs significantly from other writings likely to be invoked as analogous to it. Novalis’ “world history” (*Christianity or Europe*) is hardly akin to the world history referred to in the text, and Schleiermacher’s apology of a “community with other spirits” as the guiding principle of self-determination (*Monologues*) is far from being identical with a “communism” of spirits. Even the “absolute freedom of all spirits” and “the universal freedom and equality of the spirits” expounded in *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*—incidentally a text which appears in most editions of Hölderlin’s works, in spite of the philological and philosophical quarrel surrounding it for decades on account of its ultimately unverified authorship—is founded upon key notions which are clearly missing from *Communism of Spirits*, namely Ethics, Physics, the elimination of the State, the coincidence of Philosophy and Aesthetics, or the new mythology of reason (Beiser 1996: 68, 178, 4-5).

To be sure, *Communism of Spirits* is not impervious to such analogies and affinities. It simply plays a different hand, at a different pace, with different rules. Its political significance does not exhaust itself in carefully weaved mystical inferences or philosophically programmatic premises. Its convictions are not the stuff of free-floating poeticization, its assertiveness never hammered in the guise of a proto-manifesto of sorts.

V.

What are we to read or to see in the concatenation “communism-of-spirits”? Is it even a word sequence we can acknowledge as meaningful, after the unfolding of communism in the 20th century, which, as is well known, begins in 1848 with the visual intimation of a spectre “haunting Europe,” and has since transformed itself into a caricature collection of evil, decaying or harmless spirits? Is it even possible to ask such redundant questions and actually demand answers from a text so foreign to political discourse as we know it? And is there any pressing need to break it down into notions and ideas that we might hold as relevant only to keep moving in circles in search of its meaning and intent?

If there is a lesson to be learned from this text, it is most certainly not enclosed in a picture of intellectual militancy or in a renewal of the semantics of communism. The implications of its theological-political stance are not something we ought to draw out from its speculative or lyrical texture in order to explain why or if it “speaks to us.” We can read everything we want into it, or wrest what we supposedly need from it, and still it will remain untouched in its core.

In fact, the crux of this text lies not primarily in what it says, in terms of its theoretical contention or its hidden sources, but rather in the way it becomes manifest. By reenacting the ancient historical-philosophical reflection on the concept of form, the text is actively questioning and exposing its own shape for what it is: a nameless text, lacking a signature and unclaimed for, but, for that same reason, able to move according to a diction of its own, and therefore demanding not only to be read, but looked at on the very basis of its materiality. The more it seems to disappear, the more it calls out to the reader, who is no longer drawn to the text by that which it supposedly conveys, but rather prompted to become the viewer of a landscape of concepts which he is not bent to decipher but to reconfigure incessantly. It is not by chance that the two recurring words near the

end of the fragment—form (Form) and matter (Stoff)—find themselves replicated in Hölderlin's poetics as the reciprocity between the (subjective) self-reproductive force of spirit and the (objective) receptivity of matter. Both realms are political in essence and in effect. In the context of his many speculative attempts at determining the laws of poetic composition, and in the wake of Kant and Fichte, Hölderlin will often speak in a language which is inherently political: when discussing the relationship of the whole to its parts, for instance, he will refer to the "the most original claim of the spirit, which moves towards community and the unified being-at-the-same-time" (MA II: 77).

In *Communism of Spirits*, such longing for community is laid bare in its most raw and immediate state. Just as matter is compressed by form, time sees itself projected into space: "when the sky's eye is torn from nature and the earth's vastness stands there like a riddle whose solution lacks words [...] where will you find a community?"

If anything, the disappearing body of the text, that is, the disavowal of its authorship as the foretaste of its elimination from print, intensifies the need for its legibility as a tangible, visual object. Rather than a negative or a marginal feature, its apocryphal nature becomes crucial in turning it into the shaping mold it has come to represent. The technique of casting is now entirely visible: a given material (the human spirit) is made liquid and poured into a mold wherein a particular shape (communism) has previously been drawn or etched as a hollow figure. As the material solidifies, a final shape is extracted from the mold—a shape that can be seen as it is read, but not entirely comprehended or grasped "in its active connection, its inner relation," to use Marx's terms by deliberately displacing them. The communism of spirits—or the "commerce" of spirits, as Hölderlin's friend Isaac von Sinclair wrote in 1792 (Beck 1947: 44)—is the open depiction of a community which is made to be everything and nothing. It means to dispel the "rift" separating the present from the past by sculpting it anew, but is constantly brought to a halt by the nameless face of its author.

Such is the structure of what could be termed apocryphal politics: it erases itself repeatedly in order to redefine its form of action. As a fundamentally unknown and therefore unrecognized surface, *Communism of Spirits* is a voided space waiting to be filled by the very thing it summons without end: not the solution for history or politics, but the form of its riddle.

WORKS CITED

- Hölderlin, F. (1943-85). Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe (StA), Ed. Friedrich Beißner, Adolf Beck, Ute Oelmann.
Hölderlin, F. (1975-). Frankfurter Ausgabe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe (FHA), Ed. Dietrich E. Sattler, Frankfurt/M.
Hölderlin, F. (1992). Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (MA), Ed. M. Knaupp, Munich.
Hölderlin, F. (1992-1994). Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (KA), Ed. Jochen Schmidt, Frankfurt/M.
Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke, Ed. Franz Zinkernagel, Leipzig 1926.
Beck, Adolf (1947). Aus der Umwelt des jungen Hölderlin. Stamm- und Tagebucheinträge, in: Hölderlin-Jahrbuch 1947, 33-46.
Beiser, Frederick C., Ed. (1996). The early political writings of the German romantics, Cambridge University Press.
Bertaux, Pierre (1990). Hölderlin und die französische Revolution, Aufbau-Verlag Berlin und Weimar.
Carosso, Domenico (1995). Il comunismo degli spiriti. Forma e storia in un frammento di Hölderlin, Donzelli Editore, Roma.
D'Hondt, Jacques (1989). Le meurtre de l'histoire, in: Hölderlin, L'Herne, Éditions de l'Herne, Paris, 219-241.
Esposito, Roberto (2010). *Communitas: The origin and destiny of community*, Stanford University Press.
Grandjón, Jacques (1983). Quelques dates à propos des termes communiste et communisme, in: Mots 7, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris.
Heidegger, Martin (1994). *Die Armut*, in: Heidegger Studies 10, Duncker und Humblot.
Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe/ Heidegger, Martin (2004). *Die Armut/La pauvreté*, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg.
Savage, Robert Ian (2008). Hölderlin after the Catastrophe: Heidegger – Adorno – Brecht, Camden House, New York.
Vayssé, Jean-Marie (1994). Totalité et subjectivité: Spinoza dans l'idéalisme allemande, Vrin, Paris

Samuel Solomon

Special Subcommittee

Commune Editions, 2017

REVIEWED BY JUHA VIRTANEN

Samuel Solomon's *Special Subcommittee* is structurally and thematically centred on two sets of poems that—on a prima facie reading—engage with the early years of the McCarthy era. The titular “Special Subcommittee” draws upon a transcript sourced from the House of Representatives’ Special Subcommittee to Investigate Communism in New York City Distributive Trades, who questioned Nathan Solomon—the poet’s grandfather and the President of Local 830, Retail and Wholesale Employees Union—in the summer of 1948. Likewise, the six “Document” poems that precede “Special Subcommittee” are shaped around redacted extracts from Nathan Solomon’s FBI file. Although these two sets of poems are framed by a number of shorter lyrics and sequences, many of which originally appeared in Solomon’s 2012 pamphlet *Life of Riley*, the majority of the collection is dedicated to works that are seemingly rooted in un-American communist relations.

As such, it might be tempting to consider *Special Subcommittee* as an exercise in generational memory. This may however be a reductive approach, as Solomon’s postscript suggests: the book limits its information about the poet’s grandparents to the utterances and observations that appear in “forms of state documentation” and “state thinking,” which Solomon identifies as a “portion” of his “inheritance,” instead of his “ancestry.” The distinction between “inheritance” and “ancestry” is crucial here. While the latter is predominantly defined via one’s familial or ethnic descent, the former is inextricably connected to property, possession, and ownership. In other words, “inheritance” is itself one version of “state documentation” and “state thinking.” In this sense, if *Special Subcommittee* is—as Solomon states—

about the subcommittee “as a form of kinship and as an organization of repression,” then the collection hinges on questions about government and certain configurations of the “family unit.” Moreover, the collection works around the manifold tensions, cracks, and parallels between these public and private bodies (i.e. the government and the family) in order to fill, complicate, or challenge them through the commitments of a queer Marxist lyric subject.

To clarify what is at stake in Solomon’s project, it might be better to work through examples from the poems themselves. The titular sequence of the collection is structured around a series of poems—between 13 and 15 lines each—that are interspersed with transcriptions from Nathan Solomon’s hearing in front of the special subcommittee. Across the proceedings, the elder Solomon is asked about strikes, union meetings, and whether he is a member of the Communist Party. As a consequence of these repetitive lines of enquiry, he is frequently forced into reiteration: expressions such as “I repeat my answer,” “as a matter of fact,” and “I have given my answer” – along with recurrent references to the first and fifth amendments of the Constitution—occur throughout the extracts. Repetition becomes a defining characteristic of the hearing.

It therefore seems fitting that repetition is also a key technique of the poems themselves, which at times echo certain iterations from the hearing. Consider the following exchange between the elder Solomon and Charles J. Kersten, the subcommittee chairman:

Mr. SOLOMON: [...] Members are a morpious group. They elect bodies, just as Congress is elected, to pass laws. They elect the officers of the union in order to give guidance and cohesion to the program and policies of the union.

Mr. KERSTEN: I agree with your general thoughts on that subject that that’s the purpose of leadership [...]

By comparison, the final stanza of the subsequent poem reads:

It was just the other way around, they
elect bodies to guide morphous bodies
to be a massive body. I agree with you
your general thoughts on that subject
that that's the purpose of leadership.

But echoes are not verbatim reproductions, and Solomon shows no interest in merely moving information. The above stanza, for example, fractures Kersten's response with the inclusion of the additional "you," furthermore, the placement of the line-break allows the utterance to signify something else, i.e. "I agree with you." As a result, the remark that originally occurred as a muted and dismissive note about "general thoughts" becomes something more affirmative and—indeed—more radical. If we read that line on its own terms, we may not know who the "you" actually is, as Solomon's editing of the source material has already distanced the poem's expressions from the statements in the hearing. As such, this "I agree with you" does not necessarily express a commonality based on family or locality, but rather an agreement formed from new and voluntary social ties. Moreover, since the exact identity of this "you" remains ambiguous, the poem effectively extends its agreement and support towards strangers. Solomon's "I agree with you" is in other words a statement of solidarity; that is, the sentiments of the expression gesture towards the active formation of socialities based upon mutual trust and collective confidence, through which "morphous bodies" might become "a massive body."

In this context, then, the repetition in the poems is not simply a structural mirroring of the repetitive questions imposed upon the elder Solomon. Rather, words repeated across the nine poems in the sequence—such as "strike"—are put through a number of different permutations: "hands strike as a matter of record," "strike items from speech," and "strike inheritance" all indicate different actions and relations—some which are repressive, whilst

others are not. Based on this, it seems reasonable to suggest that the poems and the transcripts both interrupt and intervene with each other, and that “Special Subcommittee” thus highlights a much wider range of struggles than those of an individual anti-communist congressional hearing in 1948. The last stanza of the concluding poem supports this reading:

because males were less attached
to the matriarchal gens they began
to notice their own property, and
so it should be no surprise to you that
my originary myth ends in blacklist

The passage is reminiscent of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where Engels—following Lewis H. Morgan’s study of Iroquoian socialities in *Ancient Society*—situates communistic matrilineal clans (i.e. “matriarchal gens”) as a domestic institution that pre-dates the family unit. For Engels, the final death blow to “matriarchal gens” was the emergence of the male owner class, which brought about the privileging of atomized paternity over communal maternity, along with the institutionalization of “pairing marriage”, regulated monogamy, and the transmission of property—via inheritance—to paternal offspring. In this sense, the poem’s “blacklist” carries two referents: it recalls both the denial of employment for suspected communists during the McCarthyist era, as well as Engels’ view that Morgan’s study—a key text for the arguments in *The Origin of the Family*—was systematically suppressed after it was published, largely due to the chauvinism of 19th century England. The final poem of “Special Subcommittee” thus underlines hetero-patriarchal capitalism’s transhistorical efforts to attack, suppress and redact alternative socialities. More crucially, the poem reminds us that the targets of this capitalist violence exist in the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality.

A similar thread is also pursued in some of the “Document” poems, which—as I pointed out earlier—are structured around the elder Solomon’s

FBI file. To be clear, “around” is the operative word here: while “Document 1” declares, “the headliner is the document,” the poems themselves do not invariably affirm this claim, as they instead—palimpsestically—surround the quoted extracts from the file. At times the poems comment on the extracts explicitly, but Solomon also allows other parallels to emerge. In “Document 5,” the extract from the file focuses on sightings of the elder Solomon’s car at a campground, but it is surrounded by the following text:

My hands were on very little the day I was a heterosexual [...] I’ll tell you because I can’t show it—there’s a way in which it’s obvious and then also indirect, absurd—that the state will sanction, that private industry will profit from this so that the middle income queer person with sperm is weirdly thrown off-scene, cannot be permitted to share fluids in the public sphere where profits are made from what must be kept private. But it still ends in my rage directed at another person: a simple social realism, a real abstraction: my in-law.

Thus, while the extract deals with anti-communist espionage, the poem is more focused on the repressive policing of queerness. As the “middle income queer person” is not “permitted” to “share fluids in the public sphere”, the poem might—at one level—allude to the longstanding and entrenched homophobia in healthcare (a public sphere “where profits are made”), as evidenced by the regulations that forbid sexually-active gay men from donating blood. But there may also be even more at stake here. Especially in light of the tender and longing expressions (“I miss your body as I write this. I miss your hand on my arm while I lean on your lap”) that follow immediately after the above passage, the capitalist “public sphere” may in fact designate any marketized space where queer intimacy is policed, oppressed, and denied. Furthermore, as the reference to the “in-law”—who is, “as far as” the poem’s subject is “concerned,” a stand-in for the “law”—demonstrates, this “public sphere” can also be found in certain configurations of the family unit. In other words, the poem’s “rage” is

directed at all public and private structures where degrees of care, intimacy, and affinity are recognized and permitted only in accordance with hetero-patriarchal social forms.

But although “Document 5” concludes with the “I” fantasizing about “screaming” at the in-law (and thereby the law itself), Special Subcommittee does not give into defeatist imaginings of resistance. Elsewhere, the collection conveys the physical and emotional labour involved with actions such as protests, strikes, and squatting. These struggles, like Solomon’s poems, are offered as intersectional moments of solidarity and care, where “we are enough in these | numbers together.” Crucially, this “we” is not a uniform mass that erases our identities. Rather, by being in these numbers together, the subjectivities of this “we” are a cacophonous collective of differences, where radicalness does not neglect radical tenderness. Solomon’s offerings can therefore give us some confidence. Poetry might not form an easy equivalence with revolutionary action, but if “every good poem is a transitional demand,” then “chanting | bread and roses in the street” can sometimes be something like a poem, and vice versa. Both have the capacity to provide us with materials for shared activity. Where that activity leads is up to us.

Verity Spott

Click Away Close Door Say [((((([FOOTNOTES])])))]
Contraband Books, 2017

REVIEWED BY DANNY HAYWARD

Transgression for Anti-Fascists

During 2016 and the period of Donald Trump's great electoral circus, the racist provocateur and ex-*Telegraph* intern Milo Yiannopoulos travelled around US University campuses giving stump speeches under the heading "The Dangerous Faggot." The talks were all structured around a kind of Coué method done in reverse. Just as the French self-help pioneer Emile Coué thought that his patients could improve their lives by repeating to themselves the refrain *every day in every way I'm getting better and better*, the Yiannopoulos technique relies on the rote behaviourist insistence that the progressive opponents of his audience are getting in every way worse and worse. They are *insane*, they are immunized against facts, have nothing to say for themselves, are ugly and malformed, are mentally ill, hate their lives and are nobodies. At no other point in the whole history of far-right agitating has the role of the speaker been so *explicitly* therapeutic or so openly committed to making an audience feel "comfortable" with itself "in its own skin." Every provocation comes packaged with an attempt to ensure that its listener "feel[s] ... confident, happy [and] reassured," as if they were babies staring up out of their cradles at the enormous benevolent faces of fascist leaders whose unconditional positive regard for them has been cribbed from a "client-centred" ego psychology that is itself so ferociously gutted of meaningful content that it seems like it must expressly have been designed to ensure the wellbeing of murderers, fascists and investors in private equity firms.

The convergence of fascists on the therapeutic idea of self-acceptance has several interrelated motives: (1) It promotes the ongoing effort by media-savvy “ethno-nationalists” to stuff every available gap in the market with outright racist content. Free speech, the free-floating affect of background music, and “client-centred” theories of “unconditional positive regard” are all elements of a larger culture in which contentless feelings of gratification are the very lifeblood of its marketing operations; a fact which is exceptionally useful for customer-facing fascists whose main aim is to invest the desire to murder people or to laugh at their misfortunes with a thick atmosphere of reassuring familiarity. (2) The mock liberalism of psychological self-acceptance reproduces in the uplands of the human ego the same mock liberalism by means of which contemporary KKKompoops endeavour to argue that they are merely rectifying a pattern of anti-white discrimination (the theory according to which white liberals have failed to “accept” their own culture etc). In both cases this acceptance-concept is a pseudopacification of violent impulses. To tell someone that they should accept something that is fundamentally hateful is a convenient way of inflicting trauma under the auspices of its overcoming. (3) Just as classical fascism radicalizes the forms of violence required to reproduce bourgeois class relations, customer-facing fascism radicalizes the forms of psychological conformism required to “accept” life in a service depot. In a world in which revolutions are always made above your head and at your expense, what better coping mechanism can there be than learned hatred of the idea of transformation itself? At a low level of intensity this hatred can be named “self-acceptance” and marketed by client-centred therapists to their paying customers. At a high level it can become the working vocabulary of client-centred Nazis and serve as the basis for their campaigns against migrants and transgender people. The second ideology is only a new permutation of the first.

*

These basic reflections arise for me out of a reading of Verity Spott’s poem *Click Away Close Door Say*, a work that depicts two years spent working

in a private care institution in the UK while watching with mounting apprehension the insurgency of the far right across the US and much of Europe. The poem begins like this:

I used to love to work; to come inside
here every day, begin to move,,
 & what that means (to assume
a false beginning) is walking up
the tiled path, a
metal hand rail, grass
to either side. The sign at the front a defunct
 emblem. The company tag is bust.¹

The language commences in what seems at first like natural speech conducted artlessly in iambic pentameter, I **used** to **love**; and only the construction “to work,” a verb where we might ordinarily expect a substantive, disturbs the sensation of speech and meter in easy erotic symmetry. But even that interference feels relatively serendipitous, or like a retrieval of the idea of labour from self-subjugating cliché; and it binds it into a sequence of infinitives (to love, to work, to move) whose total effect is to summon into speech an impression of blissful self-direction. The pauses governed by punctuation arrive at regular intervals and enjoin a rhythm of gentle alternations, three beats and then two, three beats and then two, in which the rhapsody dedicated to wakeful activity is unified naturally with the music of simple restfulness. At the third line, the pattern at first seems set to continue; “and what that means” is something else that the speaker may have “used to love;” their love for work and movement is also love for the meaning of work and movement in combination; but then a parenthesis opens in the line and the language enjambs before it has arrived at its accustomed metrical limit, “(to assume/a false beginning),” before the sentence continues in such a way as to sever the relationship of “and what that means” with what “I used to love.” Instead “what that means” is identified with the more prosaic reality of “walking up/the tiled

path, a/metal handrail, grass.” The fantasy of the workplace as a closed environment of love, movement, labour, and meaning has a hole punched into it and its deictic closure is compromised. The metrical organization of the language materials is terminated, the intricate patterning of verb sounds is travestied in the ugly half rhyming of “defunct” and bust,” themselves bringing to a close two terminal sentences that seem to repeat meaninglessly more or less the same thing, like any sequence of days in an ordinary working week: “The sign at the front a defunct/ emblem. The company tag is bust.”

This particular breakdown becomes a defunct emblem of what I think that the poem is doing as a whole. *Click Away Close Door Say* is the large-scale depiction of a breakdown in a workplace and of the various efforts of corrupt suasion and bullying used to make people shut up and fucking accept it. It is, also, a wild commentary on the fascist media talking over our heads; a more perceptive account of their baleful symmetries than can be acquired from the most admired journalistic accounts of either; an anti-case study written in furious infidelity to the idea, so central to the bumptious marketing-principles of the genre, that the lives of vulnerable people must be either *larger* than life or else worth nothing at all; an anti-worker’s inquiry on the verge of screaming; and a confession. Where it plays out is a “specialist support service” in Hove that “looks after young adults with high functioning autism and related diagnoses/mixed diagnoses.” The service belongs to a larger group of private care homes that in turn was purchased by the private equity firm Advent International in 2011 and re-sold for a £500 million profit in 2016 to the US healthcare group Acadia;² and much of the poem deals with the material harm that that £500 million profit represents, in terms of understaffing, trauma, workplace assaults, resentment and confusion, failures of care, bullying, malfunctioning of essential equipment, managerial horseshit, hopelessness and depression, and in short the whole gamut of experiences that contemporary service economy workers and would-be workers are obliged beamingly to accept:

you got through
until the reader was fucked
for a week & the lift was broken &
the emergency radios were gone
& we were understaffed for over a
year and you were leaking in the
low drops of paranoia, anger, and loss [...] (18)

This is the situation in which client-centred fascists operate: where “Your dad, the pervert estate agent/washes his Milo” (49). The poem remains in its first parts predominantly an inquiry into details like these, which are, or constitute, as Spott puts it in the Note she appends to the poem, the “effect that the transition [in ownership] had on the individuals that lived in the service.” Accordingly the work spirals outwards from the space itself to the process of its managerial restructuring, and then more generally still to the languages in which that restructuring was carried out and made to “seem okay” (53), at which point the focus shifts incongruously to the minor mid-twentieth century US client- or person-centred therapist Carl Rogers, a figure who the poet “feel[s]” “that I hate” (69).

