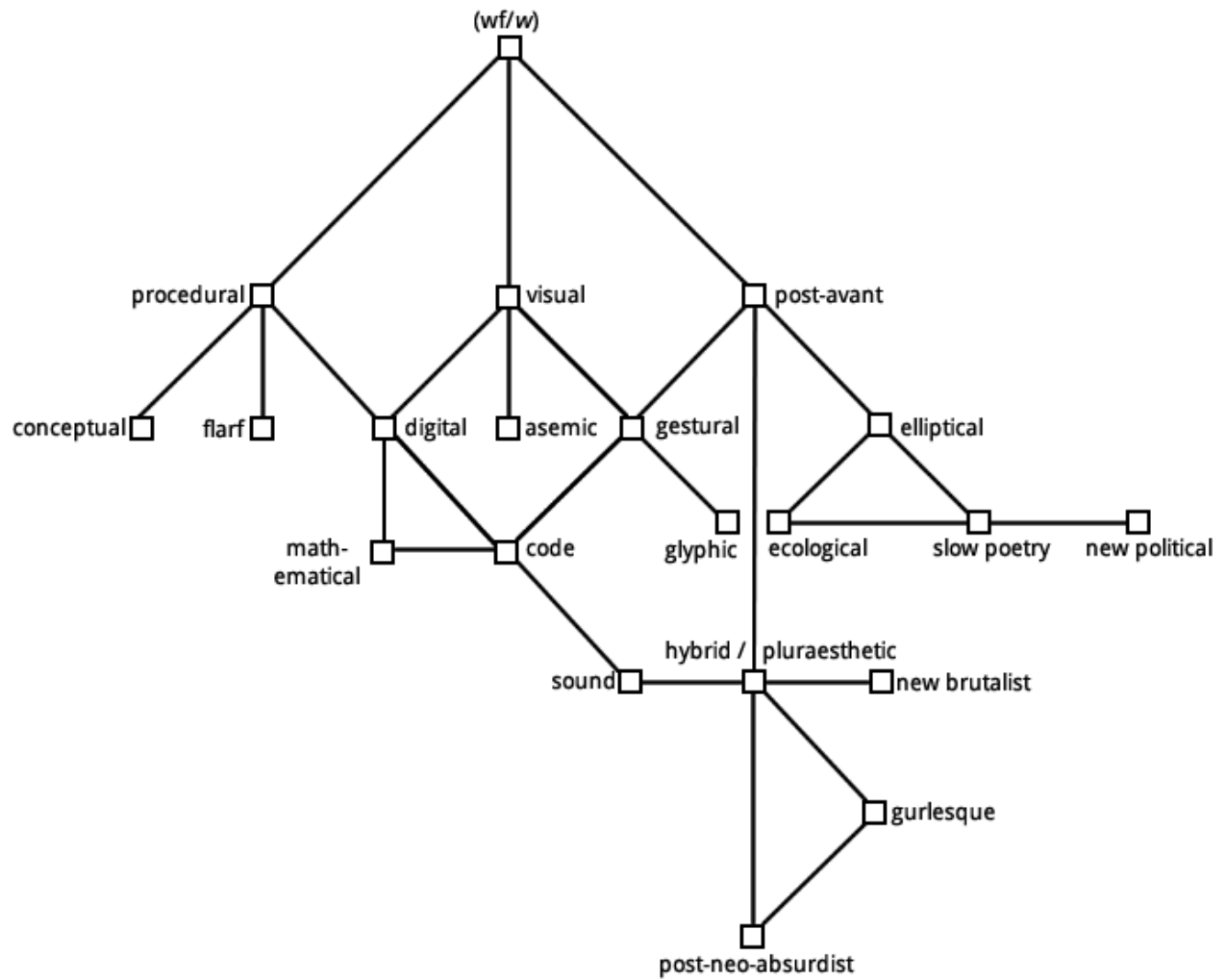


Winter / Spring 2011

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Editor's Notes



In the dream there are boxes of cardboard and wood, suitcases made of leather and canvas, bags of woven plastic. There are objects strewn everywhere: patterned scarves, balls of yarn, stacks of index cards and blankets, mismatched pairs of shoes. She does not know where time is coming from or where it is fast escaping but she feels it beating wings against her, flickering all around. Her hands are only two, scrambling to tuck objects into boxes, into bags. First the yarn and then a shoe, then a bottle and removing the yarn, a sweater and two books, she rearranges the shoes, realizing there are three, begins sifting her hands through the mess in search of another pair. Time jeering silent insistence, she folds objects away. Positioning, stacking, arrange again. She closes containers one by one, sealing flaps of boxes, pulling zippers of suitcases, clipping shut the buttons of bags.