During her pilgrimage across this landscape of management troubadours and clinical romanceurs, the poet is surprised by the fact that “change” and “movement” are ceaselessly invoked as if their value were held to be self-evident, or as if no change could ever be for the worse. At about the mid-point of the book, she quotes the following gloss by the collective-author group Wealth of Negations:

CHANGE – Invoked in a general, unqualified sense to consecrate as natural and inevitable a particular shift of power in favour of some interests and against others. The naturalistic alibi gets more persuasive as one petty interest strings along together a series of coups: it’s the way the world is going; you can’t turn back time so

you'd better adapt. Where particular change can be passed off by its partisans as Change in general, resistance to their next move is made to look like defence of an insufferable past.³

Why is it that contemporary fascists, rising like pimples from the backside of a specifically *revolutionary* ultra-nationalism, are now so deeply concerned to make sure that you're sitting comfortably? And since when was the value of Progress aggressively taken over by the factotums of companies like Advent International, as a technical vocabulary with which to dignify a business-model based exclusively on asset stripping? Implicit in the argument by Wealth of Negations is another recognition about the nature of revolutionary transformation. Four decades into a period of relentless bourgeois counterinsurgency against all of the institutions of working-class life, very few theories of Change have held out against the general current. Readiness for revolution implied willingness to die or to be utterly transformed. It was unthinkable except in a moment in which all historical potential seemed as if it must be held in the balance. By contrast readiness for "transition" of the kind that flows like a muddy tributary into the great roaring £500 million river of private equity alpha implies something else. It does not imply readiness to die or to be transformed. It implies readiness to be attacked. Change "invoked in a general, unqualified sense" refers to an alteration not in the basic order of social reality, and still less in the objective possibility for human freedom, but primarily to an incremental increase in the individual's psychic powers of endurance. Farcical invulnerability is this alpha of this outlook and its omega too: the real object of all of its realize-your-true-potential talk; and it is so deeply rooted in the daily practice of getting by that it has a vocabulary for every occasion.

As the chatter of bourgeois therapists permutates insensibly into the motivational speeches of fascist service providers, the root cause of these changes lurches more and more blatantly into view. In economies in which, as we now know, the "overwhelming share of employment" is "shunted into sectors of the economy that are, perhaps by their very nature,

technologically stagnant,” a great translation gets underway in the culture that supplies them with a running commentary.⁴ Vocabularies designed in historical periods in which more and more time was being reclaimed from necessary labour are restructured for a social milieu in which the possibility of technical revolutions of this kind becomes increasingly unthinkable, or where, as Verity Spott puts it, “in a generalisation based on feeling,” “[t]he private sector ... doesn’t mind being immobile” (14). In this situation revolution becomes a new name for sclerosis, the in-house verbal radicalism of a period moonwalking towards general decline; and only a few grazes and flesh wounds in the syntax of progress and transgression do even the slightest thing to give the game away.

In *Click Away Close Door Say*, the life that is “priced into” this “toxic pyramid/ of fearful desire” (49) progresses inexorably to the point of losing it, and the third section of the poem ends with a depiction of this breakdown, in a prose stripped of almost all of its rhythmic and grammatical assets:

I do not want to walk through this door to stay inside that
 door to remain out here between them I do not want to have to
 move I want to see no one to be alone anyone everyone my time
 taken or given back I hate the cold and the heat the scabs and
 ridges wrists t something back something gone no returning no
 extending no doors and every door. Sick of sick of what take me
 away take back my time my agency I want it gone // was born in
 the wrong body the wrong world its climates can not drop out
 of. What is the i-body, wait. (83)

This is the first of the poem’s multiple endings: its most obvious blocked up exit. It presents in shattered monologue a life at the brink of despair, exercising their last remaining autonomy in convulsive nihilism, by devaluing the life that they know will be taken from them anyway: “take back my time my agency I want it gone.” It is the statement “I used to love to work” *before* it was knowingly concertinaed: the same thought with its

mask of descriptive imperturbability thrown impatiently aside. Where does it play out? At first it might seem to be a thought screamed out in the skull in the privacy of a bedroom, in a mind pulled closed by depressive inertia. But then why are there *two* doors rather than one? Why do “I . . . not want to walk through this door to stay inside that door to remain out here between them”? On second thought we find ourselves back at the poem’s beginning: “out here” in the “airlock” (10) between the outer and inner doors of the private care unit, of which we had earlier received an “emotionless/diagram” (22). And in a sense the poem as a worker’s inquiry, or as “emotionless diagram” of a work process, of its control mechanisms and “chokepoints,” ends here, as too does the narrative of its development: in the anguished fit of “want” in which the desire to work or to remember what it felt like to love it is swallowed up and extinguished; while the elegy that succeeds it and makes up the poem’s final part is at once a memorial to that desire *and* a form of literary recidivism, in which the impulses to oneiric abstraction that are repressed in the emotionless production of commodities for other people’s use are at last given free rein. But at this point another kind of development takes over in this poem, or wells up in it, and this development is not only a “hidden exit” from the despair that takes over a life that is shut into its place of employment with no way out, trapped in its solicitude for the people for whom it cares, and unable to care for them; but is also in a more general sense the beginnings of another kind of approach to the whole question of what development means, in an economy in which the activities in which we receive our wages as workers appear in every sense impossible to revolutionize. It asks us, on the kind of grandly excessive scale on which alone questions of this kind become possibly really to *ask*, rather than merely to advertise, something like this: If it is the case that contemporary client-centred fascism and its predilection for “transgression” is in fact only a permutation of client-centred ego psychology and its benign hatred for the desire to self-revolutionize, and *if* both serve to drive us to new extremes of reassurance, then what does it mean to create an art in which transgression represents an actual, living transformation in human potential? The poem’s answer to this question only begins at the point near to its end at which its narrative undergoes a violent breakdown. Wait.

*

In her recent book about Yiannopoulos and related trends in online intellectual revanchism, Angela Nagle writes of the “cult of suffering, weakness and vulnerability that has become central to liberal identity politics.” “[T]he key driving force behind” this tendency, Nagle writes, “is about creating scarcity in an environment in which virtue is the currency that can make or break the career or social success of an online user in this milieu.”⁵ Nagle does not say very much about *the environment of this environment*, about its “driving force” or about its currency—no private equity firm having yet announced to its investors that it has realized a quinquennial profit of 500 million virtues—but, as the life and times of Donald Trump have proven incontrovertibly, a little bit of conceptual scarcity can go a long way, and no one should ever allow a real economy to get in the way of a fictitious one. Put differently, Nagle’s presentation *accepts* the idea that the bold “rebellion” of the far right emerges out of the exaggerated vulnerability of those on the left and *justifies* that response on the grounds that “the left” has created scarcity from potential abundance, which is just a modish way of asserting disapprovingly that it has been both profligate and idle. At the same time, it tacitly denies the idea that the racist and misogynist “transgression” of the far right is the form taken by another therapeutic cult, this time of “comfort, confidence, happiness, and reassurance,” the object of which is to translate an attitude of petulant egoistic defensiveness into an idiom of rebellious nonconformism, the better to conceal its deep continuity with all of the other kinds of endurance training that in existing capitalist society are passed off as business development or therapy.

The image of vulnerability in *Click Away Close Door Say* also begins with fluidity, but in a quite different mode. On p. 25 of the book the theme comes up for the first time:

Every time you move

or are still it’s there.

You are leaking. You think to yourself you
are leaking. The containment of lives, this
conservative sensation of motion.

It never becomes clear exactly who this “you” is, and the revision to which the poem was subjected after its first publication in *Prelude* magazine deliberately serves to hinder this particular kind of discernment, by routinely translating heterogeneous third- into homogenous second-person pronouns. But news of leaks tend to be related in the poem in a voice of patient tenderness, accentuated by the smoking chaos of much of the language into which the voice intrudes. And the “conservative sensation of motion” that might be associated with bodies that don’t leak and that cannot because they are “contained” also seems to characterise the language in which a leaking person or persons are identified. Unlike the persons of managers, therapists and customer-facing demagogues, *their* rhythm, the rhythm of these bodies, is regular and non-violent: “they rage in you & teeth/ to leak like skin & fire/ from s/side,,,,,, to side” (48); or “We, both & all leak.” If I were to guess I would say that the person who leaks is a resident of the service and that the “leaking” of their body is a fantasy that structures their sense of the reality to which they find themselves exposed; the very end of the poem seems to suggest this reading most candidly, when the language allows itself a lyrical address whose acceptance of the division between poet and addressee is elsewhere refracted or prohibited: “My skin/never leaked like yours does. Your skin/leaks everyday” (95). Identification with this particular kind of fluidity then becomes the primary means by which the poem organizes its sense of loving dis-integrity, against the “Rogerian” transparency of the self who is inured to harm, in line with the aggressive imperatives of an economy whose “progress” has been made identical with attacks upon the vulnerable. The leak is the transference of a fantasized wound to the body of the speaker who cares for the one who bears it, and moreover it is the “wound of its transference;” the reader is guided through this poem against and in the wake of its narrative collapse by the tenderness that characterizes it, by the solidarity that grows out of that tenderness and by the fantasies

of self-harm that arise from the knowledge of its betrayal (“I ... wonder/ whether or not I am accumulating the pain of the people I/am paid to care for in order to strengthen my position against Rogers” (69)).

It’s within this system of what authors like Nagle dismiss as merely “performed” vulnerability that passages like the following begin to make sense:

Scatter graphs to track in daily motions, or scatter
the fingers in the door snapped. Scatter one finger over the
no
why not a commencement of sprinkled
skin in the buttons over your tingling digits like leaking milk shut

There is something painfully tentative in these rewritings of basic figurative preoccupations; the finger “scattered” this time rather than emitted or leaked, the skin “sprinkled” and not leaked or discharged, the commencement relocated from the “body” to the “skin.” Smashed into the passage I have just quoted like glass into a sink is an image of self-harm, of fingers snapped or shut into a door; so that the constant recomposition of a single image (the fingers entering the code into a door-locking mechanism) becomes the playing out of a fantasy of self-mutilation, and at the same time a kind of penance for the inadequacy of any individual permutation of the basic image-complex.⁶ This is not the kind of self-relation that is counselled by the psychotherapists who appear in Verity Spott’s workplace as authorities, the “humanistic” promoters of “client-centred” therapy, the “mature, nondefensive people” and compassionate disavowers of anything “which was coercive or pushing in the clinical relationship.”⁷ But nor is its violence turned outwards towards a figure of warranted hatred, like George Osborne in Verity Spott’s earlier work *Gideon*.⁸ I want to slam my hand in a fucking door. The wish underlies language’s creative exercise like concrete beneath linoleum or as a drumbeat of irritable frustration. In Brecht’s *The Measures Taken*, four party agitators sent to China to prepare the

Communist revolution learn through experience that the excessive moral idealism of their young comrade will jeopardise their mission. They shoot him and throw him into a lime pit, “so that the lime will burn away all traces of you.”⁹ For Brecht it was the role of political art to train the mind to overcome its internalized habits of sentimentalization: to see by means of a remorseless dislocation of perspective the historical damage inflicted by the romanticism of nonviolence. Is this realization a stage in my “self actualization” as a “person,” a part of my “effective personality change” in its total and complex sequence? Can it be recuperated like this, into the digit of a code that we use to make ourselves swing open? I want to leak my hand into a fucking door.

The desire to inflict this kind of pain is not in itself uncommon. For example: attempts at self-harm can be a common behavioural trait in those diagnosed with high-functioning autism, the people for whom Verity Spott was “paid to care for” (69) during the period of employment that her poem describes. Recent historical transformations in the ideology of psychiatric care or “social work” have led (inter alia) to a gradual turn away from the most brutal procedures for stymieing this kind of self-harm, including the use of “aversive stimuli” that mimic and exceed the self-punishment that they are designed to “disincentivise.”¹⁰ In Verity Spott’s workplace the poet is instructed to “Ensure the erasure of punitive approaches,” or, since it seems unlikely that any actual training manual would have used that phrase exactly, then she is at least instructed to *avoid* them; and in place of curative violence, the idea of progress as incentive is introduced, variously embellished into a jabber of pep talk along the lines of “we make things possible” (23), that we need to be “going forward” (29), or to be realizing the idea of “Change in general” (38); that we can improve through “forward motion and training” (43) or by means of the humanistic ideology of “self-actualization” (67); and that in all the domains and dive bars of our experience we can gain from the commitment to the “anomalous flow” of one or another kind of virtuous cycle (92).

This is the prescribed language-screen through which life clinging to its need for transformation is forced to look out. The life that wakes up broken and stupid, for which “fags condense the neglected breakfast” (34) before a shift starts at “7:26am” (11), that blurts out “Fuck life” (22) and that thinks of itself as “a hole to the broken/slot” (56); a self that “shout[s] back at [itself] for help” (69) and that can’t sleep (81) and whose metaphors can never climax as symbols but which instead stir nauseously like acid on the stomach, this is the self who experiences itself through that screen and feels itself reduced in it to a wretched outline. And I am pinching myself as I write this. The juddering repetitions throughout *Click Away Close Door Say*, the evidence of text cut and paste in a word processor and pushed around like food on a plate, the self-plagiarisms and doublings back, are the material signs of a years-long attempt to rip the poem’s master metaphor out of its frame, the “central fucking door,/ object of completion” (58); to slam that door shut and to kick open some other means of egress, some “hidden exit.” What all of those cuts and reversions mount up towards is the terms of an argument the exact internal relations of which remain undecided, but which *must* remain undecided, not because ambiguity is in itself fundamentally preferable to clarity, but because the conditions in which self-discovery is undertaken are the conditions of a contemporary workplace in which meaning can either be snatched at or fully abjured; and because through the central fucking door and at the top of the staircase of genuine self-actualization that leads away from it, abjuration shines and gasps like a neon no-entry sign.

So much of the language of this book and the dynamic of its development is defined by the compulsory task of returning to materials that could only be produced in conditions of fragmentation. The earlier draft of the first of the book’s four parts that was published in *Prelude* is conspicuously more personal, more defiantly self-assertive, than the version that was finally included in the edition published by Contraband. Names of co-workers in the *Prelude* version are sanitized in the Contraband version with a black line; the third-person pronouns used to refer to residents of the support unit

are crammed into an overpopulated second-person “you,” while brilliant descriptive passages like the following are aggressively truncated:

The regional manager overheard me on the phone joking that I am “just a support worker,” which, following my failed attempts to become an academic, musician, poet, entomologist, B2B Comms worker and terminally a senior support worker, I felt was, although a joke, at least realistically fitting. She exclaimed “you’re not just a support worker,” to which I replied that I also write poetry and make music when my time allows me to. We haven’t got on well; she isn’t often there (since the Care and Quality Commission inspection in April).¹¹

The parenthesis that intervenes towards the end of this sequence and which is never shut up is a premonition of the more comprehensive cut to come. In a general sense these deletions are a mediated expression of the difficulty of returning again and again to a language of passionate speech that is distinguished by virtue of the fact that it is not allowed to flow, is not allowed that luxury, reserved to pensioned and/or independently wealthy poets,¹² of unbroken, “natural” song, but which in instead split up and interrupted by the suspended sentence of a shift pattern, or left like “Glue traces on the elbow | of the wound in our creepy head.” (49).¹³ This glue that thought is like, which we first encountered on the fingers inserted into every button of the door lock “like a gluey mask” (13), begins here to look like the clue it rhymes with, a creepy purloined letter “unevaporated” between my fingers like anti-bac gel, or blood by any other name: not flowing from the wound but gumming it up or joining its edges together. And the deeper into the poem you go the more these “clues” begin to haemorrhage: “When you’ve been subject to abuse/you might probe/it into your speech, taking each eye/to gauge whether or not what has happened is of/consequence/in the external world” (23); or 27 pages later, “When you’ve been a victim of/ abuse you might drop hints into conversations/to see if the kindness you’re getting from others sticks to you” (50). Sticks like glue? The poetry offers no

immediate answer to this question; it only opens up a path into its “leaking world,” descending like a helter skelter through the fissures in a vocabulary in which the ordinary exposition of a self—which is to say of its ascent upwards, “through the echelons to constitute/the defunct “I”—is flattened as a “history of dispassion” into the prim rattle of those who would run it into the ground.

It is fucking disorienting the experience this language can make you go through. Its complex of symbols, as they grow into one another and become more and more closely inosculated—like the image of trees on the cover of Verity Spott’s earlier *Trans* Manifestos*¹⁴—begin to thicken and warp in something that resembles pain. It seems to me now that the specific kind of pain that leaks into *Click Away Close Door Say* like water into a stranded dinghy is the pain of *betrayal*. It is the betrayal of a particular group of vulnerable people by a government of rich administrators who violate historical possibility by virtue of their total ignorance of it; this is so obvious that it hardly needs to be said. But it is also more than this, it is a more specific kind of betrayal, one that couldn’t be so clearly anticipated in the first lines or pages of the poem in which it begins to well up. And to say exactly what it is requires of us perhaps that we take one step back. I think that in trying to formulate for ourselves a vocabulary in which we conceive of the damage that is inflicted upon us with a view to deepening our response to it, and in seeking to collectivize our *capacities* of response, perhaps with the aim of “[t]rying to develop a social poetics of work and mental health” (92)—that in trying to formulate this vocabulary we may also betray our own experience, the “tiny gap in the frame” of our life in which it becomes possible to think with absolute clarity and conviction of our own reality in a language defiantly singularized by its own indifference to all general purpose or persuasion. In order to resist this self-betrayal that occurs in the communal elaboration of purpose we must in turn betray ourselves, in the broadest sense; we must give ourselves away; and we must do this even in the place where we least expect it, in the centre of a vocabulary whose emancipatory promise is defined by its obliteration of ego boundaries and

by the desire that bursts through them. We must disclose inadvertently the experience that no one can share with us entirely: must leak it out. In *Click Away Close Door Say* the recession in the speaking subject occurs through a self-betrayal within the work of self-overcoming, the leak within the leak. To drown in its hidden exit feels like this:

... on the corner of Albumen Road in Telford, I met a man called Scüth. Or was it Halifax. I was walking alone so Scüth appeared. He was from Britain with a British accent and the first thing I knew about him was that he was suspicious ... Yiannopoulos Scüth would sit across me from me in his clothes the only ones he wore and would read the paper but for the two holes prised out his eyes poking through them ... I explained everything to him how my school had been where it was but sat on the floor to tell him for he beneath his coat fingered a pistol perhaps that's what I suspected. He'd peer at me around corners, so I filed them down. I should have filed for a divorce but filed the corners of the house and even then noticed one day a tiny rip in his coat where he was leaking. Now why did he leak? What was he on that he leaked something out of himself while he lived there looking suspect. A pause in the brief wind... (90–1)

It hurts for me to read this passage. It hurts because it reduces an image of tenderness to a generic trope. It blocks out the care expressed in “Your beautiful body is leaking” or flattens it into whatever it is that you might feel at the conclusion of whatever horror novel you might pick at random from the rack at a railway newsagent. The poem will end a few pages later with another horror sequence, when its speaker describes herself murdering an ego psychologist called Tom Kitwood by cutting through his brain stem—“The hacking/ is the last taboo in me”—and then with her explaining how “When I was small ... I had something taken from me that I didn't know that I'd ever know I had” (95); and so there's a sense in which this passage is only the impersonal adumbration of a conclusion. On

“Albumen Road” (albumen is the protective and nutritive layer of liquid in an egg), in the domestic environment, a seedy down-at-heel lodger whose name sounds sort of like “cut” or “scuff,” and who is also the fascist Milo Yiannopoulos, leaks his concealed essence. But the writing in this passage is, or it has become, more hurtful for me than the conclusion, not only because it stages the moment when an abusive desire reveals itself in the scene of protective domesticity, but also and more catastrophically because it does so in exactly the vocabulary that the poem has enjoined us with all of its prodigious resources of metrical intelligence and at the very limits of its unique spectrum of anger and solicitude to hold on to or to trust.

What is a real act of transgression? Earlier I said that the poetry’s manipulation of its language materials was consistently accompanied by an image, or un- or half-conscious fantasy, of self-harm, and that that fantasy was sustained and inspissated by the need for transformation in excess of the change that any particular dislocation in language was capable of attaining; and I tried to argue that that kind of abdication of self-care was beautiful, because it resumes the need for life contained in linguistic transformation on a higher plain and with a greater prospect of joy and its extremities. But a mark of the difficulty of this poem is that it then goes on to raise this dialectic of transformative need and self-harm to a still higher level of organization, replaying it in relation to the category that it comes closest to offering to us as a hidden exit from fascist aggression and from the patter of psychological self-acceptance on which that bullshit now models itself. The “last taboo” in us really does here feel as if it might have been violated, rather than merely invoked in order to dignify a prejudice. There can be no meaningful transgression in art that does not raise in us spontaneously and irresistibly beyond all of our capacities to repress it this sensation of having been violated; and at this point I really do ask myself this question; the pain and the anxiety I feel in this passage is already its preverbal insurgency; and the question overruns my energies of composition and carries its way into my anxious, trivial dreams: maybe this shouldn’t have been done, maybe that taboo ought to have remained intact, in the dream of care for the vulnerable

whose lives already exceed in meaning and in purpose the airtight crawl space that makes up the internal reality of those whose personalities have already been locked closed. And isn't that dream enough? Why do we need to betray it? What possibility of transformation can justify the experience of groundlessness that that betrayal can give rise to, and how can we know that it won't lead to nothing but pain, to "pain ... without emollients of world"?¹⁵ Is there any way in this world of not being in love with pain? Do I need to take this final step?

Any work that allows us to answer "yes" to this final question without anxious reservations must have failed to place its world under significant duress. Only in poetry where we feel acutely that in this final step we cannot say whether the ground will open up beneath the foot that is poised in mid-air or the foot that is planted on the ground can we know in turn that its movement is real and not ersatz. The vapid pretence of transgression has never in my lifetime represented a greater threat than it does now: principles that barely exist in the world and for whose reality we need to fight get raised up on stilts of violence as the main dogmas of our entire culture, so that the act of tearing them down comes to look like daring freedom from illusion. Fuck all of the people who think that this is a way to struggle against the reality that makes us begin our attempt to talk about our lives in the language of what we used to love. I love this poem, I think it is unforgettable; no one will ever be comfortable in it; and it is because and not in spite of this fact that the love that leaks from its entire body betrays itself without any guarantees that it will pour out towards its end.

¹ Verity Spott, *Click Away Close Door Say*, London: Contraband, 2017, p. 9. From now on page references in brackets.

² Nicholas Megaw, "Britain's Priory Group sold to US healthcare company for £1.5bn," *Financial Times*, 4 January 2016: <<https://www.ft.com/content/0fa13fe2-b2e3-11e5-b147-e5e5bba42e51>>.

³ This definition was included alongside many dozens of other razor-sharp entries, on topics as diverse as “Cutting Edge” and “Facilities Management,” and as strangely similar as “Bean-Counting” and “Thinking,” in the collective’s volume on management-speak, available for download at: http://www.wealthofnegations.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/terms-and-conditions_Final_front_back_cover_01.04.2013.pdf.

⁴ Jason E. Smith, “Nowhere to Go: Automation Then and Now, *The Brooklyn Rail*, <<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/03/field-notes/Nowhere-to-Go>>.

⁵ Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017).

⁶ The mutilation may originally have not been self-mutilation: the first allusion to it occurs on p. 11, when Spott writes “So your hand gets/caught between the handle/and the wood, dull/pain. Your service manager wonders wistfully/if your stuck hand is an act of protest/to somehow discredit his efforts” (11). In this case what is described is a workplace accident—the kind of thing that might then have to be “populated” in the scatter graph of a risk assessment, perhaps by the same person who has already suffered the accident the “risk” of which she is expected to assess. But the constant, compulsive reproduction of variants of the image seems to me like a more deliberate act of self-harm all the same. Pain is supererogatory in relation to description.

⁷ The quote is from Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1961), p. x.

⁸ Verity Spott, *Gideon* (Brighton: Barque Press, 2014).

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), p. 33. “Then we shot him and/Cast him down into the lime-pit/And when the lime had swallowed him up/We turned back to our work.”

¹⁰ These “developments” in therapeutic technique are described at great length in Steve Silberman’s history of the diagnostic category of autism.

¹¹ Verity Spott, “We Make Things Possible”: <<https://preludemag.com/issues/3/we-make-this-possible/>>.

¹² Or as the poet Anne Boyer puts it: “There are years, days, hours, minutes, weeks, moments, and other measures of time spent in the production of ‘not writing.’ Not writing is working, and when not working at paid work working at unpaid work like caring for others, and when not at unpaid work like caring, caring also for a human body, and when not caring for a human body many hours, weeks, years, and other measures of time spend caring for the mind [...]” From *Garments Against Women* [2015] (London: Mute, 2016), p. 44.

¹³ “the removal/of life force and body from narration” (27).

¹⁴ Verity Spott, *Trans* Manifestos* (London: Shit Valley, 2016).

¹⁵ The full quotation is as follows: “The writer is a carer in an institution where the normativity function of world, its disposition of space, occurs as a containment of death. Human empathy in this environment is an irruption of uncontainable disorder. To look at this place produces deep disorder inside: how can one live there? How long is it possible to live at an extreme edge, this kind of edge? The answer relates to truth, sheer insistence on truth, without any resolution by hope. That means pain, without emollients of world.” <http://www.contrabandbooks.co.uk/verity-spott/>. This image of a poet deprived of a world that she would otherwise rub into her skin to relieve pain is interesting. What is its active ingredient?

Tongo Eisen-Martin

Heaven Is All Goodbyes

City Lights, 2017

REVIEWED BY MARK NOWAK

“Something about the worst society to write a poem in”:
On Tongo Eisen-Martin’s *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* and Hardt/
Negri’s *Assembly*

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri open the “Preface” of *Assembly*, a follow-up to their collaboratively written *Empire* trilogy—*Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009)—by quoting a poet, Aimé Césaire: “Here poetry equals insurrection.” I often go to Hardt and Negri to help me think through my relationship to the odd bedfellows of politics and literature, so Césaire’s inclusion so early in their text helps to remind me that any discussion of the new “leaderless” social movements, as Hardt and Negri describe them, is a space for engaging poetry and poetics, too.

In a passage on these new social movements about a quarter of the way through *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri contend that today’s movements “affirm a beating heart of plural ontology. A pluralism of subjectivities, multiple models of temporality, and a wide variety of modes of struggle, which emerge from different traditions and express different objectives, together form a powerful swarm held together by cooperative logics.” (69) The aim of these pluralisms, they continue, “is to create a model of constituent democracy in which differences are able to interact and together create new institutions: against global capital, against the dictatorship of finance, against the biopowers that destroy the earth, against racial hierarchies, and for access to and self-management of the common.” (69)

If this is, indeed, the age of new plural ontologies, as Hardt and Negri claim (and we could certainly argue the verity of this point with them at some future date), then it is hard to imagine a more apt and more engaging literature of this new plural moment than Tongo Eisen-Martin's magnificent new collection, *Heaven Is All Goodbyes*. Rarely have I read a recent poetry book that simultaneously hearkens back to those 20th century works at the apex of politics and poetry—think Audre Lorde and Dennis Brutus, to mention just one arm of that tradition—while feeling so “right this second,” so a factor in this historical moment that finds many of us filled with both hope—#BlackLivesMatter, the Sanders campaign and recent DSA electoral victories, the #NoDAPL and #MuslimBan protests—and deep trepidation (i.e., #45, a.k.a., @realdonaldtrump).

Heaven Is All Goodbyes is grounded in a “pluralism of subjectivities”: a grandmother, a bluesman, fathers and uncles and sons, bus riders, prisoners, slaves, communists, and many more. In the opening poem, “Faceless,” Eisen-Martin describes a social and economic dialectic that too many have only encountered on the patron side: “[t]he start of mass destruction/Begins and ends/In restaurant bathrooms/That some people use/And other people clean.” (9) Later, in “Look at this ghost that thinks it can fly,” he introduces a narrator who needs to “start deciding whether/I’m alive or differently alive.” (37) His “pluralism of subjectivities” are regularly working class and precariously employed, like the speaker in “Ceiling Traffic” who says that “working class windows is all my cigarette knows” (72). The narrator in “The Oldest Then The Youngest” similarly avows that “no one can name you better than the oppressed.” (132)

The book delves extensively into what Hardt and Negri term “multiple modes of temporality” in stanzas that address the long 1990s: “You just going to pin the 90s on me?/— all thirty years of them —” (11), as well as just a single year in that decade as in “The Simplicity of Talent,” where “a phone rings in 1988/and an epoch begins after a mother hangs up.” (27) The epoch, in many ways, refers to the ongoing deindustrialization

of America that comes to the fore in many poems in this collection. In “Wave At The People Walking Upside Down,” one speaker (denoted in italics) can “*hear the engines of deindustrialization*” inside “*the tin can on my left shoulder*” (23) while another speaker, in normal font, speaks of “The cold world/Of deindustrialization...” In “Selling What Slaves Made,” Eisen-Martin writes, “I’m down on my luck/Making snow angels/On the abandoned factory loading dock.” (48) Like Gwendolyn Brooks did in an earlier era in her poem “boy breaking glass,” the author reminds us that the landscapes of neoliberal globalizations can be creative spaces, too.

Yet Eisen-Martin’s book is, thankfully, far from the typical 19th- and 20th-century working-class literatures of elegy and regret. As Hardt and Negri point out, our contemporary social movements engage “a wide variety of modes of struggle, which emerge from different traditions and express different objectives...” (69). In *Heaven Is All Goodbyes*, we find singular acts of resistance, such as “The communist [who] has plenty of time/To finish his cigarette/and lie to his boss,” but we also encounter more collective modes of struggle. In one such instance, Eisen-Martin writes about “The cop in the picket line” who “is a hard working rookie,” then subverts the image in the remainder of the stanza when he adds, “The sign in my hand is getting more and more laughs./It says, ‘the picket line got cops in it.’” (21) Here, as elsewhere in the book, simple images—tattoos, bus rides, graffiti, kick drums, “where the couch came from” (66), etc.—become spaces where struggles “express different objectives” than those of earlier generations of working-class writing.

Yet it’s within Hardt and Negri’s notion of “creat[ing] a model of constituent democracy... against global capital, against the dictatorship of finance” that the poems in *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* are perhaps at their most pressing. In “may we all refuse to die at the same time,” the narrator announces that “I’m writing poems for the rest of my life again,” informs readers that “Electric chairs are not complicated: Have a drink. Go to work,” then writes that

The best way to pay me
Is in my left hand
While my right hand is juggling
A cigarette
A steering wheel
And a negotiation with the ruling class. (34)

For me, one of the books most compelling poems—though in truth, it’s almost impossible to choose one from the countless remarkable verses contained here—is “Channels to fall asleep to,” a poem about the searing effects of “the dictatorship of finance” on children and childhood. The poem opens with a single line followed by a brief stanza:

While shoebox to shoebox travels my childhood

Professionals roll garbage cans around a conference room
Half the size of a holding tank
Half the hope of a holding tank
Full of third world retail flattery
“nothing wrong with the blind leading the blind,”
we think they just said (105)

This appraisal of public, professional, and police-state spaces is soon followed by Eisen-Martin’s searing critique of public schools: “when a hostage has a hostage, that is u.s. education.” He presents us with a child who is “Not even ten years old/And most of you are on my shoulders,” followed by his assessment of precarious life:

casually be poor
teach yourself
how to get out of this room
and we’ll leave you enough blood
to turn off the lights on your way out

casually be poor...
they are all cops when you are poor (106)

Finally, *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* is equally vehement in its critique of biopowers, racial hierarchies, and “the lack of access to and self-management of the commons.” Throughout the book, we read of “the day jail quotas get filled/the day that the planet plays flat” (17), speakers who “Get out of the car against desperate white supremacy” (29) and who “saw a white man sketching the meat hooks into my angled carcass.” (124) And we hear the collective and the common speaking—“I am not an I./I am the black commons” (16)—of a future that may—or, more likely in contemporary America—may never arrive: “A masterpiece is coming/(It just has to beat a million bullets to the spot)”. (55)

“Here poetry equals insurrection.” Césaire’s phrase is an equally appropriate epigraph for *Heaven Is All Goodbyes*, too. In Tongo Eisen-Martin’s second collection, we hear a dialogue between the “pluralism of subjectivities” and a more collective commons. His book reminds us, today, of poetry’s potential role as more than an ornament in our movements. Don’t we all occasionally need reminding, as Eisen-Martin prompts us in the volume’s final poem, that “World history has a proletariat when the lights come back on—”? The brilliant poems in *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* provide just a little bit of those future lights’ electricity, too.

Stephen Collis

Once in Blockadia

Talonbooks, 2016

REVIEWED BY JULIA POLYCK-O'NEILL

*I still don't know
How to write the poems
I should have been
Writing all along – small
Yet commodious spaces
Just off public areas
Where small birds flinch
Along dirty ledges
And then mill together
Hesitating to inhabit
Fluctuating urban winds
Sheer view corridors
Or the air above
Height restrictions
Someone has yet to buy*

This excerpt, the first stanza from “Home At Gasmere,” one of the final sections of Stephen Collis’s *Once in Blockadia*, draws out one of the main tensions underlying the collection: how exactly can the poetic project intervene in the gross environmental and social injustices being committed in a poet’s backyard, directly under their gaze? Although the project itself speaks to a much-larger sphere, the vastness and inherent ecological cruelty of the Anthropocene, the collection also unfolds at the specific scale of the Collis’s individual experience of his being sued by Texas energy company, Kinder Morgan. The movement between these two perspectives is what makes this collection poignant. The personal and the public versions of the

self are necessarily caught up with different aspects of the world, though are knotted and entangled with the very controversies that ignite one's desire for revolution. The poet's world moves between the body and language, and, as Collis reveals in his multi-part meditation on the deep violence of the Trans Mountain Pipeline project, these various parts are challenging to reconcile.

Once in Blockadia opens with epigraphs from W.G. Sebald and Naomi Klein, swiftly introducing the somber, contemplative tone and themes of the book, as well as the source of the term "Blockadia," which Klein describes as "a roving transnational conflict zone that is creeping up with increasing frequency and intensity wherever extractive project are attempting to dig and drill." The pairing of Sebald and Klein speaks to the genre of historically-reflective and melancholic, politically-engaged lyric poetry: Sebald's observational, visually-engaged prose and Klein's incisive political commentary are each present in Collis's movement through the complexity of his situation, of his very situatedness.

Collis's poems radiate a certain sincerity, but without lapsing into sentimentality, and this is likely, at least in part, because of his use of legal documents, namely the 2014 Court Transcript from his trial, as a framing device, lending a good portion of the text a sense of cool detachment and authorial-authoritative distance. Though chiefly lyric in tone, sections are organized according to an experimental-conceptualist dialogic method, bringing swaths of found text, direct quotes, photographs, and visual metaphors (including erasure) into conversation with internal, personal monologues. This is, however, the linguistic experimentation of an author, not merely an author-function; this (eco)poetics is embodied, even if entrenched in a post-Language context where language is politics. Here, language also provides a direct link to poetry's Romantic past. The section "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands"—a title which seems an ironic and deliberate juxtaposition, given that an early poem suggests that poetry's inherited histories are undergirded by a self-conscious distrust—reads:

I am not the graphite in
Your pencil William Wordsworth
Though graphite is one of the most
Refined hydrocarbons and was
Mined in the heart of your lakes
Fueling the march of privileged
Beauty as in Titian's painting (13)

This is actually a heartfelt emotional exploration, often constructed around a recurring direct address to the English Romantic lyricist, known for his often-autobiographical, impassioned tributes to places and figures in his life.

Wordsworth – I feel you too!
Though there is no mechanism
To nuance this conversation
Across the years – so I brought
Your ruined cottages your
Evening walks and Grasmere
Homing here to the Tar Sands (62),

Collis muses, sharing his perspective, imbued with literary histories, and the sharp contrast between Wordsworth's remembered landscapes and the too-real hellscape of the contemporary Canadian dystopia upon which he meditates. He interweaves, in this modest section—the second of five in the book—contemporaneous reflections with references to well-known Wordsworth quotes or Wordsworthian, archaic phrasing; word combinations that seem intended to draw parallels between the remembered arrival of industrial modernity and the modern-day devastation of Indigenous lands and treaties, and perhaps the precarity of the natural world in capitalism in a more general sense. Such phrases reappear in later passages as well, as a means of gesturing to the kind of heartfelt, serious memoriam Collis is

crafting. He infuses the intertext with an ardor borne of a personal political commitment to standing with his community against ecological warfare, and it is this highly personal undertone that draws the reader into the narrative that unfolds within the poetry.

The opening section, “Subversal,” begins with a court transcript from Collis’s trial, and sets up a number of key themes and tropes that follow, including an allusion to the May 1968 slogan, *Sous les pavés, la plage!*, which closes the transcript and reappears in various subtle, reflexive forms throughout the collection: “So underneath the poetry is a description of how the barricade was constructed” (9). The repeated phrase, echoing the revolutionary battle cry, even if oblique and playful, reveals the kind of politics Collis wishes to engage in within his poetic project, as in his real life. The sharing of the biographic experience of having been in the trenches and sued gives testimony to the depth of his concern. It is easy to dismiss this genre of earnestness, but understood according to the backdrop of late-late capitalism, and the near-incomprehensible power that energy conglomerates wield in the context of the financialized landscape, the drive to express the minuscule realities of the self becomes almost noble, and perhaps a means to move through a kind of ecological-economic trauma.

And though Collis’s frame of reference is broad (“Blockadia” itself being a somewhat abstract reference to a shifting set of boundaries, delineated by contention), *Once in Blockadia* is written to respond to and commemorate specific events, in a specific place (Burnaby Mountain), even if the frame shifts between related locations as a mode to speak to how the Trans Mountain conflict relates to larger geopolitical networks, controversies, and realities. This collection performs an informational, descriptive role in addition to voicing a creative, personalized response to localized injustices. The poems illustrate the rich life, consisting of flora and fauna since time immemorial, that has coexisted on the mountain and in the affected territories, including those of the Kwikwetlam, Kwantlen, and Tsleil-Waututh, depicted in Collis’s writing and in the included photographs, from Collis himself and from

Genevieve Robertson and Jay White's *The Watchers*, which add a poignant visual dimension to the work as a collective enterprise. The references to the specific and the specifically-local are also mirrored in further intertextual elements, particularly those which draw in the works and personal-political legacies of such Vancouver-area writers as Rita Wong, Cecily Nicholson, Peter Culley, and Malcolm Lowry, whose famous image of the (S)hell refinery from across the Burrard Inlet provides useful historic context for understanding the artistic activism that underscores and shapes Vancouver writing communities. As with a number of his previous projects, including *To the Barricades* (Talonbooks, 2013) and *DECOMP* (with Jordan Scott; Coach House, 2013), which focalize other respective atrocities with a similar postmodernist, fluctuating and fragmentary voice, Collis uses his 130+ page text as a platform for expressing how the process of responding to and recording and/or broadcasting travesties such as the Trans Mountain project is collaborative and multiplicitous, showing how complexity can only be productively met with corresponding complexity. This project can be read as a concerted attempt to demonstrate how aesthetic actions, often considered as a disembodied, disengaged undertaking, might—and will likely—fail on their own to enact real change within real events, but also how a well-timed, well-performed failure can participate in *and as* controversy, as a significant change-making activity.

Divya Victor

Kith

BookThug / Fence Books, 2017

REVIEWED BY DALE ENGGASS

In the “Prologue” to *Kith*, Divya Victor relates a story about the experience of being displaced. “*You were between terminals*,” it begins, in italics, and continues in the second person and without italics, to describe an encounter with a woman lost in an airport. “You walked her to her gate, which was in the opposite direction of yours.” This is not so much a good deed as it is a recognition: “You learned, as we do, of her occupation her hometown her mother’s health and you learned something of what she was paid for washing dishes mopping floors changing the nappies chopping vegetables for a family of five that was not hers to love or live for.” The pronoun “we” links “You” and this woman, this migrant domestic laborer, who is not a stranger, but could be “Your own wife or sister or mother or daughter” carrying cans of Coke “home for her children because they had never tasted it,” and who, in token of this recognition, “pulled a warm and heavy can of Coke from her bag and offered it to you.”

Victor’s use of the second person pronoun in this introductory tale would seem to place a reader in the position of “otherness,” much as Claudia Rankine does in her retelling of microaggressions in *Citizen*. But such a move is not this prologue’s intent. After a paragraph break, the speaker continues, “And when you told this story and when you began to explain how her offering had made you feel, your trembling hands—because of habit and manner—reached toward your eyes and hid from us their misery.” The “you” here is not the reader-as-stand-in for migrant or immigrant hesitating before the departures board, but rather the speaker’s addressee: a friend or family member who is, as the speaker is, part of the “we” and the “us” referred to in the story. The “you” is *kith*, and *kith*, Victor implies, is not

you. *Kith* raises the question of who is reading; or, rather, the question of how books can be both for, and not for, particular readerships.

Kith is a book concerned with the nature of inclusion and exclusion, with all the compromises and contradictions that come with both belonging and not belonging to a culture. Consisting of ten sections that employ an array of forms and styles, the book itself follows a sort of kith-logic: a collection of “Paper People” who find themselves bound together by ties of foreignness. A book or a boat; as Victor notes, “catamaran” comes from Tamil *kaṭṭumaram*, or “tied wood”, which, incidentally, isn’t a bad description of a book. To give just a few examples of *Kith*’s range: “Dromomanie” recounts stories of “ambulatory automatism” told by friends and family during Victor’s childhood. “Paper People” creates a series of minimalist poems out of common advice for adopting appropriate cultural etiquette. “Paper Boats” conflates boat and body through a series of instructions that to my mind recall the “Body Movement Poems” in Rodrigo Toscano’s *Collapsible Poetics Theater*. “Blood” mixes a horrific journalistic account of the violently anti-immigrant “Dot Busters” with “An Unknown Length of Rope,” Victor’s close reading of John Singleton Copley’s 1778 painting *Watson and the Shark*, previously published in *Semblance: Two Essays*. “Salt” eulogizes the thousands of salt workers killed when a cyclone struck the Indian state of Gujarat in 1998.

What ties this constantly shifting ground together is, to use the title of one section, the experience of “No Man’s Land;” that is, the experience of being an immigrant. Or, more specifically, the way one is constituted as an immigrant through the stories one tells about oneself, and the stories a culture tells about its others. For instance, referencing Gandhi’s famous Dandi March in “Salt,” Victor writes: “As a metaphor, salt helped kith win independence; as a commodity, it has caused others to remain enslaved. Both these stories should be equally well known.” The repetition of such narratives not only highlights the transmission of familial and cultural lore, but also belies a kind of fatigue—the fatigue that comes from having to tell

histories of atrocity, disaster, and racism again and again and again before they even begin to be heard.

These repetitions of personal and political history bear traces of Victor's own back and forth movement between India, Singapore, and the United States, without ever implying a settled or completed trajectory. And while Victor's projects take quite different forms, *Kith's* focus on the immigrant as a person continually in transit, occupying a no man's land "*between terminals*", as it were, extends the territory covered in her previous collection, *Natural Subjects*. There, Victor *detournes* various documents pertaining to the bureaucratic component of immigration, defamiliarizing the process of "naturalization" with all of its attendant nationalist and essentialist assumptions.

Natural Subjects also contains moments of biographical and family detail, but they are presented in the factual, affectless style that bureaucracy encourages. Compare this institutional manner to *Kith's* closing section, "Foreign Terms," a private glossary compiled mainly from childhood memories and containing entries such as "B is for Buhari's Pistabar Chocobar Ice Cream," or "K is for Kerchiefs." In the latter, Victor observes: "An average eight-year-old is just four feet of sugar, snot, and dirt. I was no exception." This is the intimate narrative tone characteristic of memoir. Indeed, some passages approach the realm of nostalgia—a mode, it's worth noting, that Victor does not reject out of hand. In an epigraph, she quotes Amitava Kumar's contention that "nostalgia can be a weapon in a cultural milieu where you are expected to feel only shame for what you have left behind" and, in a note at the end of the book, she describes "nostalgia as a kind of political salvage." In the same note, Victor includes the rest of Kumar's comment on nostalgia, " 'but I do want to ask what it means to remember,'" and she elaborates, "I wanted to ask, borrowing a phrase from Arundhati Roy, how 'the checkbook and the cruise missile' were part of the affective economy of my grandmother's custards." Nostalgia, as Victor employs it, retains its doubly weaponized potential as anti-Orientalist tool

on the one hand, and cruise missile on the other. This ambivalence around the act of remembering in turn reminds readers that nostalgia literally translates as both “homesickness” and “the pain of returning home.”

Colonization and capitalism are the overlapping systems that continue to engender this pain. In the entry “I is for Innie,” for example, an innocent childhood attempt to meld an “innie” with an “outtie” belly button prompts “[a]n early discovery about the disparities of skincolour [sic].” This colorism is both perpetuated and pounced on by multinationals like Unilever, whose “ubiquitous product of skinshame—a cream called Fair and Lovely—offers kithwomen a ‘safe skin lightening technology’ while ‘empowering individuals to Re-script their Destiny.’ Because skin colour is destiny, as Unilever well knows.” Specifically, “the destiny of the thousands of Indian workers whose lives have been poisoned by mercury because of the Anglo-Dutch company’s use of Kodaikanal, and kithwomen, as its toxic dumpsites.” As a summation of this vicious circle, Victor mimics the familiar Maybelline tagline: “Maybe She’s Born With It! Maybe It’s A Profitable Biopolitical Caesura Affirmed By Imperialist Expansion!”