Dear Nation,
What anchors, what milk, what murmur of mine?

Dear Immigrant,
Shouldered loyalties, what offered up for entry. Shout
softly from safe rooftops.
Claim skin, claim map, claim mobile.

Sonnet II.

I dream.

Bordered edges, green demarcations,
dotted blots on map to mark construction.

Upright of slag cement.

The need to tongue and teeth a map:

Romania Slovakia Hungary Italy

Venezuela United States

Israel Palestine

Say and repeat. Bare tangled recognition.

Sovereign becomes an olive pit, bitter flesh and oils.

Turn the name over on the tongue. A nation becomes a mouth.

Dust swills up around the jaw-line, the cut-bone barriers.

Mandible to masticate, the chew-drum:

sovereignty, supremacy. A tooth-lined artillery.

my father's father gave a warning thumbed
a caution that history repeats itself that falling happens
in patterned sequence the body a people
thuds and thuds again

“didn't want to be *those Jews*”

I said sometimes the body the cycle
is transferred another body

she says “see the Arab scarf” clicks her tongue

what steady
claim survival
regime to claim ownership
what anchors

this barbed spine of dragon wire we are connected by

razor thorn
to shoot at signs of motion- wind, armadillo, child

two slabstones, moat of liquid heat between
cameras, sensors, robot drones
sound of trucks rolling over sand

imaginings of what lies on the other side

Dear Nation,
Wall built into the water. Some kind of muddled Moses. The sea will not
split for this.
concrete partition looming,
the captive heart beating a claustrophobe's rattle
it reaches for the sea

Dear Nation,
I ascribe not to you but to the between-you. Is this the leap from second to
third— a generation toes the line.

scowl of *socialism* her mouth the inescapable

articles, items, artifacts grandmother her mapping

“See the wool gloves your aunt wears in this one? Those you can only find in Romania, near the hills, it gets very cold in the winter.”

thick scarf snakes neckline a winter city
wheeled cart to market from third-floor apartment
oranges, dates, bags of flour, sugar

“Your grandfather traveled, selling shoes all over Europe. He always remembered to bring a treat for the girls”

lollipops from Bucharest, paper butterflies from Berlin
dangled edge of lace

She runs trembling fingers over the photographs to remember
as though teakettles and stockings could be felt through the grains.

She likes department stores best;
watery gleam, overhead fluorescents, sleek counter-tops.
Walks aisles arm-in-arm with her daughter:

“Now *this* is a good seam, how it rolls down the side of the skirt.”
“These high-tech alarm clocks fall apart too soon.”

Stacked, by color, dozens lining the aisle. Days would measure out in yards of cloth, bright bolts lining the fabric store. Tailor her daughters, blouses her daughters, mother a girl at her hip. Arms extended, grazing fingers over each roll of fabric. Kaleidoscopic modern-day department store: coat hangers, scented candles, plastic picture frames glinting beside boxed kitchenware.

I dream of envelopes breaking apart into hundreds of paper cranes. Some fall to the sea, float listless on the surface of the water until they dissolve.

[illegible]

Dear Immigrant,
Claim clung, waxed hand, once gripped cannot
unclaw undone unheld.

What your children will never know of mortar.

Dear Nation,

Exp.

Residencia permanente del titular

131920



Er

ficarse a:

Dirección:

to the between-you.

REP
MINISTER
SERVIC

El tit

ENEZUELA
NES INTERIORES
ENTIFICACION

ento ha sido
ente.

1963 de 195

3243909

EADED AND F

— a generation toes the line.