The ability to jump from a critique of colorism and environmental racism to a witty rewrite of advertising’s vacuous monologue is one of Victor’s many strengths as a writer. But, more than that, these jumps formally enact her view of cultures as fundamentally unstable, always already shot through with their other: “M is for Michael Jackson and Malcolm X;” “S is for Saget, Bob.” *Kith* asks, to use the language of the belly button example above, what it means to be an “innie” or an “outie” in a culture/society?

A different way to phrase the question is: who (or what) comprises one’s “kith”? Kith, of course, denotes one’s friends and acquaintances rather than blood relatives. But also, crucially, “kith” is related to “couth,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “cultured, refined, and well mannered,” and, by extension, to “uncouth,” which the OED designates as not only “lacking good manners, refinement, or grace”, but also “(of art or language)

lacking sophistication” from Old English *un* [not] and *cunnan* [to be able to know]. To be “uncouth” is to be both “unknown” and incapable of acquiring knowledge.

I rehearse this etymology because Victor repeatedly stages the question of belonging, of being in or out, as one of uncouthness. For example, in the other essay to appear in *Semblance*, “Cicadas in the Mouth,” she notes that, “For some, opening the mouth to simply say ‘I’ also means saying ‘Aye’, assenting to certain fates.” So-called “uncouth” speech—speech lacking, say, a “proper” British or American accent and correct idiomatic usage—marks one as an outsider while also drawing one into relationships of similarly uncouth kith. The postcolonial situation produces “the mouth in transit, a mouth not at home with itself.”

In *Kith*, the best demonstration of “the mouth in transit” is the eponymous section. It opens with a kind of translation exercise between Tamil, Latin, and English that recalls similar passages in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* and Kathy Acker’s *Blood and Guts in High School*. After an interlude in which a six-year-old Divya affirms that there are two countries in the world, “*India and Forin*,” twenty variations/mutations of the word “foreign” are printed in all caps and large font on facing pages. Some seem phonetically motivated, like PHURAYN or FAWRUN, while others indicate an associative chain that moves from FORIGN to ORION and FORIGIN to FORAGE.

While it’s tempting to view this solely as a riff on “uncouth” speech, some basic Google searches of these terms prove instructive. For instance, the fourth word, “Firang,” is a derogatory Hindi term for a foreigner, in particular a British officer or gentleman. The top hit for “Fawrun” is the Dubai-based RAKBANKIslamic, which offers the “completely Sharia compliant” Fawrun Term Deposit (“Instant profit. Instant joy”). “Firinne” is the Irish word for “truth” (one of the top hits on my search was the article “How to say ‘post-truth’ in Irish?”) while, in the context of *Kith*, even a familiar word (at least to ignorant western eyes, i.e., mine) like “Forbear”

recovers its double sense as a verb meaning to refrain from doing something, and a noun meaning ancestor.

Whether or not all of these allusions are intended, Victor's variations on the word "foreign" are an example of *Kith's* centrifugal movement. The reader is impelled outward, asked to contemplate the shifting entanglements of globalization. At the same time, it dramatizes the way the book both courts and resists "foreignness." Victor addresses this ambivalence in a kind of preface to the "Foreign Terms" section, as she describes her personal "brand of critique against Orientalism—a dire warning against self-exoticization, against writing as explanation," specifically, "the fine line between expressing oneself and explaining oneself to my largely white audience in the United States." To complicate Orientalist expectations, Victor writes of trying to "unitalicize" language, as "[t]o italicize was a way of explaining—it meant, *Sorry you don't understand this word I'm using even though everyone I love understands it. Here, let me help you*" (the italics here are Victor's own). Victor's point is, I think, more complex than an endorsement of the command to find one's unique voice. Rather, to unitalicize her language is "to write in an English that others had borrowed from us for centuries," a fact Victor corroborates through words like Pariah or the aforementioned Catamaran, both of which originally come from Tamil. Therefore, Victor states, "I have refused to remain foreign in a language that is as much mine as it is yours":

& so I began this manuscript. & so I made of poetry something
other than an explanation

— of an "us" you couldn't know
— of kith unitalicized.

The refusal to remain italicized is not to succumb to assimilation—adopting an appropriate transparency and legibility in one's speech and conduct—but rather to recognize that languages are always already infected by foreign influences. For Victor, to write in English is still to write in a language "borrowed from ancestors."

Victor's insistence on "an 'us' you couldn't know"—echoing the initial shift from "you" to "us" in the prologue—is, finally, a provocative challenge to the current reign of relatability that threatens to homogenize experience and reduce the act of reading to moments of mundane recognition. As one member of her "largely white audience in the United States," I find her disavowal of universal relatability to be a profound stance. At some level, in other words, *Kith* is *not for me*. And that's *okay*. The most compelling effect of poetry, and reading more generally, is not the moment of immediate understanding, but that of incomprehension. Or at least the surprising mixture of familiarity and difference that results from being in transit: "Sometimes *Kith* is just small-boned monologues held in the cradle of a road trip—an American tradition with other stories of other others."

Euripides

bakkhai

Translated by Anne Carson

New Directions, 2017

REVIEWED BY KAY GABRIEL

Specters of Dying Empire: The Case of Carson's *Bacchae*

What's at stake in the desire called Anne Carson, the Canadian classicist, poet, and translator? Carson seems to thrive on enigma, and she's done so happily since the 1980's when she left academic classics for a wildly successful writing career. Her over 20 published titles include widely read translations of Sappho and the Greek tragedians (*If Not, Winter*, 2002; *An Oresteia*, 2010), non-fiction on classical themes (*Eros the Bittersweet*, 1986; *Economy of the Unlost*, 1999), and creative adaptations of Stesichorus and Sophocles (*Autobiography of Red*, 1996; *Antigonick*, 2012). But Carson's poetic practice draws primarily on a range of formal techniques she discovers in a 20th-century canon of modernism and the avant-garde. So while in content Carson updates ancient Greek texts, in form she adapts Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H.D., Samuel Beckett, and Paul Celan, among others.

This alignment produces a *frisson* of transgression, a little thrill of thumbing your nose at the canon. It's about as punk as cutting school to go read in a park, but more than occasionally Carson's work scandalizes professional classicists. In 2012, George Steiner reviewed Carson's *Antigonick*, an adaptive translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. "Translation should embody an act of thanks to the original," Steiner blustered. Carson's apparently didn't: a "vulgarit[y that] subverts this most adult, unsparingly formal, and radiant of masterpieces." As Steiner's literary pearl-clutching shows, Carson provokes chagrin in an academic old-guard. But it's unclear from

this irritation what Carson's would-be transgressive classicism actually enables, beyond a breath of fresh air from academic cloisters and ponderously faithful translations.

Carson's translation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, released from New Directions in late 2017, provides another chance to ask this question. A synopsis if you aren't familiar: produced posthumously in 405 BCE, the *Bacchae* relates the story of the god Dionysus' arrival in the Greek city of Thebes. The ruling house of Thebes resists adopting his cult, so he drives the women mad and sends them out of the city to Mount Cithaeron to observe his ritual practices. Dionysus then engineers the humiliation and demise of Pentheus, the king of Thebes and his cousin. He makes Pentheus lose his senses, dress in the clothes of a female worshipper of Dionysus, and spy on the women's rituals on Cithaeron. Pentheus is discovered and ripped apart by his mother Agave, who suffers exile along with her father Cadmus. The curtain falls on a whole new Thebes and a gory pile of limbs.

Generically Carson's *Bacchae*, transliterated in her preferred style as *Bakkhai*, sits between the recreative urges of *Antigonick* and her more straightforward translations of Greek tragedy represented in her *Electra* (Oxford UP, 2001) or *Grief Lessons: Four Plays By Euripides* (NYRB, 2006): Carson's version adheres broadly to Euripides' Greek, albeit frequently torqued in form and idiom. But Carson specifies that Euripides himself licenses this innovative formal play. As she writes on the back cover copy:

Euripides was a playwright of the 5th century BC who reinvented Greek tragedy, setting it on a path that leads straight to reality TV. His plays broke all the rules, upended convention and outraged conservative critics.

This assertion aligns Carson's *Bacchae* with her translation of Euripides' *Orestes* in Carson's volume *An Oresteia* (FSG, 2010): "[Euripides] has revolutionary instincts," she writes. "He wants to shatter and shock. He goes about it subversively. Leaving the external structure of the myth and the traditional form

of the play intact, he allows everything inside to go a tiny bit awry.” In other words, a mirror of Carson’s own practice, at least as she appears to imagine her work: the renovator of traditional forms who pushes tradition over the edge of a crisis.

This image of Euripides as Athenian tragedy’s modernizing enfant terrible isn’t unique to Carson. But she illustrates this assertion in her *Orestes* translation by way of a highly particular figure: the effeminacy of the Trojan slave in the *Orestes*, “a sort of hysterical Trojan version of Venus Xtravaganza” (2010, 177). Carson’s nod to Xtravaganza—a Latina trans woman and ballroom drag performer profiled in Jennie Livingston’s 1991 documentary *Paris is Burning*—is a curiously presentist gesture, a too-timely attempt at shock value through the citation of contemporary trans experience to explain the force of Euripides’ xenophobic messenger speech.

In fact, this association of radical Euripidean form and feminizing gender transition characterizes Carson’s take on the *Bacchae* as well. Her introductory paragraph goes on:

The *Bakkhai* is [Euripides’] most subversive play, telling the story of a man who cannot admit he would rather live in the skin of a woman, and a god who seems to combine all sexualities into a single ruinous demand for adoration.

In Euripides’ play, the god Dionysus humiliates Pentheus, king of Thebes, by dressing him in the clothes of a female Bacchant before leading him offstage to his death. In Carson’s interpretation, this robing scene actually discloses Pentheus’ repressed transsexual desire. Carson again splices a present configuration of gender together with a 2400-year-old representation of transvestism. This interpretation is, to put it bluntly, bizarre, either a baldly anachronistic reading of Euripides’ play or a cynical publishers’ ploy to drive up sales among a voyeuristic cisgender readership eager to consume a titillating trans narrative with an especially violent conclusion.

Either way, Carson has tipped her hand twice, in two translations, by the insinuation that Euripides stays thoroughly modern by the invocation of a feminizing costume, in Carson's hands fused to the specter of 20th- and 21st-century transsexuality. If Carson uses her Super Saiyan avant-garde Euripides as a mirror of her own work, then the pertinent question becomes: what does Carson think the spectacle of feminizing gender variance—in other words, drag—has to do with her translations, even her own poetic practice in sum?

One possible answer: within a certain highly transphobic imagination, a drag-affiliated constellation of gendered sensibilities offers a symptom of cultural decadence. "Euripides presents a twilight where everything is susceptible to tricks of a fading light," Carson writes in her introduction to *An Oresteia*, quoting the Broadway director Brian Kulick. Where Carson imagines Euripides as a transitional figure, renovating tragedy in the throes of imperial decline, drag then appears to offer her a little window-dressing for her fin-de-siècle ambience—think of the Emcee in *Cabaret*. From this perspective drag symptomatizes, albeit superficially, the anarchic energies of historical break.

But Carson in fact deploys drag to a significantly more programmatic effect as a site of transgressive pleasure and desire on analogy with the aesthetic transgressions of the avant-garde. Her *Bacchae* elevates this analogy into whole historical sensibility mediated by the figure of an avant-garde Euripides. This emerges in the poem Carson appends to the beginning of her translation by way of an introduction. "Dionysus is god / of the beginning / before the beginning," she writes, gnominically inquiring about "what makes beginnings special":

Beginnings are special

because most of them are fake.
The new person you become
with that first sip of wine

was already there.
Look at Pentheus
twirling around in a dress,

so pleased with his girl-guise
he's almost in tears.
Are we to believe

this desire is new?
Why was he keeping
that dress in the back

of his closet anyhow?

Carson presents here the seeds of a tidy philosophy of history: “beginnings,” the pretensions of the declaratively and historically new, turn out in her account to indicate a primordial essence (say, a Dionysian “beginning before the beginning”). Pentheus services an elaborate metaphor for Carson’s purposes: she discovers a whole historiography figured in the pleasures of drag, which she provocatively argues to have always been present. This verges onto an ontology: Dionysus reveals what you *really* are; just look at Pentheus.

The punchline arrives in the introduction as in the play itself, in the narrative shift from the pleasures of wine and ritual clothing to ruinous anti-social violence. She continues, describing the women engaged in the ritual worship of Dionysus:

This is the world before men.
Then the posse arrives

and violence begins.
What does this tell us?

The shock of the new

will prepare its own unveiling
in old and brutal ways.
Dionysus does not

explain or regret
anything. He is
pleased

if he can cause you to perform,
despite your plan,
despite your politics ...

something quite previous,

the desire
before the desire,
the lick of beginning to know you don't know.

If life is a stage,
this is the show.
Exit Dionysus.

The narrative effect that Carson introduces is, effectively, a theoretical primitivism: the radically new doesn't just turn out to be quintessentially "quite previous," it also causally reintroduces a primal violence onto the historical scene. As dialectics of enlightenment go, Carson's is anticipated by the anthropologist René Girard in his 1972 tract *Violence and the Sacred*. Girard's account congregates around Dionysus as a figure for the containment of primordial human violence via the ritual act of sacrifice. In Girard's textbook structuralism, the violent outbursts of the *Bacchae* derive from the dissolution of canonical distinctions—women,

men; humans, gods; humans, beasts—and the final *sparagmos* restores the social order via the sacrificial paradigm.

Girard divides his attention between readings of Greek tragedy on the one hand and intervals of an imperialist epistemology on the other, documenting social practices in the global colonial periphery. On loan to Girard's primitivism, the worst excesses of this racist fantasy are nonetheless suppressed in Carson's version: all that remains is the formal appeal to originary violence, Carson's "beginning before the beginning" that takes the form of an authentic Dionysian primal scene. But even this stratum is an arch-ideological effect, a colonialist imaginary that equivocates between some Conradian heart of darkness supposedly animating Greek tragedy and a pre-civilizational violence presumed to characterize the objects of European imperialism.

Still, Carson varies from Girard to the degree that sacrifice in her version offers no resolution to a social crisis but only initiates its anarchic unfolding. "The posse arrives," in her version, "and violence begins... The shock of the new / unfolds its own unveiling / in old and brutal ways." By citing a cliché ("the shock of the new") used to designate a canon of modernism, Carson implicates the 20th century in her vision of nightmarish progress. The apocalyptic tones of this conclusion bound over Eliot's melancholic handwriting on the "futility and anarchy of contemporary life" towards a Yeatsian poetics of total social disaster, which the peaceable tones of Carson's stoic authorial persona narrate from an unruffled remove.

But here the force of Carson's deployment of drag as a metaphor becomes clear. Her introduction proceeds in sequence from Pentheus putting on the dress with pleasure, to the male incursion into the women's ritual gatherings, to the conclusive Dionysian violence that proceeds, as Carson says, "despite your plan / despite your politics." This narrative sequence discloses a formal argument: the phantasm of a nebulous trans desire precipitates a climactic dissolution of the social. Complete with the critical detail of the

male intrusion into a separated female realm of the social, the apocalyptic progression of this narrative recalls Janice Raymond's 1979 *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, an infamous document of anti-trans feminism directed against the specter of the "medically constructed transsexual" infiltrating women's movements.

So in Carson's hands a spectacular constellation of trans-inflected desires and behaviors represents less a mere symptom of social catastrophe than its privileged figure. What does this have to say for her translational practice? Or, to rephrase this question: how does Carson situate her poetics in the vortex of her historical sensibility? Carson marshals a narrative of vertiginous collapse implicating her own moment: a direct line advances, she writes, from Euripides to reality TV. This rewrites Eliot's "direct line between antiquity and contemporaneity" into an aggressive analogy between the most immediate present—say, season 9 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*?—and the 5th-century B.C.E. Athenian empire. The common term that mediates this analogy is "imperial decline."

Here the curious double function of Euripides as transitional figure discloses its full force: recall that Euripides in Carson's hands is both a metonym for imperial "twilight" and a writer with "revolutionary instincts" who "wants to shatter and shock." In other words, a writer just shy of a climactic rupture, stuck in an old regime and ruthlessly paddling towards the sublime new. If this is the function of the avant-garde in an unfolding crisis, then in the privileged figure of drag that we may now name without qualification as a transphobic phantom Carson discovers all the transgressive pleasures and all the cataclysmic undertones that animate her would-be subversive classicism.

Carson therefore ignores the realities of trans lives in attempting to achieve a historical narrative via the operations of metaphor. She thereby betrays a theoretical tendency that Viviane Namaste diagnosed already in 2000 in her book *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Namaste asserts that the queer theory that had come to prominence in the

1990's used drag as a metaphor of social relations in general by dodging a confrontation with the social realities of trans lives in particular. She offers as an example Judith Butler's citation of (once again!) Venus Xtravaganza's life in Butler's book *Bodies that Matter*. Writing about Xtravaganza's murder by a client, Butler asserts that her death represents "a tragic misreading of the social map of power." Namaste rebuts:

Since Butler has reduced Xtravaganza's transsexuality to allegory, she cannot conceptualize the specificity of violence with which transsexuals, especially transsexual prostitutes, are faced. This, to my mind, is the most tragic misreading of all.

It should be amply clear by now that Carson falls into a nearly identical trap via her opportunistic overreading that unites Pentheus' Bacchant costume with transsexual desire. The deployment of trans people always as a figure for something else entirely is sheer stigma raised to the level of rhetorical effect.

Worse yet, Carson advances her historical allegory in the service of what we can now recognize as a staunch cultural conservatism. Her historical narrative accords—ironically!—with a proposal infamously advanced by none other than George Steiner in 1961, the contention that the moral universe of tragedy no longer had anything to say to the anarchic world of the present. Carson, in effect, demonstrates her fidelity to Steiner's position in the common ideological ground of that empty abstraction called "modernity": Carson agrees with Steiner on the anarchy of the present, and disagrees only in that she continues to translate Greek tragedy for New Directions. This catastrophism ultimately gives way to a political quietism utterly out of sync with those who have a stake in the alteration and overcoming of the world as we know it. That it takes the shape of an exploitative deployment of trans lives in the mode of historical allegory demonstrates the hard limits of Carson's project in means and ends at once.

Rob Halpern

Music for Porn (Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2012) [MfP]

——, *Common Place* (Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Press, 2015) [CP]

——, [———] *Placeholder* (London: Enitharmon, 2015)

——, *Touching Voids in Sense* [2017] (2nd edn, London: Veer, 2018)
[TViS]

REVIEWED BY LISA JESCHKE

'The World of the Heterosexual is a Sick and Boring Life'¹

In 2013, Rob Halpern gave a reading from his sequence *Music for Porn* at the Sussex Poetry Festival, Brighton, which pushed against the time slot allotted to it to such a degree that it seemed to never end, and in some ways it still hasn't. The nervous repetitive continuity that manifested itself was not accidental, but integral to the poems Halpern read. *Music for Porn* is concerned with the lyric I's fucking of and being fucked by the holes and wounds of 'my soldier' (MfP, 135), who 'died last September hit | By Taliban mortar' (MfP, 124)—to name only one of a series of deceased figurations that appear condensed into the entirely intimate, yet entirely general poetic conceit of the appellation of the one: 'my soldier.' The political challenge of this conceit can maybe only become clear in its daring if we imagine the poems from *Music for Porn* read out not to a poetry audience at a one-off reading event, but, instead, night by night on the evening news, as a horrifying and violently tender good-night lullaby releasing the American public into the bad dreams that form its reality day by day.

The love object of the American soldier is a figure split into vastly discrepant symbolic ascriptions. At a first extreme, he² can be considered the hand, the tool, the executor of imperialist power. In *Tripwire* 10, CAConrad describes the interwovenness of hetero-normative masculinity, the patriarchal generational line and American state power:

My grandfather wanted me to join the Marines and become a sniper, make the family proud. [...] My grandfather wanted me to become a killer but I became a vegetarian faggot poet instead.³

With this in mind, it could be argued that by projecting his desire onto the figure of the soldier, Halpern, as a '*fucking faggot*' (CP, 111), seeks to break the patriarchal chain. In effect of the role play initiated by the poems, the desired soldier, that 'fine-tuned killing machine', is made a '*fucking faggot*' in turn, so that the fine-tuned self-reproducing machine called nation that leads wars such as the War in Afghanistan is sabotaged, the soldier unsoldiered, the war made ineffective: impossible.

In terms of a second symbolic extreme, the soldier represents the expendable worker, his flesh wasted, then mock-mourned. More often than not, veterans' days serve the future sacrificial waste of future soldiers, aim to perpetuate rather than end the mass-sacrifice of a significant part of the working classes. *Music for Porn* honors the soldier much more tenderly and truthfully than a state-sponsored flourish invested in the continuation of military aggression ever could. Iconographically, it does so—and this may be considered a third symbolic extreme at play—by taking up a homoerotic fetishization of sailor and soldier which found some of its most prominent versions in the writing of Jean Genet and the visual work of Tom of Finland. In *Music for Porn*, the uniformed bodies are neither live nor drinking nor sullied nor heroic nor monumental, but dead, injured. They are no less sexually attractive for it: there are more holes. Halpern's mouth steps in to fuck ghosts in the flesh, where they hurt most. The tropes of love poetry, whereby love and unrequited love create holes, gaps, wounds in the human mind, heart and body reappear as concrete and cruel social realities that precede the act of poetic speech. The imagined love relation established by Halpern's poetry is a mere afterword.

2015 saw the publication of two books that might be called serial extensions of *Music for Porn*: [———] *Placeholder* (London: Enitharmon, 2015)

and *Common Place* (Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015). The former collects a selection of Halpern's poetry from *Rumored Place* (2004) onwards and hence presents something of a time-line through the historical period of the early twenty-first century. It also already includes excerpts from the latter, *Common Place*, the project succeeding *Music for Porn*, a poetry sequence in which Halpern obsessively imagines himself fucking and being fucked by 'a civilian detainee [...] found unresponsive with a ligature around his neck in his cell at the Behavior Health Unit (BHU), Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, at approximately 2200 hours on (b)(6) 2009' (CP, 21). In a self-consciously interrogative passage, Halpern acknowledges that *Common Place* continues where *Music for Porn* stopped, that is to say, it goes beyond a limit point Halpern had set himself when working on *Music for Porn*:

As an experiment in early 2013, I began transcribing the autopsy report of a Yemeni man who had been held in U.S. custody since December 2001, and detained at Guantanamo Bay. [...] The report entered the public sphere, together with a cache of others, by way of the ACLU's recourse to the Freedom of Information Act, and is among the documents that I accessed while working on a book called *Music for Porn* for which I'd been seeking evidentiary language to denote the bodies of fallen U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. At that time, I decided not to use any of the language from those Gitmo reports in my soldier porn, afraid that I'd be betraying a fundamental difference. (CP, 155-56)

To continue from *Music for Porn* to *Common Place*, from soldier to detainee, of course, is not Halpern's serialization, but exactly consistent with the progression of American politics in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Precisely because Halpern's tracing of a political sequence is so logical, we witness in the step from *Music for Porn* to *Common Place* a radical increase in monstrosity: 'What does it mean to love inside a system that has made love monstrous' (CP, 141).

The fact that the love object has changed means that the position inhabited by the speaking subject, by the lyric I, by Rob Halpern,⁵ also changes. In this case, it is less the love object than the speaking subject that incarnates two extremes. First, for an enabled voice safely inhabiting the free world of the United States to read through the autopsy report of an inmate that has been suicided by that free world while detained at Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, for this voice to take the position of a subject that can get off on the objectified body of a dead person that cannot respond—all this is to double the murderous objectification that body has received at the hands of American power: ‘it’s impossible to recognize myself except in the figure policing his cell.’ (CP, 129) Prisons and detention centres are, in and of themselves, highly sexualized institutions in which functionaries exert an asymmetric degree of power over those detained. Not only have detainees held in Guantanamo Bay aired abuse claims against wardens,⁶ but political-compositional features such as the orange jumpsuit establish on a fundamental level non-consensual pornographic relations.

As the citation in above paragraph can indicate, *Common Place* subjects itself to continuous self-examination with regard to its re-enactment of this abuse. The complexity of the book, however, lies in the fact that the subject that arguably is the voice of America, the lyric I as warden, is also a subject denounced by that same voice as a ‘*fucking faggot*,’ ‘designed to denote my person even as it eludes my grasp’ (CP, 111). This renders a straight critique of the book as the straight reproduction of straight American state violence impossible. The following passage forms part of the elongated section ‘Hoc Est Corpus’ in which Halpern records his physical response to reading the detainee’s autopsy report:

The ligature fibers are elongated and distorted at the junction of the two cut edges c/w the history of cutting the ligature at the twisted part. There are no bloodstains on the ligature. Boredom distracts and numbness disorients, but arriving at that period I become acutely aware of my body as I write. The word ‘ligature’ excites me and my left hand begins caressing my thigh. (CP, 23)

The sentence ‘my left hand begins caressing my thigh’ is the statement of an American citizen getting off on the suffering of those his nation has captured and imprisoned. But it is also a form of speech that comprehends the history of ‘the closet.’⁷ If, across the second half of the twentieth century, to stick to recent living memory, gay desire could in many places not be openly lived, but lived only through closeted fantasies, then masturbating over an imagined, or photographed, or textually described—unreachable—body forms an important expression of a persecuted sexual desire. The related above-mentioned objectifying fetishization of certain types (the soldier, the sailor, the prisoner) continues to be central to the gay imagination: given that the state endows us with uniforms, we may as well play with them, desire the bodies that wear them. In the light of this history, Halpern’s objectification of an unreachable body can be understood as a genuinely longing and loving objectification that wants nothing more than the desired body to appear for real, in the flesh, unharmed, alive.

It is not only the history of the closet that informs every expression of longing uttered in *Common Place*, but also that of the AIDS crisis, the prolonged period of time during which the US government not only refused to act on behalf of those affected by the disease, but actively contributed to their further marginalization and exclusion, i.e. to their dying. As a result of this state aggression, during the later decades of the twentieth century, the lived experience of sex for many gay men—and for many others—would realistically have included the experience of fucking or being fucked by mangled, frail, dying bodies, bodies with holes. Not only that, but bodies yet unaffected would know that due to the government’s inaction, they might in turn, in due course, become bodies made largely of holes.⁸ The victims’ bodies were bodies sacrificed by the US government as much as the bodies of soldiers or prisoners. To make love to a body destroyed by the US government—or to fantasize about such love—can be considered as one’s opening towards extreme vulnerability, not least one’s own vulnerability.

The fact that the lyric I has been part of communities that have experienced injury and wounding is made clear most explicitly and expansively in the meta-reflective section “As for Myself in the Present” (CP, 96), in which the speaker describes sharing stories with ‘Bruce’ [Boone] (CP, 96) about ‘the deaths of friends’ (CP, 96). A figure called ‘James’ is mentioned ‘whose death twenty years ago continues to haunt my work’ (CP, 97). This figure becomes the central figure in a further extension of Halpern’s project, *Touching Voids in Sense* (2nd edn, London: Veer, 2018), which introduces itself through the following epigraph from Emily Dickinson: “A not admitting of the wound | Until it grew so wide | That all my Life had entered it | And there were troughs beside —.” Opening the collection with Dickinson’s megalomaniacal wound, reminiscent in its ‘Life’-swallowing character of the crack in the wall in Ingeborg Bachmann’s novel *Malina*,⁹ Halpern zooms into the medical detail: ‘It’s just to the right of the spine, about an eighth of an inch in diameter and barely abutting one of the three most prominent vertebrae.’ (TViS) This ‘[i]t’ is a ‘line [...] running from hole to lung’; James suffers from ‘sarcoidosis, an immune deficiency disorder that causes inflammation to multiple organs’ (TViS). Halpern, the lyric I, appears as a lover and carer for James: ‘My role was to inject [...] fluid daily into the lung by way of the portal and then, after several minutes, to suck out the resulting debris thru a plastic suction’ (TViS). To suggest a link between this trauma—‘my own trauma’ (CP, 97)—and ‘all the writing I’ve been doing for years now about sex with fallen soldiers & deceased detainees’ (CP, 97) is not to suggest that the personal history provides an explanatory key underlying *Music for Porn* or *Common Place*, as if *Touching Voids in Sense* could be read as an ur-narrative solving the difficulties presented by the others; Halpern himself remarks on the ‘obvious incommensurability between this and that’ (CP, 97). The extension is no source narrative, but just that, another prosthetic extension—of a project invested in opening, widening, socially inflicted wounds.

The complexities of illness as a social issue become apparent in a series of reflections in *Touching Voids in Sense* starting with the observation that ‘[b]y all appearances, James was a PWA (person with AIDS), tho his sarcoidosis

bore no relation to HIV beyond sharing the phrase “immune deficiency”. This, in fact, is noted as having contributed to a ‘heightened experience of alienation’ in that ‘his diagnosis positioned him outside AIDS-related camaraderie, community organizing, and social services.’ If the experience of the condition was privatized, Halpern suspects that there was nevertheless an element of social causation: ‘I’ve often pegged James’s illness to the degraded working conditions he suffered as a kid – exposure to factory tar, rubber & toxic VOCs – tho this may be a dream.’ This may be a dream, but if so, it is the dream that is the fleshly reality experienced under capitalism, it is, to use Sean Bonney’s phrase, ‘our death.’¹⁰ If the figurations and fantasies constructed in the sequence of Halpern’s books constitute ‘lines of flight’ (TViS), it only makes sense, then, for a further line of flight to be ‘fantasies of day laborers fucking me’ (MFP, 119). Wage labour as such, and especially precarious wage labour and wage labour involving continued contact with pollutants, may be thought of as a continual public health crisis. The AIDS crisis is an index of the processes of discrimination inscribed into regimes of work as much as health care more generally.¹¹

Having established a central contradiction between the lyric I speaking both with the voice of imperialist America and the voice of population groups oppressed by imperialist America, this review will now move into a tighter complex established by *Common Place* in terms of the cultural gendering of homosexual desire. In ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’ (1987), written at the height of the AIDS crisis, Leo Bersani theorizes the relation between the treatment of gay men during the AIDS crisis and a Victorian and post-Victorian history of misogyny that hates the prostitute as woman and the woman as prostitute:

the similarities between representations of female prostitutes and male homosexuals should help us to specify the exact form of sexual behavior being targeted, in representations of AIDS, as the criminal, fatal, and irresistibly repeated act. This is of course anal sex (with the potential for multiple orgasms having spread

from the insertee to the insertor, who, in any case, may always switch roles and be the insertee for ten or fifteen of those thirty nightly encounters), and we must of course take into account the widespread confusion in heterosexual *and* homosexual men between fantasies of anal and vaginal sex. The realities of syphilis in the nineteenth century and of AIDS today ‘legitimate’ a fantasy of female sexuality as intrinsically diseased [...]. Women and gay men spread their legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction.¹²

Among the fears listed by Bersani, that of disease (‘syphilis’, ‘AIDS’) is perhaps that which is most often aired explicitly in mock-moralizing public debates around female prostitution and homosexuality. Behind the public placard lurk the more hidden fears, which seem to coalesce around the fear of being emasculated, of becoming-woman—expressed, firstly, in the revilement of the idea of being the bottom (“Women and gay men spread their legs”¹³; see Halpern: ‘So I submit to what I can’t master and spread my legs for his dreamy cock’ (CP, 69)) and, secondly, in the idea of repeatability (‘multiple orgasms’) with possibly swapped roles (‘may always switch roles’), the latter aspect further implying the possibility of multiple partners (‘prostitutes’, ‘unquenchable appetite’). One is not born a woman.

Bersani’s argument appears particularly relevant in relation to an image that occurs, in variation, in both *Music for Porn* and *Common Place*: ‘I’ve been made pregnant with his child’ (MfP, 151); ‘I am pregnant with his child. I know this, and though my detainee isn’t even in the dream, his body haunts every detail of it, and my baby is his.’ (CP, 117) The passage from *Music for Porn* can be read as referring to the figure of the war bride left behind by the soldier, perhaps pregnant already, and in both cases, the reference to the speaker’s pregnancy can be read as echoing the common homophobic—and misogynist—accusation that gay men are basically just women who want to have babies. In response to these historical over-determinations, the lyric I takes the risk of becoming-woman. This is complicated, however, by the

fact that the image of the poet's pregnancy also constitutes a variation on the poet-muse relation. The traditional trope of the male poet's impregnation by the muse could itself seem always already queered if it did not doubly confirm hetero-normative gender divisions, insofar as: 1) it has defined the form pregnancy takes as strictly gender-divided, as, apparently, women have actual children while men issue works of letters; 2) it has endowed only men with the faculty of speech. While the female muse inspires, the male poet aspires, speaks, is heard. In taking up the traditional image of the poet inspired by the muse and translating it into his impregnation by soldier and detainee, Halpern ultimately addresses the fact that thanks to his 'masculine prerogative' (CP, 136) he is on top of his poetry, not only in those passages in which he imagines himself sexually on top ('I hollow out a cunt in his corpse *my opening to the other* and fuck a patient orifice' (CP, 70)), but even in those passages in which he images himself the sexual bottom: 'my fantasy | of being fucked by a Gitmo detainee' (CP, 79-80). The poet figure, not the detainee, speaks through the sexual organ of the mouth. The love object cannot speak. Under current conditions, neither arse nor mouth are democratic.

To the extent that the poet-soldier/poet-detainee relation mimics a poet-muse relation, then, *Common Place* absorbs into its body the history of male-hetero poetry—only, of course, it is not a male-hetero poetry. Wherever we move in reading *Common Place*, in terms of its over-arching gesture of desire or in terms of particular passages, this is the irreducible tension that suffuses it, that renders it a clear account of the brutality of the War on Terror, yet makes it impossible to read as the duplication or even endorsement of that brutality. This tension is immanent in the expression of the desire described to the extent that passages of emotional self-examination ('anxieties', 'worries' (CP, 162)) can at times feel unnecessary, albeit understandable; the poems are, as ever, more intelligent than the poet, and this is a compliment. It is clear without further explanation that the book is grounded in care, that there is a discrepancy between what the lyric I wants and what the book *Common Place* wants. By overlaying homo-erotic sexual desire with the

domination exerted by American state policy over its imprisoned subjects, *Common Place* declares that Mr. and Mrs. Heterosexual White Subject are actually themselves ‘*fucking faggot[s]*’ masturbating over the reports from Guantanamo. The stretch of this image pulls the social fabric from under the feet of a sick and disgusting ‘world of the heterosexual’, which is the social fabric that underlies Guantanamo Bay. ‘I want to believe the writing needs to be written, not that it simply can be’ (CP, 134): Halpern’s poems do not want a world in which Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp is a reality, they do not want to be the necessity they currently are.

¹ Aunt Ida in *Female Trouble*. Dir. John Waters. Dreamland and Saliva Films (1974).

² I use the pronoun ‘he’ not to obfuscate the fact that there are female soldiers or the dubious character of gender assignation more generally, but because the frame of reference here is – culturally – a male homoerotic imaginary. On gender slippages within this conceit, see below.

³ David Buuck, ‘An Interview with CACConrad’. *Tripwire* 10 (2015), 46–68 (pp. 47–48).

⁴ Ibid. 48.

⁵ Throughout this essay, reference to Halpern or the lyric I or the speaker of the poems is made largely interchangeably. Their merging is a conceit pushed by the volumes themselves: the sexual desire expressed needs to be real and extreme to render it possible for Halpern at least to begin to give an image of the extremism of the politics of the American government post-2001. If Halpern did not risk his own body and integrity in the project, the volume would read as little more than a fantasy diversion.

⁶ See, for instance, Paul Calahan, ‘Guards are sexually assaulting me, says the last Briton in Guantanamo Bay’, *The Independent* (31 July 2013). <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/guards-are-sexually-assaulting-me-says-the-last-briton-in-guantanamo-bay-8740739.html>> accessed 26 February 2018.

⁷ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1990).

⁸ See in this context Ron Athey’s ‘St. Sebastian’ (1999) performances, e.g.: Ron Athey, ‘St Sebastian’. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQzI9oVOcT4>> accessed 25 February 2018.

⁹ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* [1971], in *Werke 3* (Munich: Piper, 2010), esp. 336–37.

¹⁰ 'Our Death' is an ongoing sequence of poems, some of which have been published in Sean Bonney, *GHOSTS* (London: MATERIALS, 2017).

¹¹ On work-induced illness and injury, its effect on gay and trans communities, and on discrimination in health care, see Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* [1993] (20th Anniversary Edn, <<http://www.lesliefeinberg.net>>, 2014) and Leslie Feinberg, 'We Are All Works in Progress', in Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 1-13. Also see Feinberg's indictment of Lyme disease – a tick-borne illness that might, according to so-called common-sense, appear merely natural—as an 'undeclared war': Leslie Feinberg, 'Casualty of an Undeclared War Series: Introduction'. <<http://transgenderwarrior.org/lymeseries.html>> accessed 15 February 2018.

¹² Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October*, 43 (1987), 197-222 (p. 211).

¹³ As a friend of a friend put it, the arse is the most democratic organ.

¹⁴ Perhaps a criterion for all poetry.

Keston Sutherland

Whither Russia

Barque 2017

REVIEWED BY JONATHAN DUNK

Whither Russia follows Sutherland's collected *Poetical Works* published with Enitharmon in 2015. Joshua Kotin notes the parodic brilliance of its publication-semiotics:

The book interrogates the present, but is written for the future—designed to sit on a shelf between Spenser and Swinburne, even Shelley and Wordsworth.

Which reckons both the scale of Sutherland's intellectual ambitions against the massive futility of canon production—taxonomically it's as much to say three aspires to snuggle between two and four. Kotin agrees with John Wilkinson's verdict in *Jacket* that Sutherland's work constitutes the most significant poems written in English during this century—whatever that might turn out to mean—comparable to *The Waste Land* and *Howl* in their own moments. But Kotin—and Sutherland—know that poetry might never have been less able to interfere in the conciliation of collective and individual interests under capital than it is now. Nor, with the insidious stupidities of Conceptual Poetics—few paradigms have been less conceptual—has it been less interested in giving a fuck. It's a decent analogue for the antinomy between the predicament of efficacy—what do you do when you've done it—and the predicament of impotence—what do you do when you can't—that punctuates *Poetical Works*.

Whither Russia atomizes this impasse with Sutherland's usual ruthless enthusiasm, restaging what he elsewhere called the basic questions of radical thought—what size we are, and what size the world of our action—to which conventional descriptions of political lyric today offer disyllabic answers.

But then, the assumption that thought can become convention and remain thought—the old antinomy between form and content—is antithetical to Sutherland's project. So as much as it foregrounds the terms of its own production it also actively resists neoliberal mechanisms, which subsist upon fatuous assumptions of what can and can't be done with instruments like thought, language, and poetry.

I'll get to Sutherland's reformulation later—it strikes me as relevant that the best reading of Sutherland's precursor—per the obvious influence tropes—J.H. Prynne, was written, by Sutherland himself, about another form of crisis or transformation, in *Hilarious absolute daybreak* (2010). This essay gnaws the reversal or refutation between the messianic ambitions of *The White Stones* (1969) and the bathic prophecy of *Brass* (1971)—a shift as massive as Paul Celan's *Atemwende* from “the richest tradition of the trust it is possible to have” to the possibility of trust (118).

Sutherland locates a pivotal origin of this movement in Prynne's break with Charles Olson following the latter's reticence or inability to hold his poetics accountable to social and political responsibility. The implications of this schism, and its subsequent influence on different British, American, and Australian lineages of experimental poetry is worth its own book. For the time being, in light of Kenneth Goldsmith's bathetic demonstration of indifference, of Heriberto Yépez' searing critique of Olson's 'Human Universe' in *The Empire of Neomemory* (2013), and finally of the dubious resuscitation/revenir of the neo-imperial fetish of *Weltliteratur*, it's enough to say Sutherland is recasting the size and sphere of the experimental poem in a radically changed landscape of production

In *A Singular Modernity* (2002) Jameson argued that modernity—the modern, the current, is a species of rhetoric rather than concept. An erotically powerful form of rhetoric riven with slippery contradictions. For one it's impossible to construct an ontology, analysis, discourse, or poem of the present without recourse—however repressed, submerged, or diffident—to an image of the

past. You touch this antinomy whenever you prod the etymology of change—revolution, renaissance, reformation, mundus novus—the words of the dead limn the nightmares of the living. You can't speak the present without the past, and the paradox or parallax sharpens with modernity because the modernity-effect absurdly aspires to antithesis against history, time, and narrative. In the terms of classical dialectic there's no resolution of this slippage; it's an aporia. Fortunately, classical dialectic turned out to be some bullshit. The aporia in terms doesn't bring us to the edges of thought or history—it merely illustrates problems inherent to the terms. Derrida usefully upends this structure, and the aporia becomes not “an absence of path, a paralysis before roadblocks... (but) the thinking of the path” (1989, 132)—the impossible doesn't negate the possible, it clarifies it. Or as Sutherland writes in “Sinking feeling”:

This is the kind of thought it pays to have. The / thought I can't
fucking do this anymore that gets you / nowhere is free

Radical thought is coeval with violent despair. As Prynne writes in “About Warning an Invited Audience,” a particular form of tepid intellectual nihilism—or the boundary between nihilism and exhaustion—underwrites and sustains the ratchet structure of capital—after all, why would we continue to imagine it if we were left free to imagine anything else. It takes the ruthless work of resistance to arrive at whatever limited, selective, but actual freedom inheres in the present, and for Sutherland and Prynne poetry, a form of poetry, can be this work.

On its own this isn't new, interesting, or ethical. From Hejiniian's rejection of closure and Bernstein's legitimation of poetry as an 'other' world, we arrive at the most inert, least involved, and most smugly bastardised descendant of *détournement* in the fatuity that Conceptual Poetry can 'block' or 'disrupt' the movement of capital while simultaneously touting its institutional pelf with the subtlety of conquistadors. Even in its best intentions the idealization of obscurity qua and for itself is question-begging. If difficulty foregrounds the disjunction between the text and the regimes of value and meaning which

curate it, then as Anthony Mellors writes, “the error of the avant-garde has been to presume that the political effect of this negativity is self-evident, with the paradoxical result that more and more critical space is taken up with attempts to explain its performance (171).” Among other arguments Mellors has in mind Steve McCaffery’s claim that the ‘tactile’ poem eludes structuration, escapes semantic exchange, and, in a ridiculous phrase, arrives at the “surplus-value of meaning itself” (155).

My last exordial point addresses the question of whether, as a fairly prominent and superficially progressive Australian poet and editor asked me recently, poetry needs to be political at all. To which I have two contradictory instincts, firstly that all poetry, like other language, is of the polis; it is structured by the project of relation, and thus always already political. The praxis of neutrality, or indifference within relation is a politics only accessible to a privileged minority. My second response is that if as Goldsmith blithely put it, Conceptual Poetics “doesn’t have to partake in an ethical discourse,” then it should acknowledge itself as a classical or in Brecht’s terms a culinary form, without stake, and vacate discursive spaces devoted to actual thought.

Sutherland and Prynne follow an alternate path of experimental poetics, which I’ve elsewhere formulated as a form of deconstructive, apophatic, or negative lyricism, following the influence of Paul Celan. Goldsmith and Bök built a poetics on Francis Fukuyama’s triumphalism:

Any notion of history has been levelled by the internet. Now, it’s all fodder for the remix and recreation of works of art: free-floating toolboxes and strategies unmoored from context or historicity.

Celan argued the exact opposite in *The Meridian*—that the radically individuated sign that resuscitates utterance into a paradoxical “still-here” lies in the work of those “who do not forget that they speak from an angle of reflection which is their own existence, their own physical nature” (49). In other words, the most radical powers of the experimental poem are approached

through history, and not in the onanistic fantasy of freedom from it.

I've borrowed terms from deconstruction and negative theology because they pursue their object in complete recognition of the present inability of their instruments and resources to thetically articulate that object. They know that these instruments are intricately complicit with structures they oppose, and thus must approach their aims in paradox, as Derrida described Celan's poem *À la Pointe Acérée*: "in the night, along the path of questions" (2005, 2). This is a version of the predicament which confronts poetics today as form haunted by the notion that it once mattered, that it was involved in the project of mattering, of trying to find or share or imagine that something could matter. For Sutherland, this predicament is urgent—as he described his project in *The White Review*:

It remains, nonetheless, the horizon of my poetry to attempt to express with the maximum conceivable and liveable pressure an absolutely imperative need for the comprehensive revolutionary transformation of human experience and relations.