In the dream there are mismatched scrambling, boxes escaping coming of cardboard cards flickering. Her jeering everywhere and wood, sifting pair. Positioning suitcases the objects made of beating wings. There is fast, and canvas, where time begins woven. First plastic of bags, strewn: feels patterned, rearranges. Scarves search in sealing insistence. Time balls where it zippers. She stacks another index. A pairs and blankets, of shoes. But she against her, all pulling. Does not know it from or around. Hands are only two, to tuck are boxes, the yarn. Books into bags and stacking three, then, a shoe. Then leather a bottle and mess of sweater, one by one. Removing suitcases, the yarn, of yarn, and objects two, she shoes, realizing her hands, silent. There are folds through objects. Away, arrange again. Clipping of buttons, flaps. Shut closes where it zippers.

Stephen Ratcliffe

poems from Temporality

3.14

pale orange of sky on horizon above black
ridge, red-tailed hawk calling on branch
in foreground, sound of wave in channel

from perception, 'collected
elements' as entities

complicate, remain the same,
and still do so today

silver of sunlight reflected in channel,
white cloud in pale blue sky on horizon

3.15

pink cloud in blue-white sky above black
ridge, red-tailed hawk calling on branch
in foreground, sound of waves in channel

form taken only in that way,
other origin in sense

is the ending, picture held,
certain view of world

silver of sunlight reflected in channel,
white cloud in pale blue sky on horizon

3.16

pale pink line of cloud above blackness
of ridge, silhouette of leaves in left
foreground, sound of waves in channel

ordinary, conceive of space-
time continuum itself

as “relative,” made in many
ways, of acceleration

silver of sunlight reflected in channel,
white cloud in pale blue sky on horizon

3.17

blinding silver circle of sun in clouds
above ridge, streaked sparrow on feeder
in foreground, wave sounding in channel

eye, would animate material
vision accompanied by

content, self-consciousness
“attention” to effect

clouds on horizon to the left of point,
wingspan of pelican flapping toward it

3.18

yellow-orange of clouds above black plane
of trees, motionless green leaf in left
foreground, waves sounding in channel

attention to side different
from what it was, yet,

in which thing shows itself,
“seeing,” looking and

white cloud in pale blue sky above point,
sunlit green top of ridge across from it

Anhvu Buchanan

IV.

how many films were made from broken recipes/it's time to cook the cake mix with the broccoli/there is a safety in mismatched clothing that else no one knows/i've collected all the spare scraps from the local museum/follow the ribbons as far as the morning can go/why must the insects persecute me/i want to eat ice water the way angels do/if i can read a magazine to the air is there anyone there to hear it crash/there's no better time like robot time/what does it mean to look through a telescope/i have turned my mother parts inside out/why call it shambles when i can call it treasure/i have fallen and there is no piano to pick me up

Walking Orders from the Briefly Psychotic

snatch the president's purse stay mute but mumble in spanish and english and hungarian feel the left pain on the side of your cheek eat all the plastic flowers from the dresser follow your daughter's voice throw tea bags at the radio unzip the pillow cases to toss in your old teeth smell the news from the television take a bath in breast milk or lemonade solve the funeral to keep the mystery alive bite out pages of the nearest book grab at the gold chains in the pharmacy fear the ultrasound beam aimed right at your throat look at the passenger side mirror for your forgotten cousin search for the tapped phone lines in the refrigerator window swim to the closet earthquake or police station wrestle with a witch in a guinea pig cage receive scriptures from jupiter grip the meekest arm next to you and go find the healer with the index finger made from light

How Dreams Acquire Their Eyes

My head gives way to the yawning. The muscles in my body have departed for the winter. I have stored stories in my stomach. While I rest the ground translates my dreams into familiar eyes. Every closed wink leads to another trap door to another familiar smell. This slumber drags our wishes across freckled thoughts and rusty nails. I am flooding out each breath. I am blessing the bed. I am trying to recover our eyes.

Foggy

parked by the side of the road.
the car lights up the woods like a lantern.¹

¹ stumbling into furniture means I have lost control. I peak back into myself and it happens again like this: my head bobbing uncontrollably up and down. a warm sensation on the top of my head. like the yolk from a cracked egg dripping down my forehead, burning. several hours away from my body. I am a separated dream. I am foggy thoughts building up in the backseat. but I have taken precautions. I have found the safest way to live. the only way to wander is to wander alone.