The premise of resistance is not the virtue of conflict itself, but the addiction to surplus implicit in the bourgeois mind's pentecostal faith in the commodity-fetish. The more obvious the material finitude and fragility of the material earth becomes with each melted glacier and sinking island the more luridly the idol of capital swells above it, like an obscene Kubrick star-child with Trump's asinine rictus-grin.

These antinomies are invited, put to question, and returned upon themselves obsessively in the structure of *Whither Russia*—two signature Sutherland rhapsodies, "Sinking Feeling" and "Instincts on Trump University"—brutal, manic, ludic, claustrophobic—bracket translations of French, German, and Italian canonical poets. As I interpret it this helical structure comprises a rhetorical attempt to grasp, shake, and restructure contemporary poetics' teleological landscape, the implicit narrative of its past and the horizon of its future.

“Sinking Feeling” is an operatic, partly satirical mediation on the uses and uselessness of despair. It takes an ambiguous epigraph from *Prometheus Unbound* where Zeus embraces scorched earth nihilism in contest with Demogorgon, and in context impossible not to read it as reflection of the Syrian refugee crisis, a temporal acknowledgement of climate change, and with the shutter-stock sandy sea-floor of the cover, the bathetic end of indifferent capital. This speaks to Sutherland’s work on the latent Marxist concept of *Gallerte* as brutalized, compressed labour, which, unlike the usual translation—congelation—renders the quality of experience unrecoverable. But even in the gelatinous model, however, there might be a nightmarish rigidity beyond which the human substance can’t be squeezed, a meridian of despair.

This poem is a tripartite epistolary monologue or masturbatory soliloquy dissecting the eros of the lyric impulse—in the broadest sense, any poem written for or towards anyone is lyrical—towards the secret object of the other. Sceneries of experience fracture and flow into globally circulated fetishes of affect and domestic flotsam. The relics of romantic subjectivity ebb against office politics as the frenetic voice lurches through consumptions to sublimate and sublimate drowning bodies.

In terms of spatial form it’s a manic tumult of cognitive angles pressured to suffocate or gelatinous lability by stark highrise margins, in terms of Jameson’s cognitive mapping, or spatial analysis of the psychology of culture. Sutherland’s project performs subjectivity at its farthest possible breaking point—the limit case of capital. The poem’s third movement travels through vivid pornographies of affect to arrive with abrupt sincerity at the shared predicament of lyrical, lexical, and erotic imaginaries under capital—inextricable since at least *The Phaedrus*:

far away / from what you never left, everything is still the /
beginning, though something is the middle, and / nothing is the
end, inflated into concrete fate or / pegged to balusters of air where
you are made to stop, / look back on, go on, I am here looking at

you and you are / there doing it, seeing how you do, the strap on
your / shoulder, the eyes you abandon, that I use, how I / know to,
in a way, or not, for now, for you.

As in they're irreparably fucked, but mutually so. Celan articulated the first
pivot of this thought in *Grosse, Glühende Wölbung*:

Die Welt ist fort, Ich muss dich tragen
(The world is gone, I must carry you)

The oecumene or situation of discourse linking the idea of one to any idea of
any other, the world as a shared object of *bildung* has been rendered radically
untenable, if it ever was. The good news is that the verb *tragen* means both
drag or carry and sustain, maintain or support. Bear in both the sense that
one shoulders a coffin and the one in which one carries a child to term. The
duality is probably the point, as Derrida has it in *The Beast and the Sovereign*
part two; the predicament means between one of two things, not one or three.
Either “I carry you, I have to, I ought to, when nothing will happen to us nor
welcome us ever on any island or any shore, nor any world, to life to death” or
“for you, to give it to you, to bear it toward you, destined for you, to address
it to you—I made the world come into the world.” (268) Ethics is the caesural
comma.

The crisis necessitates birth or burial and both, radical millenarian
transformation, hilarious absolute daybreak, for which, perversely, and
contrary to narrowly futurist strains of Marxism, we need the image of a
workable history, and as I see it this is Sutherland's oblique project in his
historical translations—a kind of resistant or speculative historicism. These
seven translations of Verlaine, Goethe, Gautier, Tasso, Toulet, Heine, and
Hölderlin are unnerving and contradictory; Sutherland is often faithful to
rhyme and metrics, but brazenly breaks character for effect, like these lines
apparently from Gautier's *Buchers et Tombeaux*:

Old Trump denudes the NEA,
Citing the miscreant *Piss Christ*

The age grows frivolous as time,
Trends like the contemporary;
The liberal MFA makes rhyme
Counterrevolutionary

There are senses of thematic resonance, lust, regret, and politics, but I think the thrust of these translations is more ambitious, an attempt to disturb the collected assumptions of 'literature' and thereby the false angles of history, returning to an awareness of radical singularity without analogue or metaphor in which, returning to Celan, we might actually be able to "lose you to you" (353).

From an elegiac but consoling rendering of *Dichtermuth* Sutherland returns to the present fury with *Instincts on Trump University*. Vastly more interesting and cutting than conventional protest poetics, this poem reads Trump, and the poet, or a cipher of the poet-scholar smugly quiescent on the mahogany shelf between Shelley and Wordsworth, as uroboric creatures of the same ego:

My sound is like a sherbet pelvis being nailed to the moon. His
is simpler: Wealth Preservation Retreat, structure yourself for
lower taxes, protect yourself from frivolous law suits, and pass
your wealth on to your heirs while protecting them from financial
threats. In reality these are one and the same sound: *you will learn
my name.*

The poem's last movement vibes Emma Lazarus' Statue of Liberty sonnet with Matthew 11:28 into an obscene, nightmarish, and completely realistic satire of the current American regime and the structures which produced it. It's also a savage indictment of the quietism of Anglophone literature since Vietnam:

That it has come /to this is your fault, you who know how to read this. / Come to me, the atomized to putty, diverse, diverted / dirigistes, the ultra unbound, the shit under the / fingernail of Philip Green, or of your family, or of the / people who have been here the longest. The solution / is always the problem, the new life ready to be / activated within 45 minutes. Fuck new life: death to / the end, right to be heard, angry and sad, rust to dust, / London to Cairo: come to me, make me full, so that / I can kick myself the fuck out.

There's a lot going on—Jameson called history “the problem of which it purports to be the solution (2015, 6), Sutherland inverts this paradigm and twists it, the future is the problem, the illusion of its plenitudes and ratcheted cul-de-sacs of possibility—the obscene idiocy that, as Mark Fisher had it, it's become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capital (1). That one would entail the other might be a black consolation, or in defiance Lenin's question behind the one of Trotsky's Sutherland's title borrows, “who whom?” Which mutually opposite will eat the other, Zeus Demogorgon, Trump the poet, capital or a world.

Celan, Paul. *Collected Prose*, trans. Waldrop, Routledge, 2003.
Selected Poems, trans. Hamburger, Penguin, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques. *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Lindsay, Columbia UP, 1989.
Sovereignties in Question, trans. Dutoit, Fordham UP, 2005.
The Beast and the Sovereign II, trans. Bennington, Chicago UP, 2010

Goldsmith, Kenneth, & Smith, Dale, 'The Tortoise and the Hare', *Jacket*, 38, <http://jacketmagazine.com/38/iv-smith-goldsmith.shtml>

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative?*, Zero Books, 2009.

Jameson, Fredric. *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*. Verso, 2002.
The Antinomies of Realism. Verso, 2015.

Kotin, Joshua. Review of *Poetical Works: 1999–2015*, by Keston Sutherland, *The Cambridge Humanities Review*, forthcoming.

McCaffery, Steve. *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973–1986*. Roof Nightwood editions, 1986.

Mellors, Anthony. *Late Modernist Poetics from Pound to Prynne*. Manchester UP, 2005.

Sutherland, Keston. 'Hilarious Absolute Daybreak: On the Poems of J.H. Prynne,' *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary*, 2, 2010, pp. 115–147.

Interview with Natalie Ferris, *The White Review*, March 2013.

Wilkinson, John. 'Mandarin Ducks and Chee-chee Chokes',
<http://jacketmagazine.com/35/r-sutherland-rb-wilkinson.shtml>

Uljana Wolf

Subsisters: Selected Poems

translated from the German by Sophie Seita
Belladonna, 2017

REVIEWED BY ALLISON GRIMALDI-DONAHUE

Subsisters: Selected Poems, by Uljana Wolf, translated from the German by Sophie Seita, reveals a new understanding of the ontology of language through moving, playful expression. Rather than fixing language, Wolf and Seita allow the reader to see the text for the multiple readings it can offer. Poems on topics ranging from family, motherhood, 20th century female Hollywood stars, to Roman Jakobson and Freud comeingle in a hybrid English-German space. Meaning is allowed to proliferate. This is not to say the poems are too theoretical or difficult—they aren’t—they are fun and touching, but the reader must be open to a sort of happy linguist confusion. The texts themselves are in a state of change as they are being read: language and poetry are in motion. Wolf and Seita take formal, philosophical and collaborative risks and still create intimate poems full of connection and feeling. This is also helped by the wonderful essays in the book by Yoko Tawada, and the authors themselves, which ground the work and allow the reader to dip into the authors’ process.

Writing the emotional and the theoretical side by side is no small task and is rarely so well rendered. Wolf and Seita dig into the bilingualism or multilingualism within language and poetry that is at the core of language’s existence and something all readers, no matter how many languages they may have, must reckon with. This comes up in a poem in the “Babeltrack” section of the book:

...this
smelting of languages (themes) develops distinctly bound-

ary-crossing or foaming (irrational) attachments, by which i mean (freudlos now) a babble phrase, in which words of all languages are imaginable, a smelt-speak or schmelzing of, a lengevitch, then that's the shore of it

The poems in “Babeltrack” are reflections on an unborn child’s language, milk and wave, blueprint and bubble to be burst, combined with ideas from linguist Roman Jakobson. The language takes on a material viscous quality, it changes and morphs constantly in the speaker’s mouth, from birth to death. *Subsisters* brings to mind Derrida’s essay “The Monolingualism of the Other, Or the Prosthesis of Origin.” No language is every fully our own, yet each of us has only our own language, individual, incommunicable. Derrida writes:

1. *We only ever speak one language.*
2. *We never only speak one language.*

It seems like a paradox until you settle into reading *Subsisters*, where the poems joyously live out this riddle. Creating language and backtracking again, an endless and incomplete task. The book creates its own dialect while also giving instruction on how to read said dialect. As Derrida points out, we each have our own language; however, there are times spending extended periods with someone in a second or third language in which this individual language comes to be shared. Wolf and Seita enact this phenomena through these poems. Both English and German are on equal footing and at play within the abilities first of each author and then within each reader. It isn’t necessary to speak German to read this book but even with just a little understanding of the language readers can take sounds and forms together with the English and experience language as a material, a thing to touch and hold.

These texts feel foreign and at home in both tongues. Reading some of these poems I can no longer tell the difference between English and German—I

begin to search for something wherever I can find it. The languages communicate seamlessly between each other and with me, the reader. From the traces of English I can make meaning from the German.

“CAN YOU SHOW ME ON SE MAPPE”

we wanted to lean over this phrase like a charted city, to make a point, create a mouthspace, myth of hear or say: hier, in this net of tongues, one path was well-sprung, a mistake, mystique. lingua franca stuck on our foreheads, almost touching and already legend: you are here, ich bin wer, a game of routes, but whatever we said the words did not arrive.

Words never arrive, but they always arrive at the right destination. The text mimics a bilingual reality and in turn the reality of language's ongoing confusion and reconstitution. It is this bilingual reality that turns the theory into something with deep and lasting feeling. The feeling is an intimacy that begins with two authors sharing two languages and not finding a home in either place. This is a feeling familiar to many bilinguals but also to monolinguals searching for a home in a language that may be historically laden with oppression or restriction. This feeling is fundamental, also, to the experience of language, as no language is singular—here we see the unity of language for the sham it is and learn to embrace something different, something infinitely plural.

Even when the meaning of a word is unclear new meanings come about. As I read this poem I laugh at the line “eine parole haben” because I feel like I have too many words and too much meaning, but then, I possess, I have none of them. They are always running away from me.

from ANNALOGUE ON ORANGES

or as you say

ein organ haben

“Starting from or with an orange, all travels are possible.
All ways of the voice that lead across it, are good.”

or as you say

eine parole haben

you tell me what it means

or French

a lengevitch on parole

According to philosopher Catherine Malabou, the symbol, language, does not finish in a state of fragmentation but rather exists plastically and the plastic is not flexible or bending but through repetition gives birth to discrete iterations of itself. Language breaks or explodes and comes together in new ways; through repetition and recontextualization, a word like “parole” not only shifts in meaning but changes upon the tongue. Beside the slices of orange earlier in the same poem, the roundness or rigidity of the foreign term explodes in the mouth. The words remain on the page but the readers will have a singular understanding with each reading. This is an opening of meaning for every poem in every language but not only. It carries over into prose and written correspondence and perhaps in spoken utterance as well. The trace becomes form and rarely the same form. Each reader will have a unique interaction with the swirl of languages in this book and each time the reader will form her own meanings.

Here we see the liberating fact that symbols are empty, that language can, in fact, have weight and feeling and also be playful and without a dictator. The text is in an ontological state of change. Here play with homophones can alter meaning and fool the reader and, sometimes, it is good to be a fool before language.

from ANNALOGUES ON FLOWERS

I have bin told
There was a boy
~~There was a boy~~

i mean i dislike that fate that i was made to where

Subsisters is arguably enacting a new feminist practice of writing. This is a text not about possession but proliferation: surplus. This level of collaboration between author and translator feels largely unprecedented as authorship fades and language is left to do its own work. The work language does, its qualities of syntax and grammar and what these things do to our brains is endlessly fascinating. Words that have fixed genders in German suddenly lose those genders in English. With “more whorls than girls,” Wolf and Seita spin gender classification into oblivion while still acknowledging its existence.

ON CLASSIFICATION IN LANGUAGE A FEEBLE
READER

the bending of our gender words began early as a set
of pines near coastal dunes—lithe with the level roots,
androgynously grown. a settlement of expansive sight,
in which we caressed, buffeted by creaky singsong
of *der die das*. cassettes of our childhood! i almost said
boyhood. we were more whorls than girls, you twirled
me until my needles kneaded veins, compact compass.

I read and the languages fade only language remains. I am not sure or worried about which language I am reading but I understand. I lived in Germany for a year a long time ago, I see certain words like beacons on the page, full of memories and relationships. Single words and the false comfort they offer, Wolf and Seita write in ANNALOGUE ON FLOWERS:

that a promise?

ich erinner

oder

a fan!

mich nicht

oder

a fleur!

have we not before?

I find myself recalling the moment I learned a word but not recalling its meaning.

Subsisters is a book of poems sometimes accessible and sometimes inaccessible to the very same reader. At one point in the “Subsisters” section of the book, at the end of a German version of a poem, “so she turns herself inside out. What seems to be a lifeboat is in fact the ocean.” It is unclear which is which and depending on who or what you are either can offer safety. The poems have the power to transform the reader as she reads, making new understandings out of misreadings and music with each word.

Flarf: An Anthology of Flarf

ed. Drew Gardner, Nada Gordon, Sharon Mesmer, K. Silem Mohammad,
and Gary Sullivan
Edge Books, 2017

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL GOTTLIEB

1. WHY FLARF? WHY NOW?

It is so important to have a Flarf anthology in our hands now. This is an important school/thread/tendency in contemporary writing and it is time that it has an anthology, well past time. Flarf blew into our lives a good ten or fifteen years ago and poetry has not been the same since. This was, this is, a wild-eyed, disruptive, rude, crude, careening, take-no-prisoners poetry. It rushed into the rooms of our cloistered post-Language house like some heedless, malevolent whirlwind. It upset the furniture and smashed the crockery. It was just what we needed.

And, a time comes in the life of any writing movement when, for various purposes and reasons, it is time for an anthology: for reasons of group-identification or reification, because the group of practitioners or others need or decide that it is time for the group or the type of writing to be able to be labeled. It may be as simple as that. It happens. And for Flarf it is time. Actually it is past time, some might say.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY FLARF?

What do the poems in this 288-page anthology have in common? There was a common agreement among and between these poets to make use of certain internet tools to drive the creation of their poetry. In fact, we can say that without the web this kind of writing could not have been created. The Flarf poets dove in and made use of search-based tools to collect, unapologetically crate up what we can call digital social language, that is discursive, more or less informal conversational language that is created on the web.

By means of a set of techniques which they taught each other, they hijacked Google's algorithms for their own subversive purposes, producing strings, torrents, floods of words that could not possibly have been generated except by their cunning hacks.

A bald eagle coos weakly to a magic unicorn in the mist:

“Look, a tiny Abe Lincoln

boxing a tiny Hitler

in the zero-sum game

of this construction!”

Nada Gordon

They way these poets processed and cooked and served up what they got their hands on produced a poetry gives us back the world—which is part of the job of any poetry, isn't it?—in a way that we've never seen before.

The marvelous power of search algorithms is only part of it. These geographically dispersed poets came together in an online community, a listserv, that enabled them to connect and communicate, to create a community for themselves, one that could acknowledge and react and provide essentially-real time support and feedback, in a way that wasn't possible not so many years earlier.

There are clear lines back to Dada and Surrealism, and even perhaps hints and tinctures of the New York School are present too in this writing; think of Kenneth Koch's crazy, playfulness, for example. Flarf has also acknowledged some antecedents in Language poetry, as has Conceptualist poetry. A narrative has developed over the years that these two movements or schools are in competition with each other. In fact a Flarf vs Conceptualist reading was held at the Whitney Museum a number of years ago.

And while some aging Language poets may be secretly pleased to see groups of younger writers fighting over rival claims of inheritance, or more often, in fact, some of those old 'uns for sure have been grousing under their breath, in appropriately codger-ly fashion, that none of these kids are doing anything that they hadn't done themselves, and done better, back in the 70s and 80s. But the fact is that Flarf and Conceptualism are very different from each other, and from Language poetry.

While both Flarf and Conceptualism rose and then became a dominant environment, the argument can be made that while Conceptualist poems make use of web tools and its vastness for operational purposes, the fact is so many of its poems could have been written even if there was no web, because the ideas, the concepts, the operational steps that the poems are made out of have nothing per se to do with technology or its opportunities or demands, they can just now be executed with a modicum of time and effort, by virtue of the power of technology, the web.

Flarf poems, on the other hand, could only be written using web tools, Google in particular. Its productive, or generative, or skewing, all those powers to string words, to create language, to create words, one after the other, each words something real, like a thing, that we recognize, what people say and see nowadays, these kind of things. Can a poetry be thingy?

These poets take the dictum, "No ideas but in things," and modify it to their own practices. The Conceptualists say, "No ideas but in ideas." Flarf says, "No things but in things."

3. HOW WILL I RECOGNIZE FLARF WHEN I COME ACROSS IT?

Half of Flarf's impact flows from the overwhelming variety and volume of social language, social and consumer and discourse public and private it serves up (though certain other kinds of language is rarely seen, technical or literary languages hardly ever if at all seem to serve as the source waters

for what appears on the page). Instead, it's the words and names that we hear and speak every day. It is in the air, in the ads, online, offline, what we say and write, but it is presented to us in a way that we'd never seen before.

That presentation makes for the other half of Flarf's impact: the way search and other web tools are used – and to be clear, they are just used as tools – doesn't just generate a dizzyingly variegated language but it creates strings, lines and stanzas, thoughts, some whole and entire, arguments. And the particular logic, the particular logical extensions, progressions—we recognize that too. The particular way that search skews, starts to lose focus, the way a search ranking tends to default, from paid to organic, from page to page, slowly into predictable tangents and then greater and greater misses.

Neither of these attributes could pertain if these poets hadn't access to the web. Why? First, there would be no other way to produce the particular variety and volume of words. Second, the logic made use of by these poets, that drives the work, is currently only available, for poets at any rate, by making use those web tools. If there is no web, there are no such tools and then no way to drive the use of that logic.

While seeing all of a group's work like this, in an anthology, can help provide perspective or even clarity, make it clearer what all this work has in common, all such anthologies should do that, another virtue of an anthology is that it also makes it clearer how different these poets are from each other, how much variety there is represented, in a way that can't be clearer than having their work sitting in one place like this, one next to the other.

When it comes to the first of the two key attributes of Flarf, the kind of language it serves up to us, it is striking that the language of so many poems are drawn from a few categories of content, text, language, that is present online. First and foremost so much draws from mass-cultural content and events and personas

Arthur Treacher grabs my assclown
Assclown grabs my squid n
Squid signs me up for the NOW Action Alert list
NOW Action Alert list adds ice cream to my Jäger bomb
Jäger bomb waits patiently to turn into a little white boy
Sharon Mesmer

The second of the strikingly present categories is one that includes sexual language, the language of sexual politics and intimate conversation:

I stole a kiss from you while you were playing, sweet little Juventius,
a kiss sweeter than sweet ambrosia.

...

I surreptitiously grabbed a lick from you during toy-time, Juventius
a kiss sweeter than sweet ambrosia.

...

Brandon Brown

The third category, the third particularly frequently encountered kind of language is the language of politics, including but not limited to what we used to call current events, wars and crimes, but also language about thinking about politics, about living one's life in political terms.

Whales desire passion, struggle, daily routine . . .
Only the government, their thinking goes, has
the ability to rewrite the future of the ocean
and the automobile...

Elisabeth Workman

Why these three? What does that tell us? That these poems are different, yes. And we can see that indeed that these poems are *about* something, different things. Now we can also that see that Flarf is possessed by the same obsessions, the same realities that we are; that's one take away. But the realization of all of that identifiable subject matter, that 'aboutness' is perhaps of even more moment.

Having said all that, it should also be noted that there do seem to be a lot of unicorns, and Nazis and kittens in these poems. Perhaps this tells us something about this poetry's communitarian, listserv-driven interaction model. How figures or phrases might be picked up and shared. Possibly is also tells us something about the highest-order kind of logic that drives the web, and its values. E.g. the fact is that unicorns are uniquely suited for replication online and that's that.

When it comes to the second of the two principal attributes of Flarf, the way logic, logical arguments evinced by relationships of words and phrases to each other, in strings, in lines, as extensions and skewings of arguments, those skewings being a by-product of the search engines' algorithms, we do know that a set of techniques were taught or shared from one poet to another as this group started to come together. And as we read these poems some similarities in what must have been the set of instructions the poet built her/his search upon seem to stand out.

The first set of poems seem to have been built up out of a search-enabled operation that focused on word-choice, as evinced by the granularity and repetition model dimension of these poems:

Kitty Goes Postal—
wants pizza.
Kitty has hat & cape and looks
like a magician . . .

Rodney Koeneker

The second set is less granular, more accommodating of phrase- or sentence-length returns, as opposed to single words. It would seem that a different sort of poetic process had been made use of in these poems:

I'm Doomed! I'm Doomed!

Oh dream maker—

A Fateful and Fatal

Sexual encounter!

Bored femme Godzilla

An unbilled—bit—

Done with no dialogue—

Done with His!

Michael Magee

The third set is even less granular, it surfaces and shares greater chunks and servings, entire parts of arguments and delivered, lined up for our delectation. Was yet a different sort of search operation employed in creating these poems?

I have written a couple of poems about trees poems

about trees and snakes and lakes and birds

poems about nature and life in New England

I write crappy poems and eat babies

if you like poems about trees you're in for a treat

Kasey Silem Mohammed

Are these indeed different technical approaches? If so, might they represent more or less complicated operational procedures executed by a given poet?

And, if that is the case, it would be interesting to know more about how these writers shared their technical knowledge, the terms they use to describe it and actually developed and presumably modified them under use. The 'inside story' of this writing would make for compelling reading.

And while these variegations become clearer and clearer as one reads through this anthology, as a fuller, more rounded picture of this movement comes into focus, some other attributes come into focus that perhaps weren't clear before. For example, virtually all of these poems 'look' like poems. That is, all except one or two are laid out flush-left on the page and most of them are made up of short or relatively short lines. When it comes to a few of them, the first letter of the first word on each line is capitalized, just like an old fashioned poem. The common ways that other poetries, including Language and Conceptual writing make use of the page, by running text from margin to margin or placing text on the page in any number of ways, randomly or purposively, using the full breadth of the white space, in a way that we've come to be quite used to over the last number of decades is surprisingly absent.

Was this a conscious decision these poets made? Like, say, William Burroughs' decision early in life to don a suit and tie every day and by virtue of that decision not just camouflage himself, but also drive as much attention as possible to his words, the revolutionary import of his writing. Was this in some way a similar decision to 'look normal' and by 'looking normal' drive all the reader's attention to what is distinctive and different about this writing? Or, perhaps, is a different message being sent via these formal decisions? Might these poets be saying that none of those other stratagems are really of much import at all? All of those impassioned arguments about the page, and how poetry can or should look, none of that counts for much anymore, if it ever did, they are saying.

4. HIT ME AGAIN WITH THAT UGLY STICK

Seeing all of these poems together not only clarifies our understanding of Flarf, what it focused on, how it was constructed, what its writers have in

common and how they are vitally different, but it also summons up the impact that this writing had when it burst into view in our world. Who were these people and where did they come from? Well, we knew them. We knew most of them for years. But what had they gone off and cooked up on their own? What was going on here?

This anthology brings back those days and the wild, dizzying, fresh, disorienting, simultaneously bafflingly confounding and supremely clarifying impact these poems had as they crashed upon our shores. There was an almost terrifying ‘reach’ to these poems when we heard them first. This was language we’d never seen in poems before, language that had never been organized, served up like this before. It came from a new and dangerous place, that much was clear. The architecture, the lineaments, the vastness of that place, the online world—which we take for granted now—it is our world now, after all, was only becoming clear back then.

Another exhilarating, clarifying attribute of this work is its insistence on ‘badness...’ on bad taste and bad-poetry-choices. This is a poetry that flaunts its its garish costume jewelry, its fake nails, its clashing plaids, its full Clevelands. Regardless of the methodology that was serving it up to us, we’d never come across poems that argued like this before:

I boughted my wittl pairwukete
a birdy bong for hims birfday

but it gived him a itty wittle cut on hims
bitty wittle beak-wip couldn’t do a bawwel woll

Rod Smith

And, the apparent agency which these poets had, to one degree or another, each decided to hand over—for their own purposes—to the locomotive, the engine, that drove and still drives so much of how that place is organized, ‘search’ itself, was itself scary and breathtaking to behold.

5. ANTHOLOGIES, ARE THEY NOT A GENRE UNTO THEMSELVES?

The biographical notes in an anthology are always worth reading. In this one we learn that one author has stopped writing altogether and another has left the listserv that was the basic organizing structure of this group. That is not something that you see in every anthology. Indeed the history of this group has turned out to be quite different than that of the Conceptualist poets, to whom they were so readily compared back in the day. Their anthology came out years ago. Was there something about Conceptualism, or that group of writers—were they more ‘organized?’ Less ‘subversive?’ Was it something else?

The Flarf writers distributed, collective method when it came to decision-making may also be a factor. In addition they seemed by and large less inclined to publish critical or theoretical work explicating their approach, apparently comfortable in letting the poetry speak for itself. They might even deny that there is an overarching theory when it comes to Flarf. However, it would still be interesting to know how this group communicated among themselves. How, inside the listserv, they shared and taught each other the techniques they all went on to make use of, each in their own way. A collection of their correspondence as they got themselves together and got on with their work, their posts, or threads of their chats – however it was spun out, assuming that it has been saved – would be extremely interesting to read and would indeed serve as important documentation for future study. It would also make it crystal clear, if any further evidence is needed, that Flarf was not a club, it was not a secret society. Not only does it live on, but anyone can write Flarf.

The Conceptualist anthology (*Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptualist Writing*, edited by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, Northwestern University Press, 2011) made a point of including older writers, from Language poets going all the way back to Diderot who the editors argued either were influential or consonant with that project. In the same vein, it would be interesting to have a better idea of who the Flarf poets were thinking about as they set about their project. And indeed, apparently a pre-Flarf or proto-Flarf anthology is in the works.

6. WHY DO WE NEED THIS POETRY MORE THAN EVER?

There is another reason why we need this Flarf anthology now, why we need Flarf now more: we have moved into a Flarf world. We have a Flarf president. John Milton wrote that the purpose of *Paradise Lost* was to justify, or explain, the ways of God to Man. If poetry has an interlocutory role in this life, if part of its job is to help us understand the world, of the worst and the best of it, of the insanity of it, there it very well may be that there is no art better suited to help us make sense of this random-chance-generator rando of a president that we have now than a poetry that rides the very same algorithm-driven waves of the web that landed him in the Oval Office.

Flarf rides those waves to places poetry hasn't been taken before and then it returns. It comes back to us bearing all manner of strange loot, booty, treasure, trash. Flarf then serves it all up to us in a way that in the final respect does make sense, in its own sense, a sense that perhaps we've never been exposed to before but which now seems perfectly, awfully true. This is the world we live in now.

Alli Warren

I Love It Though

Nightboat, 2017

REVIEWED BY ROBIN TREMBLAY-MCGAW

Revelation: Reading Alli Warren's *I Love It Though*

It is difficult to write a commodious poetry of the contemporary. By which, I mean, many poets I know want their poems to speak to the present—a present that is contentious, problematic, riddled with political, social, environmental catastrophes; they want to locate their writing in this particular historical moment, to address it, without also relinquishing something of themselves, as a poet with a particular life, friendships, love, and importantly, without relinquishing all the powers of language's complexity. That is, they seek to engage language and its many capacities for sound, description, figure, cadence, consonance, and dissonance. In other words, prosody. It is a rare thing to find a poet capable of attending to all of this at once.

I have followed Warren's work since she was a student at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I have this memory—I think it's true!—of Warren as an undergrad telling me that she wrote letters to some of the poets she was most interested in, asking them questions about their work, poetics, and working process. She was and is a serious and an unusual reader and writer whose attention is wide-ranging, finely-tuned. This latest book reveals a poet passionately interested in prosody, the world around her, language in all of its registers, pop culture, community, poetry's diverse and rich history, the brutality and beauty of the discrepant world we find ourselves in. In short, Alli Warren is interested in it all.

I Love it Though begins with a poem entitled "A Yielding Hole for Light," the opening line of which is:

Where were you when the West
Antarctic Ice Sheet began to collapse?

What a beginning! The poem locates its mode in address, asking a question that marks and underscores the degradation wreaked by human ingenuity and unbridled resource extraction; our Arendtian capacity for beginning, in this case, generates climate and social catastrophes. At the same time, the poem underscores the fact that this catastrophe, unlike or perhaps exactly like so many others, isn't locatable in a singular point in time. It appears to be happening in the distance. Yet its effects are everywhere. No one will be able to say where they were when the sheet collapsed. Its collapse is ongoing.

In the next lines, the poem immediately leaves the geography of the Antarctic for Iowa:

On the way to Iowa City
to see my first sumac and coming
to know its name in asking
it's the way of coming to know
as if in revelation instead of simple clarity

The poem zooms in from that long shot of disaster to the extreme close-up, the specificity of tree life—a first sumac—and the intimate, open power of a question. Knowledge, or being in the world, becomes lush, romantic, pastoral, even as here: “what I want around me/are the ripe and tender ones/wine the color of weather/the lush bearing of our longing” (1), but the speaker's desire is not naive; rather, the voice sets this longing amidst the facts of capital and consumer life, which is to say, life: “the courage or not/ of me and my friends....while container ships brim/and caps and bergs/slope across the slog.” Cargo ships bring into the San Francisco Bay containers full of commodities, many of them petroleum based, having traversed oceans which are warming, crossed a globe while icebergs crack,

calve, melt. Against this backdrop, the poem's speaker asserts: "I want to be able to continue/ to love to stay alive/....the green pervades, it's a diamond, we all are" (2). The simultaneous cataloging of everyday legible and illegible crises along with hope, longing, love, friendship, moments of courage, and the beauty of the world characterizes much of the work in this book, and the book as a whole.

After all, it is right there in the title: I love it *though*. "Though" performs a kind of concession, a registering that in "spite of," there is this: love. Warren's book enacts an ethics, one that suggests that poetry not remove itself from the "unbearable facts" ("Lunchtime With Woodwinds" 3); that poetry not behave as "those skeptics/in the building/ who think of the unknown/ as hemorrhage—quick stop/ that thing from surfacing" (3), but instead remain open, attentive, alive to the present in all its contradictions.

This poem's language and its formal pleasures, like so many in this collection, announce its preference for "the ear." That is, sound in all its rich variety: alliteration, anaphora, rhythmic surprise. For instance: "heat machine/ beaming luxuriously, ground of everything/ ground of light,/ makes the field wider,/ makes hedges fall" (1-2), or here from "I Wanna Be Shipmated": "having stared into the balm between bridges/ breathing with the night herons and whatever" (86). Or here: "I toe the light/ I jab my finger in the peephole"/ nay, I ginger gently" (7). In "A Better Way to Zone," the poem calls out: "So, ear, be an instrument for thought" (47). And it is.

The poems also write and read-write through poetry's history. The reader encounters Shakespearean diction and cadence in the midst of an unlikely terrain: "I trip on a log and go under/ cover I bury my face in/ that warm crevice/ the eye of which is bigger/ than a human head how/ wherefrom we've come/ swallows the sea deep/ constellates tomorrow" ("A Date with the Cages" 9-10). There's a clear debt to the New York School in the poetry's engagement with pop culture, daily life and desire, and Frank O'Hara's manifesto, "Personism," in for example, "Total Vacation": "on the right

side of your open neck/ with pants so tight everyone/ will understand the conditions that produced them” (34). The poems mash up allusions to Wallace Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West” in “In the Craving Night”: “the idea the mind/ contains the idea/ of the body by cause” (90). There are echoes of Keatsian lush lyric, and pop songs of old: “what’s that song?/ love lift us up where we belong,” (95) and “If you can’t win/ with the one you love/ love the inflated object?” (10).

Warren’s work is intellectually and metrically fresh—as in the above line “love the inflated object?”—which is sonically flat after the lyric lines. Likewise, I find this poet’s odd-angled and sometimes subtle references and invocations to politics and history compelling. She eschews the obvious. There is always more than one thing at play in the poem. In “Tunics, Trousers, and Cloaks,” the poem’s alliterative title calls to mind the politics of dress and registers how social movements and groups have sometimes been associated with various forms of clothing—say feminism with bloomers and trousers, or tunics with communists or the Greeks or Romans, cloaks with artists and witches; with its classic, “I sing,” the poem channels and simultaneously comments on (though not only) Whitman: “I sing of something that cannot speak its name/though its signature is everywhere” (22). It closes with “All the evil things of the world will have full sway/ To get dressed/I need the help of a trained hand” (22). The poems subtly take on past and more recent social history as in “On the Levelers Everyday” and “Wabenzi.” The present too is everywhere: the marches of Occupy and the deadly power of the neoliberal order:

I am given the job of interpreting pings
I am given one hour off leash
To take my picnic to the cherry snow
....
Even if I gather all my friends together
And light the diorama with a pearl
There is no spring break for debt (“Sheepskin City” 66)

In so many of the poems, alongside disturbing facts, Warren torques the form with her wry and sardonic humor. In “Index of Social Membership,” Warren charts social upheaval, or better—*witnesses*—various complicities: “Who here daily distends/ having had a feeling/ in the bush-deep/you’ve got some uh/ you’ve got a bit of blood/pooled at the opening,” continuing:

Here let me mark the place
where the deed was done
and the clock stopped or shot
went reeling in the night down
gentrified avenues & littered laneways
stricken in the flank
surely as sirens sound
Faith ain’t nothing
but weakness & credit
Miss it terribly need a little dog (25)

The magic of these poems is that in addition to witnessing the trouble we are in and part of, the writing often identifies and makes a hole, “a yielding hole for light,” a place of resistance; in other words, in the midst of this fucked up imperfect world, it is still possible that something might be incubated: “who among us/ will turn back/on rushing water/ in the how where we inn” (“Thinking of a Dream I had” 70); where “Everything is alive/ even you, floral loafer” (“Breadwinning for Birds” 82). One thing is certain: turning to Alli Warren’s complex prosodic and critical love is not about checking out but tuning in.

I Love it Though has been selected as one of *Entropy Magazine’s*
Best Poetry Books of 2017.

Joanne Kyger

There You Are: Interviews, Journals, and Ephemera

edited by Cedar Sigo

Wave Books, 2017

REVIEWED BY EMMA BROWN SANDERS

First in Wave's new interview series is a volume on Joanne Kyger. Cedar Sigo edited this collection of Kyger's interviews, poems and ephemera, which was published six months after Kyger's passing in March 2017. While the timing is bittersweet, Sigo has created a work that is far more than a collection of exchanges with Kyger throughout the years. Sigo is an astute and sensitive curator of Kyger's life and work, the differences between which for her were indistinguishable. Undoubtedly, Sigo's experience with collaboration (for example, his collaborative poems with Micah Ballard he discussed on the City Lights blog) have aided him here:

Collaboration is also editing. It's easy to just fire away contributing lines to a poem, but cutting the final shape together requires a more delicate hand. You can't exactly tip toe around each other as to which lines should be left out, reordered, reversed; the sooner you are willing to begin, the easier the editing process becomes. You learn a lot about your voice in collaborating, certain things you may stress too often as content in your poetry, or you will notice certain tones that your collaborators will erase from the works you make together.

While *There You Are* is not straightforward collaboration, in that Kyger allowed access to the materials but did not herself make curatorial decisions about the book, surely Sigo must have felt the difficulty of selecting from her individually exquisite but prolifically robust body of work. Of particular note is Sigo's careful replication of original correspondence and first-run poem publications. Sigo has made it so we can hold in our hands facsimiles

of what might never have come to us on paper: the *Bolinas Hearsay News* (for which Kyger was the “Wednesday Editor” for years), her chapbooks *Desecheo* and *Trip Out & Fall Back* (both published by Arif Press in 1971 and 1974, respectively), and a broadside of her poem from the Kent State Arts Festival.

What does it mean to separate these facsimiles from their original purpose and placement, to decontextualize them? *The Bolinas Hearsay News* under Kyger’s editorship served a practical purpose: —advertising town happenings, listing birthdays, —facilitating the buying and selling of everyday objects. In October 2000, there is a sale on plants: 50% off all fruit trees (except citrus). The *News* itself is rife with supplementary material: poems by Robert Creeley and drawings by Philip Whalen and Arthur Okamura.

If the inclusion of some front pages of the *News* renders it as art object in the context of *There You Are*, does the inclusion of Kyger’s chapbook and broadside facsimiles similarly raise questions of their functionality, their usefulness? These poems are contextualized by their original design and art. While the words and lines are the same as in Kyger’s collected works, their form as originally published is singular. Kyger herself was interested in the interplay between the poem on the page and other mediums. For example, her 1968 film “Descartes” Descartes film for San Francisco’s NCET public TV station KQED mixed poetry and audiovisual experimentation. At the time, her lending a female voice to Descartes was considered revolutionary. Indeed, Kyger continues to be described as a rare female poet among the predominantly male Beats (though she never limited herself to being described as being a poet of any one school). Creeley credits Kyger for helping to shake off an all-male poetic establishment and way of thinking:

Early poems of Joanne Kyger’s made very clear that her place was not to be the one simply familiar, for that time at least, and her envelope had no accommodating patience for the vagaries of

Odysseus's meandering. In that way she is one of this generation's clarities, that we cannot longer indulge an habituated paternity that wants the authority of force and feels that women are somehow an addenda to the real business of life.

The inclusion of facsimiles, the capture of poems or letters as they were in the moment, also embodies the ever-humming present in each of Kyger's poems. This continuous present of Kyger's lines she called "the kind of space that vibrates its meaning ... It just stays there for a long time. You can go back into that one line and it will keep giving off overtones." And: "I really like phrases now that have some internal turning, that seem to turn around all the time."

I am concerned with the echo
it answers perfectly
one does not find
canyons like this

Even the inclusion of *ephemera* in the book's title is significant, from Greek neuter of ephēmeros: lasting only a day. In Kyger's collected works, *About Now* (National Poetry Foundation), Kyger returns in each poem to the day. The startling freshness of Kyger's poems is particularly striking in those written upon her return to her lifelong home of Bolinas from various travels. When an interviewer asks Kyger about her lifestyle, she pauses to laugh at the word, then clarifies herself the muddled concept: "About getting up in the morning? Get up in the morning and you look at the day." The thought continuing in a separate interview: "And the feeling in response to those elements."

Sigo's curatorial choices create a portrait of Kyger as an individual. In part, obviously, like the inclusion of her photographs and photographs of contemporaries she loved and respected. But Sigo also creates a sense of intimacy through the inclusion of Kyger's writing on her contemporaries,

and her contemporaries' writing on her, what Kyger describes as "a group of people writing in and out of the same situation..." The book begins on a deeply personal note—Robert Creeley's introduction of Kyger (a facsimile of his typewritten page, annotated with his handwritten cross-outs and edits) precedes even Sigo's introduction. This is a work of *access* rendered in the most intimate form possible.

When Kyger writes a reliquary for Joe Brainard following his death, it's not a eulogy, nor a traditional tribute. Kyger dwells in a space they shared and on the page, creates space for Joe to exist there. She is present with Joe on the page even following his passing. Kyger's poems denote her dwelling in a radical still that allows a connection to materialize absent of physical or verbal contact. There are similar pieces on Robert Creeley and Gregory Corso. They are presented simply as "Robert Creeley, by Joanne Kyger." They are meditations on the person, on the poet, as they exist for Kyger. There is a purity to this reflection without purpose that recalls part of Kyger's *the Long Poem*:

For how long we sit
in quiet

absurd this way no
speech
creates a
tie between us

Her integration of the poets she considered friends and respected contemporaries happens throughout her life's work. Her ideal of the group poetic voice is evident—their influence on each other she considers not only inevitable, but generative and positive, a weaving of influence on each other's work. In this way, all becomes collective. As Kyger says in one interview, the self does not exist.

Included in the book is a joint letter composed by Kyger and Larry Fagin from Paris. Joanne's portion describes a proposed invention:

THE AUDOMETER. It is composed of a rubber tube with an immobile alidad running round its edges and a sort of photographic device in the middle. The audometer was made for speaking to a person present without being heard by others. It is also used to send pills to someone sick in bed without bothering him.

How does this differ from Frank O'Hara's personism, in which the poem takes the place of the telephone? Here Kyger conceives of direct correspondence as an aid, even a tool for delivering what could alter one's state or deliver wellness. The individual at either end of the audometer benefits, whether delivering or receiving. Personism happens within the poem. Kyger's audiometer happens outside the poem but becomes indistinguishable, irremovable from the poem. Kyger never stopped insisting that how a poet lived was inseparable from the poet himself. Physical distance is no barrier, audometer or not.

Then again, writers, poets whose lives have been close to you are who often your dialogue is with. They may not necessarily be in your vicinity anymore, but they are where your thoughts go—your family as it were. From this comes an intimacy of tone which includes the reader. They are included in these anecdotal addresses.

Kyger spoke favorably—"If I congratulate everything human and everything alive then I congratulate my own living." Surely among what she considered worthy of congratulations were the correspondences and exchanges that shaped not only her work, but those to whom she was close. These connections transcend distance, time and consciousness.

This tongue denies the touch / I
tell you so / but this one way to
keep you here is

all I have discovered

Cedar Sigo, *Tape the Holy Cross: Collaborating with Micah Ballard*, City Lights Blog, August 12, 2012. <http://www.blogcitylights.com/2012/08/20/tape-the-holy-cross-collaborating-with-micah-ballard-by-cedar-sigo/>

Joanne Kyger, *About Now* (University of Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 2007).

Joanne Kyger, *Descartes*, 1968. <https://vimeo.com/68494299>

Joanne Kyger, *There You Are: Interviews, Journals, and Ephemera*, ed. Cedar Sigo (Seattle: Wave Books, 2017).

CONTRIBUTORS

ARTICHOKE is a Berlin-based reading series. It brings together poets from the German-speaking context and from other countries/languages. Each event is accompanied by a publication featuring translations and critical writing about the work. Back copies can be ordered at artichokelesereihe@gmail.com // <https://soundcloud.com/artichoke-readings>

H. BOLIN lives in Atlanta.

SEAN BONNEY currently lives in Berlin. He works at the Freie Universität, where he is currently teaching a course on the work of Amiri Baraka. His most recent publications are *Ghosts* (Materials, 2017) and *Letters Against the Firmament* (Enitharmon, 2015).

KAMAU BRATHWAITE was born in Barbados in 1930. The co-founder of the Caribbean Arts Movement in the United Kingdom has lived and worked in the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and the USA. The *Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973), *X/Self* (1987), *Middle Passages* (1992), *The Zea Mexican Diary* (1994), *Words Need Love Too* (2000), *Ancestors* (2001), *Born to Slow Horses* (2005), *Elegguas* (2010), and *Liviticus* (2017) are among over 20 books by Brathwaite that have maintained his international standing as a distinguished poet, scholar, and dramatist. In 2018, Brathwaite received the American PEN/Voelcker Lifetime Award. Kamau Brathwaite lives in Barbados.