Gracie Leavitt

Quaquaversal

Quaquaversal

In anteroom, on riverboat—my vox
in clammy anteroom, deserted: Were
inert as auks in warmer wastes, was how
we leaned, were made more lost, now not
so brave as we might want, perplexed,
more vexed, by banks of Yangtze River
thrumming, unmoved, while she shivered,
huddled under cloth. Was wet, was cool,
was bright; her shoulders brown; were brown
from all the sauntering we did that day about
his gorge, that small one there, was round,
she fraught and leaning on this onyx still
obstreperous and taut, plus sauntered on,
three more days gone, just prattled on,
just safflower picked, contriving sicko songs
while ready ever one ear to these waters,
strong, for thuds of poles dropped in by men,
them old, to move their boats along, those same,
you see, we longed to eddy down this river
on, yet never did, not ever, all my fault,
three ways gone wrong. Least thought to dip
the cloth, hers white, so pale as great auk's
paunch, which skimmed this quarry freshet,
blessed, or of it what was left, was mostly dry,
forgot, to drape her, soothe her neck, to make
her bear some mantle where was radiant, so blithe,

to let me think I could a vision, one, though,
shivered by the river as I balked. Oh, say out
at droughted freshet how it's not my turn
to want this; then would not know now
was my turn then to step into that freshet

Deballasted

Jupes rouges et bleues et brunes forsook
or sloppy cast off, rather, in some patch
of molted shade tainted alternate of sun,
meantime he, doltish, sick on the carpet,
sulks, his bailing can of hedge apple
upturned in our fount, they motile,
bobbing off. Unstoppers dark paps
to his lips, apatetic in the toft, sings:
“Here I am again in Bolivia, dreaming,
oh, the tangerines you’ll open, every
one, and then not feed me one of!”
That now he knows it all as only from
a hilltop wholly made of scree much
attended by those men tidal several
miles above their mouths, he sobs this
silently, winded, and the ard takes off
the first of dirt as often as not, as any
other thing, as in cassocks on his porch
the others, lofty, ply contrarily unawares,
etiolate, beseated, some in waiting, some
in wanting, querulous, lumpen. All’s
as often as not, as any other thing— still
two ptyxis shows, waging love, volute,
before him form from under ard
and infinite. Anyway, who was it there
cast off their skirts, all hues? Say,
just when will they come back?

On the axis but across from each magnolia

Mirror-black birds stiff
on mirror-black boughs,
it's mudtime, edenic, on
this pampa under stars, or,
depending where you are,
upon one drumlin, pitchblende,
grayed, where of rose hip,
of chicken scratch we chat
long into night, still beer-sour
from full sun and other actions
in the shade, all our arms our legs
still sticking out from blossoms
tossed from trees in tongues
and clots and threes, pink-tipped,
chatoyant, cluttering ghat
we wobble down where you
whose lover is banal watch
while I wade in these which
as I pass weld to then peel
from me as if I'd found
the spot where all dirt roads
you'd meant to find convened...
But pond skin thin as drum paper
breaks in the end with just
one beat too hard: She dives;
you turn; I see your face
as would I on your final thrust.

Etc.

Three shirtless boys and one swan's body in the winter water maneuver nearer bend of— to— but remember how you broke me at the toll beach, both your hands on both my hips? This while the other lovers went on braying, a dozen or so, slumped in the xyst, playing cards for keeps as always? This while we two made to unfold what we could and could not bear—he alone in the kitchen with a gun and the impartable. To think nothing of Arabella, poised akimbo, what a lamb, always forgetting her virgin's two-step. To balk at, marvel—wreaks of marvel—can you imagine? The unconcerned face of her beloved; a bouquet across his lap all through the show. This while I wash dishes in your woodsman's shirt, unbuttoned, and do some drying with rough sleeve as long as you won't— All I can see is old men, can smell only cows and oil and piss—old men ignored by the zodiac—lashed to—just to stay standing. To go frame by frame by frame by frame and finally no impulse left. To be conceived by the incidentals; to be ever more complete. We two unfold what we can and cannot bear, abiding, queuing in the snow, thinking back to red earth in the mouth of— But for now there is this bowl of vile soup between us, and a book. Perhaps when the soup is finished, and the book. But for now I wash dishes and you won't talk back. All I can see is old men, and yet, by this map of strobes: Three shirtless boys and one swan's body in the winter water maneuver nearer bend of rail to see a flag in wind, and then of course to feel it move.