JULIE CARR'S most recent book is the essay collection, *Someone Shot My Book*. A mixed-genre work, *Real Life: An Installation*, is due out in 2018. She lives in Denver where she helps to run Counterpath and teaches at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

CHRIS CHEN is an Assistant Professor of Literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz. He has published poetry, essays, interviews, and reviews in *boundary 2*, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Economics*, *The New Inquiry*, *Crayon*, 1913: *A Journal of Forms*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. He is completing a book-length comparative

study of contemporary black and Asian American experimental writing. He lives in Oakland, California.

THEODOROS CHIOTIS's publications include *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis* (Penned in the Margins, 2015), *Screen* (in collaboration with photographer Nikolas Ventourakis; Paper Tigers Books, 2017) and *limit.less: towards an assembly of the sick* (Litmus, 2017). He is a member of the editorial board of the Greek literary magazine [φορμ] and contributing editor for *Hotel* magazine. His project *Mutualised Archives*, an ongoing performative interdisciplinary work unfolding throughout the whole of 2017, received the Dot Award by the Institute for the Future of Book and Bournemouth University and will be published in 2018. He lives in Athens and works as the Co-ordinator of Scholarly Research and Digital Development of the Cavafy Archive (Onassis Foundation) and as co-curator of the Digital Nights series of talks at the Onassis Cultural Centre.

PETER CONSTANTINE has introduced a new generation of Greek online poets to American readers in publications such as *Words Without Borders* and *World Literature Today*. He is a co-editor of *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present* and *A Century of Greek Poetry: 1900–2000*. A Guggenheim Fellow, he was awarded the PEN Translation Prize, the National Translation Award (USA), and the Koret Jewish Literature Award.

CHRIS DANIELS (b. 1956, Manhattan Island) is a feral proletarian translator of global Lusophone poetry. He lives in Oakland.

ARTURO DESIMONE, Arubian-Argentinian writer and visual artist, was born in 1984 on the island Aruba which he inhabited until the age of 22, when he emigrated to the Netherlands. He relocated to Argentina later and leads a nomadic existence. Desimone's articles, poetry and fiction pieces have previously appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Sydney Review of Books*, *CounterPunch*, *Círculo de Poesía* (Spanish) *Acentos Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and in the Latin American views section of *OpenDemocracy*.

YIANNIS DHALLAS was born in Epirus in 1924. He has translated ancient Greek lyrical poets. In 1987 he received the State Prize for Criticism and in 1999 the Grand State Prize.

ALLISON GRIMALDI DONAHUE is a writer and translator whose work has appeared in places like Words Without Borders, Electric Literature, Gramma Poetry, The Brooklyn Rail, Funhouse Magazine, Cosmonauts Avenue and Mousse Magazine. In 2016 she published her chapbook *Body to Mineral* with Publication Studio Vancouver. She has been an NEA Fellow at the Vermont Studio Center, a Bakeless Fellow at the Bread Loaf Translators' Conference and artist in residence at Mass MoCA. She is fiction editor at Queen Mob's Teahouse and associate editor for translations at Anomaly. She is a PhD candidate at the European Graduate School and teaches writing at John Cabot University, Rome.

BRUNO C. DUARTE is a full member of the Institute for Philosophy at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Université Marc Bloch—Strasbourg and has been a Visiting Scholar at the Freie Universität Berlin, Brown University and Johns Hopkins University. He is the editor of Hölderlin's *Pindar-Fragments* (Lisbon, 2010) and *Lógica Poética—Friedrich Hölderlin* (Lisbon, 2011). <http://www.ifl.pt/index.php/pages/bruno-duarte>

JONATHAN DUNK is the Kenneth Reed Postgraduate Scholar at the University of Sydney. His poetry, fiction, and scholarship are published in *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *JASAL*, the *Australian Book Review*, *Rabbit*, shortlisted for the *Overland VU* prize, and awarded the A.D. Hope prize. He lives on Wangal country.

GEORGE ECONOMOU is the author of fifteen books of poetry and translations, the most recent of which are *Unfinished & Uncollected: Finishing Cavafy's Unfinished Poems and Uncollected Poems and Translations* (Shearsman Books, 2015), *Complete Plus—The Poems of C. P. Cavafy in English* (Shearsman Books, 2013), *Ananios of Kleitor* (Shearsman Books, 2009), and *Acts of Love, Ancient Greek Poetry from Aphrodite's Garden* (Modern Library of Random House, 2006).

DALE ENGGASS lives in Salt Lake City where he is a PhD candidate at the University of Utah and a member of the Halophyte arts collective.

HEATHER FULLER divides times between Baltimore and North Carolina and is the author of perhaps this is a rescue fantasy, Dovecote, Startle Response, and Dick Cheney's Heart.

KAY GABRIEL is the author of *Elegy* (Department Spring (BOAAT Press, 2017), the finalist for the 2016 BOAAT Chapbook Prize. With David W. Pritchard, she's also the author of *Impropria Persona* (Damask Press, 2017). Find her recent and forthcoming writing in *The New Inquiry*, *Salvage*, *Lambda Literary Poetry Spotlight*. A PhD candidate in the Princeton University classics department, she's writing a dissertation on adaptations of Euripides in modernism and the avant-garde, and lives in New York City.

HARRY GILONIS is a poet, editor, publisher, and critic; he has also been a fellow-traveller on the left for more years than he cares to remember. He 'earns' a 'living' in some un-noticed corner of commerce. A recent response to the momentary optimism of the 'Occupy' period was the attempt to learn from the poetry of successful revolution, culminating in the translation of a book of versions of Vladimir Mayakovsky and others, *For British Workers*, available from Barque Press in the UK [www.barquepress.com]. The two poems included herein are offshoots from that project, not included in the book.

KRYSTALLI GLYNIADAKIS (Athens, 1979) co-hosts a book show on national television; publishes in major Greek literary magazines like *Nea Estia*, *Poetics*, and *The Books Journal*; and also works between multiple languages, translating and self-translating in Greek, English, and Norwegian. She studied Philosophy and Political Theory at the London School of Economics and Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London, and also holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia.

KATERINA GOGOU was a Greek anarchist poet and actress, who appeared in over thirty films. She was involved in numerous political and cultural struggles in Greece and a consistent critic (from the anarchist left) of the Communist Party and other rigid party formations. She committed suicide in 1993 at the age of 53. Her first book, *Three Clicks Left*, translated by Jack Hirschman, has heretofore been the only published English translation of Gogou's work. *Tripwire* is excited to publish here what are some of the first English translations of her poems.

MICHAEL GOTTLIEB is the author of nineteen books, most recently *What We Do: Essays for Poets*, 2016, Chax Press. Speaking of anthologies, he's appeared in numerous ones, including the first Language anthology, *In The American Tree*, first published in 1986, as well as *Against Expression*, *An Anthology of Conceptual*

Writing, 2011, and the upcoming *Ingenious Pleasures*, an Anthology of Twentieth-Century Poetry, edited by Drew Gardner. He divides his time between New York City and the Northwest corner of Connecticut.

CHLOE HARALAMBOUS studied Modern Greek at Columbia and Oxford. Her research focuses on the nexus between literature and politics in the history of the Greek and Italian Left. She has been particularly interested in grassroots cultural responses to the crisis and the ways in which they mark a transition in Greek and Italian conceptions of the state. In 2015 she moved to Lesbos in order to work with refugees. Her essay on the present situation (with Katerina Stefatos and Dimitris Papadopoulos) can be found in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*.

DANNY HAYWARD is based in London. His last book *I/II* was published by Shit Valley, and he remains one of the shadowy backers of the occasional performance debacles *No Money*.

ANTOINE HUMMEL: testanonpertinente.net / gueuloir.5tfu.org / radfueralle.bandcamp.com / lapersonneperdengeneral.win

ADELAIDE IVÁNOVA (1982, Recife) is a Brazilian activist and journalist working with poetry, photography, translation and publishing. She has published 3 books—*autotomy* (...) (São Paulo: Pingado-Prés, 2014), *Polaróides* (Recife: Césarea, 2014) and *O martelo* (Lisbon: Douda Correria, 2016/Rio de Janeiro: Garupa, 2017)—and currently edits the anarchist-feminist zine *MAIS PORNÔ, PVFR!*, with erotic poetry in Portuguese and in translation. Her most recent work, “The artist is not present”—in which she thinks about the precariousness the art worker’s life, under a feminist and Marxist perspective, mixes text, sound and a documentation of her work as live model in Germany—is current showing at Centro Cultural Hélio Oiticá, in Rio de Janeiro. Ivánova lives between Cologne and Berlin.

LISA JESCHKE lives in Munich.

LESLIE KAPLAN was born in Brooklyn, New York, but raised and educated in France. Active in political groups as a student, she interrupted her studies in January 1968 to join the Marxist-Leninist movement of *établissement*, where activists took jobs in factories so as to bring the revolution to the workers. She moved from one factory job to another for two years, and participated in the events of May 1968

from the perspective of an occupied factory (the Brandt washing machine factory in Lyon). Winner of the Prix Wepler 2012 for her novel *Millefeuille*. She is the author of nineteen titles with P.O.L and five with Gallimard: plays, novels, and books of poetry.

JAZRA KHALEED (born 1979) lives in Athens, writes exclusively in Greek, and is known as a poet, translator, editor and filmmaker. His poems have been widely translated for publications in Europe, the US and Australia. He is a founding co-editor of the poetry magazine *Teflon*, which publishes cutting edge literature from Greece and the world. His newest short poetry film “Gone is Syria, Gone” has been selected for the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Ann Arbor Film Festival, and L’Alternativa.

KYOKO KISHIDA (a pen name, taken from the Japanese actress best known for her role in the 1964 film *The Woman in the Dunes*) publishes all of her poetry with *Teflon*, the magazine she founded with Jazra Khaleed and others. The first issue, which included everything from Langston Hughes to Yusef Komunyakaa, described poetry as food “witch-cooked, but also served raw.” She also writes essays and translates, most recently from the poetry of the African American lesbian poets Pat Parker and Cheryl Clarke.

EVAN KLEEKAMP is the co-director of Les Figs Press. His chapbook *13 THESES ON STATE-SPONSORED BLACK DEATH IN AMERICA* was published by Kastle Editions in 2016. Excerpts from his in-progress manuscript *Three Movements* are forthcoming in *Fence* and *Nightboat Books’s Responses*, New writings, *Flesh* anthology edited by Ronaldo V. Wilson, Bhanu Kapil, and Mg Roberts. He lives in Los Angeles.

SPREE MACDONALD’s chapbook, *Milksop Codicil*, won the Sanger-Stewart Chapbook Competition and was published by Slapering Hol Press in 2017. His poetry has been a finalist for the Anhinga Press Rick Campbell Chapbook Prize, a semi-finalist for the Philip Levine Prize in Poetry, and twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He can be found online at spreemacdonald.com.

MAYAKOV+SKY PLATFORM is an anarchist/autonomist framework based in Oakland and Athens. The Platform has presented films, photography and analyses of the crises developing in the Bay Area and Greece at large, at various anarchist spaces and collectivities around Greece, the 3rd Anarchist Film Festival in Montreal, the Bay Area Public School and publications/journals *Armed Cell*, *Tripwire* and *#This Is A Co-op* of the 15th Venice Biennale of Architecture.

SARAH McCANN was a Writing Fellow at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and has published her poetry in such journals as *The Bennington Review*, *Margie*, *The Broken Bridge Review*, *Midway Journal*, *The South Dakota Review* and *Hanging Loose*. Her translations from the Modern Greek into English have been recognized by the Fulbright Foundation with a grant and published in such anthologies and journals as *Austerity Measures*, *Words Without Borders*, *Poetry International*, and *World Literature Today*.

JENN McCREARY is a Philadelphia poet. She serves on the board of San Francisco's Small Press Traffic, is the author of three books of poetry & several chapbooks, & in 2013 was named a Pew Fellow in the Arts.

MICHAEL NARDONE is the author *The Ritualites* (BookThug, 2018), *Airport Novel* (Gauss PDF, 2015), and *Transaction Record* (Gauss PDF, 2014). He lives in Montréal.

CECILY NICHOLSON is administrator of the artist-run centre and mental health resource, *Gallery Gachet*, and a member of the Joint Effort prison abolition group. She is the author of *Triage* (2011) *From the Poplars* (2014) and *Wayside Sang* (2017).

MARK NOWAK, a Guggenheim and Lannan fellow, is founding director of the Worker Writers School and author of *Shut Up Shut Down*, a New York Times Editor's Choice, and *Coal Mountain Elementary*, which Howard Zinn called "a stunning educational tool."

JENNIFER PAP teaches in the French and Francophone Studies Program at the University of Denver. Her research is primarily about exchanges of ideas between poets and painters such as Apollinaire and Picasso or René Char and Georges Braque. For several years, she and Julie Carr have worked together on translations of French poetry by Guillaume Apollinaire and Leslie Kaplan.

CHRISTOS PAPAGEORGIOU was born in Volos in 1954. He has worked as a librarian and copy editor. He has published eight poetry collections and was co-published of the short-lived magazine *Figure of Speech*.

IRINI PAKYRIAKOU (1974) has studied literature and theatre and holds a doctorate degree in Modern Greek Literature from Sorbonne-Paris IV University. For several years she was editor and translator for various publishing houses; translating poetry,

novels and essays. She is also the co-author of an experimental novel. She currently lives in Athens and works as a cultural events project manager for the Athens World Poetry Festival and the French Institute of Greece.

ELENI PHILIPPOU is a poet published in a number of journals and anthologies.

OMAR PIMIENTA is an interdisciplinary artist and writer who lives and works in the San Diego / Tijuana border region. His artistic practice examines questions of identity, migration, citizenship, emergency poetics, landscape and memory. He has published four books of poetry: *Primera Persona Ella* (2004); *La Libertad: Ciudad de paso* (2006); *Escribo desde Aquí* (2009); and *Álbum de las rejas* (2016). He is currently a PhD candidate in Literature at the University of California, San Diego, and received his MFA in Visual Arts from the same institution.

THE POETRY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP: <http://www.poetrytranslation.org/translators/the-poetry-translation-workshop>

JULIA POLYCK-O'NEILL is a Canadian artist, curator, critic, and writer. She is a Canadian doctoral candidate in Brock University's Interdisciplinary Humanities program, where she is completing an interdisciplinary and comparative critical study of contemporary conceptualist literature and art in Vancouver. She teaches in art history and contemporary visual culture, and is currently a visiting lecturer and scholar in the Obama Institute for transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany.

NICK POTAMITIS was born in 1975 and grew up in North London.

KRISHNAKANT LAXMANRAO PULKUNDWAR (1971, Kandhar, India) is a painter who teaches at the J. J. Institute of Applied Art, in Mumbai. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in Mumbai and been exhibited internationally.

NATHALIE QUINTANE lives and writes in Digne les Bains, where she works as a high school teacher. Her poetic and political satire appears in publications with P.O.L. and La Fabrique. She is rumored to have attempted to sow the seeds of both tomatoes and insurrections in her garden (see Tomates, P.O.L., 2010).

MAX RITVO (1990-2016) was awarded a 2014 Poetry Society of America Fellowship for his chapbook, *Aeons*. He was a poetry editor at Parnassus and a teaching fellow at Columbia University. Milkweed Editions published a posthumous collection of his poems in 2016.

ANGELOS SAKKIS was born in Greece. BFA from SFAI, 1989. He translated *When Snow Fell...* by Leonidas Petrakis (Pella 2012.) He has been translating Greek poetry to English and co-translating, with John Sakkis, the work of Greek poet and multimedia artist Demosthenes Agraftotis: *Maribor*, (The Post Apollo Press 2009,) which received the 2011 Northern California Book Award for Poetry in Translation, *Chinese Notebook* (Ugly Duckling Presse 2010,) *Now 1/3 & The Poem* (BlazeVOX [Books] 2012,) *Yes & Diaeresis* (Dusie 2016). He co-translated with Jack Hirschman *Food Line* by Sotirios Pastakas (Forepaw Press, 2015). Most recently he participated in *Cross Section*, an Anthology of Contemporary Greek Poetry, Erato Press, 2015. His own work has appeared in *Ambush Review*, *Try*, *Hellenic Voices*, *Otolith* and *Tsakmaki*. His chapbooks *Memory-of* and *Fictional Character* were published by Zarax Books, 2012, and *Travel log with Homer on my mind* 2011 in 2012 by Both Books. He lives in Oakland, California.

EMMA BROWN SANDERS is a queer poet living in Philly. Her work can be read in the tiny, *Bone Bouquet*, *Full Stop*, *Boneless Skinless*, *Fungiculture*, *Recreation League*, *Bedfellows* and *Reflections on the Burden of Men*. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

LASANA M. SEKOU is a St. Martin, Caribbean author of 20 books of poetry, short stories, monologues, and essays, including *Nativity*, *The Salt Reaper*, *37 Poems*, *Love Songs Make You Cry*, and *Brotherhood of the Spurs*. He is the editor of poetry anthologies, the landmark *National Symbols of St. Martin—A Primer*, and producer of *Fête—The first recording of Traditional St. Martin festive music by Tanny & The Boys*. His poetry has been translated into Spanish, Dutch, French, German, Turkish, and Chinese. Sekou is an advocate for the independence of St. Martin, a colony of France and the Netherlands.

AZAD ASHIM SHARMA is a 25 year-old poet living in South London. He is affiliated with the Brighton underground poetry scene (especially *Horseplay* and *Hi Zero* poetry/performance series). In 2017, Azad's first collection of poetry, entitled *Against the Frame*, was published by Barque Press. This collection engages with the

concept of trauma as a result of and through the experiences of on-going conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; the vulnerability of Azad's own complex Islamic-Hindu hybrid identity; and experiences of xenophobia in a political landscape punctuated by Donald Trump, Brexit, and the rise of new fascisms.

SAMUEL SOLOMON is author of *Special Subcommittee* (Commune Editions, 2017) and *Lyric Pedagogy and Marxist-Feminism: Social Reproduction and the Institutions of Poetry* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2018) and co-translator, with Jennifer Kronovet and Faith Jones, of *The Acrobat: Selected Poems of Celia Dropkin* (Tebot Bach, 2014). He teaches in the School of English at the University of Sussex where he is Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Sexual Dissidence.

VERITY SPOTT is a poet from Brighton, UK. Its books include *Trans* Manifestos*, *Gideon*, *The Mutiny Aboard the RV Felicity* and *Click Away Close Door Say*.

EILEEN R. TABIOS loves books and has released over 50 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in nine countries and cyberspace. In 2018, the 15th anniversary of her invention, the “hay(na)ku” form, is celebrated at the San Francisco Public Library and Saint Helena Public Library. She lives in Napa Valley where she is attempting grape farming. <http://eileenrtabios.com>

CASSIE THORNTON is a feminist economist and artist working under the title of the Feminist Economics Department (the FED). Miranda Mellis wrote: “Her genius is simple, but not easy: she tries to find the soft spots, the loopholes, the places of possibility and sets up shop exactly where things seem the most intractable and impossible.” Cassie is co-director of *RiVAL* in Thunder Bay, Canada.

ROBIN TREMBLAY-McGAW lives in San Francisco. She is the author of *Dear Reader* (Ithuriel's Spear 2015) and co-editor with Rob Halpern of *From Our Hearts to Yours: New Narrative as Contemporary Practice* (ON Contemporary Practice 2017).

CASSANDRA TROYAN is the author of several books and chapbooks of poetry, most recently *A Theory in Tears* (ANNOTATIONS & CASES FOR FREEDOM & PROSTITUTION) (Kenning Editions 2016). They used to live in Oakland, but now they live and teach in southern Sweden.

UNIVERSAL JENNY was born 2 October 2013. Attempting a transcendence of individual and collective consciousness in terms of either/or, her poetry seeks to narrate the impact of historical momentum on actually existing life. Universal Jenny is committed to the insights of symbolic characters, such as Brecht's Pirate Jenny, and of real people whose passage through political humanity has expanded the remit of the possible.

SAM VERNON, featured on Huffington Post's "30 Contemporary Art Makers Under 40 You Should Know," uses installation and performance to confront questions concerning personal narrative, historical memory and identity. Sam earned her MFA in Painting/Printmaking from Yale University in 2015 and her BFA from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in 2009. Vernon has most recently exhibited with We Buy Gold, Interstitial Gallery, Coney Art Walls curated by Jeffrey Deitch, Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum, Fowler Museum at UCLA and Seattle Art Museum. Sam lives in Oakland, CA and teaches printmaking as an Assistant Professor at California College of the Arts (CCA).

FRANCISCO VILHENA is assistant editor at Granta. He translates from the Portuguese. His work has appeared in Granta, Wasafiri, Clinic, and elsewhere.

JOSE ANTONIO VILLARÁN is the author of *la distancia es siempre la misma* (2006) and *el cerrajero* (2012). His third book, titled *open pit*, is forthcoming from *Album del Universo Bakterial* in 2018. He holds an MFA in Writing from the University of California, San Diego, and is currently a PhD student of Literature at UC Santa Cruz. He lives somewhere in between Santa Cruz and San Francisco.

JUHA VIRTANEN's publications include *Back Channel Apraxia* (2014), *-LAND* (2016), and the critical study *Poetry and Performance During the British Poetry Revival 1960-1980: Event and Effect* (2017). Together with Eleanor Perry, he co-edits *DATABLEED*. He is Lecturer in Contemporary Literature at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.



Contemporary Brazilian Poetry – Issue 8

This issue is dedicated to exploring contemporary Brazilian feminist poetics. Brazilian poets Adelaide Ivánova, Adriana Zapparoli, Carla Diacov, Érica Zingano, Flávia Rocha, Jussara Salazar and Vírma Teixeira are published in translation in the habitual bilingual amazing edition of the magazine co-edited by Jèssica Pujol and Vírma Teixeira. We also invited two Brazilian writers, Cristina Judar and Assionara Souza, who contributed with short stories for this issue.

Latin America has a very high prevalence of gender violence, with Brazil occupying recently the fifth position in the world ranking of female murders. This special edition aims to reflect on this alarming violence against women in Brazil, and on how Brazilian women poets reflect about the theme in their writing.

www.albalondres.com

In alba Londres we publish articles on Spanish/Latin-American culture in England – or in English – and original poetry in translation. We work with different languages including Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, Galician, Euskara, Occitan and English.

alba

OUT NOW

ISSUE 3.34 | WINTER 2018 | THE WORK OF WORDS



Preview featured content and subscribe at
THECAPILANOREVIEW.COM

ISSUE 3.35 (SPRING 2018) COMING SOON