Ian Seed

Sidestepping grace

1

the documentary skin
spells steep slopes

and other bells
treated as equals

girls
impossible to meet

or kiss in the stairwell
with the notion

of rain hammering the roof
bubbling fat

until midnight
with the light turned off

2

now my estranged
barber

may spot a bald patch soon
blooming in motion

mine is pretty small
in the morning

recentralising
'angels'

no I never saw one
without the inverted commas

which is all she's wearing
her mouth open

3

I creep towards her
ripple

for the rest of the evening
jack it

cradle your jaw
but no less staggering

for its emptiness
delete

in a handkerchief
between the wars

black
with perfect sense

4

a broken wave
no monetary value

thus the rite
whose colour we crave

have you noticed
the smell

behind eyelids
coming down

each face
printed for purchase

numberless
exile

5

as a child I could
with a few sticks

or matches
make part of a face

whatever I wanted
to name without words

nothing resists
on the surface

when I touch
these angels with wings

of paper to cut
or burn

6

images that shrink
or detonate

we are not made in one piece
the machine turns

in emptiness
the way we went down

nor is it important
how we begin to dance

and fragment
in a grainy photo

easy to miss
at first glance

7

dig into sky
to find a heart

people who press
against us with their wings

in a moment
of infinite suggestion

yet I am
of your country

where drops of blood
fall on pavements

indelible
and absolute

Jim Berger

The Fragilist

1.

Nodes and groves of glottal frictions--
Has his telephoto memory condensed all that distance
into volume, the way a drizzle on TV looks like a torrent?
The red-cheeked birds who bow their heads;
the red-tailed birds that veer up out of the trees;
in nagging disproportion;
almost perfected.

2.

Make the fragilist toughen
his new teeth,
his new tongue
will salivate the acids necessary.
The delicate diner has no defenses,
he tries to seduce
with coy declensions.
If only his stomach had hairs lucid enough
to conjugate the infinite follicles.
Mad for dust and sand,
the marble-smooth branchless trunks of palm trees:
the fragilist crawls in the bushes
while his wife buys clothing.
Everywhere there are children, he notices.

3.

The fragilist is busy protecting
the cyanides that he'll crossbreed
with lettuce in his covered garden.

And in a puddle on the sidewalk
a deep lasciviousness awakens his memory.

On the road's nearest approach to his house,
the fragilist finds a bomb,
a homemade device hidden under
a green plastic rug supposed to look like grass.

How fertile, how fruitful
the toxins of his soil.

4.

The spider plant,
its leaves delicately
browning and curling,
is healthy,
 she tells him.
It is the fern he must watch closely.

5.

The frenzy of what is not;
one after another she returns perfected--
wearing makeup? More slender?
Her brother is alive again?

6.

The old couple must be his parents.
They create nothing— Their sexual act
is the creation and dissemination and
spreading--
comes from male, spread onto female.
The fragilist doesn't want to watch,
to see them—
doesn't want to be part of it;
but he is,
inadvertently, apologetically—

7.

Striation still is possible.
Face two faces:
arm in armory,
shoulders like continents.

Why he's so tightly bunched--
it's music
that pulls his brain off.

8.

I didn't expect *him*--
this Hasidic cliché, pale, dark beard,
skinny like he's never heard of a gym,
tzit tzit hanging out of his pants
a stunted confirmation to cosmic dishevelment.

He studies Talmud. The rest of his ineptitude
he wears as an arrogance he's only recently discovered,
a dark suit on the hottest day.
I'm the Jew, it says, what are *you* going to do about it?

But I've been studying the signs and formulas
and there's no doubt: it's him, this little putz,

Moshiach.

9.

I fuck her and she's pregnant.
I fuck her and she's wearing the tiniest
little panties
and I fuck her then she's pregnant.
I fuck her and she's screaming, pregnant,
perfect, slender, obscene.
I don't exist, she's holding me
and I'm fucking her then she's pregnant.
I fuck her and she's crying.
I fuck her till there's no anger in the world,
till the world is healed,

and what does the fucking Moshiach do?
I've seen him with his wife (who's fat and seems
to be drizzling in some psychic way over everything)
and his seven children.
When is that asshole going to start working?

10.

Behind the left flap behind
Beyond the right hood beyond
Beneath the startled calendar
and allergic cadenza

11.

He shells, he peaks—
a perch abates just past
his spying.
In multierous bags
he carts his personal grapes.

One animate figment;
one survival of marked pivots.

That skunk
who seizes the black and white cat.

He wonders,
how can a single escalator?

12.

No more pressure for a free skin,
my aggressive friend;
no more burnishing brandished by
my cognitive branches.

Do you find scratching redemptive?
Do you urgently?
Would wishing make it snow?

13.

Destitute— he looks out from
the pavement grating

14.

There is strength in the two red flowers,
in the narrow tubes supported by their fluids.
There is a general hopefulness,
she tells him.

When we finally turned the plant around
after many months,
it was like a bristling gaping
noise;
a burst relation.

You can absorb it,
she tells him.

Imagine *you* are the object.

15.

He's turned around the wrong way
so the room doesn't look right;
disconnected like a vat of seeds
marking its alluvia.

Cradle the science of soothing,
she tells him.

16.

Poor cell, poor cell, pregnant again
with division, its over-completion
is its fragility, a hyphenation
that never knew what split it.
He's tormented by that fantasy—
of sponginess, the possibility of that rip
right down the nucleus,
reciprocal
incontinence
of incarnation,
in each moment of labor
the mutating code re-engaled
like a sneeze.
He fears, rather, that he is porcelain,
poured to a shape,
unable to blink;
the same baked function.

17.

The fragilist sees a tunnel in a pool of dark
and small half-worlds, durable, drifting,
illuminated from a source in haze
beneath what must be a horizon
yet somewhat closer than where he'd guessed;
A horizon for every occasion, he surmises.
'There is a sense of "presentation,"
as if "pecan encrusted on a bend of lentils
and a banana leaf," or at least that impression
bundles itself, as with secret muscles
which then dissolve, as if
abandoned by his spine.

Kara Imre

There is a cake in the VCR

There is a cake in the VCR instead of not. I am in trouble cause I baked a TV who's having a baby. The baby is stuck and now the guests are pissed. I am a by-stander, did not use antennas. Recipe called for motion, only. Action, movie. The TV needs a C-section. Cut. Driving to the mall. Riding escalators like they'll take me to dinosaurs. It's called the land before mine. I am out of AA batteries. The cashier is bitchy, wears a bun of hair. I am running under fluorescent lights next to toy stores. There is a boy over my shoulder selling puzzles. Take two. Remote in tact. The cake is wound up. She ejects eventually. I put on my party hat and everyone gives me their plate. I hang the piñata and everyone goes on hitting.

(I was in this forest of frosting)

I was in this forest of frosting
and I licked the top.

I was in this forest of frosting
and the trees were totally baked.

I was in this forest of frosting
and the cake-people had eyes.

I was in this forest of frosting
and there was no funfetti.

I was in this forest of frosting
and the birds held knives.

I was in this forest of frosting
and everything was dead but me.

a vampire vetoed my valentine

dropped a blob of blood on the blank
next to "NO" ---
Didn't want my skin
that never fit in
in the fourth grade
or this modern age
with too many candles
too little cake.
Could have guessed
he wouldn't check next
to "YES."
It's this half heart
folded: the make of me
made to ache
each morning
in waking.
It's wanting.
P.S. haunting.

Sara Michas-Martin

AUDITION

halyards in the bay steady the indoor voice of the ocean
the undertow mumbles its silhouette an exhale
elevated to a sigh the full amplitude of motion any object
produces sound when it vibrates in matter
particles collide with particles in front of them
which collide with particles ahead
until you hear water hiss in the metal sink
pipes clack elbows the suck on the drain
over trucks outside wincing through gears the person shouting
echo of high heels pigeons warbling
hammer anvil stirrup
noise plays past the ear marries us to time
its tricks with speed and one-way argument
sitting quiet the reward of nothing then letting
a song decide which mood to sink
what other faculties live as vacant as crammed
as spotted as this? musicians organize sound
for no evolutionary purpose an audience claps
hearing the rise and fall of pitch
high notes swapped in for higher notes
a finger pressed firmly to sound the matching key.

CAFE, PERSON CRYING

The spirit unbundled like that

no place
proper to land

eye to eye out of reach
the meanwhile

imprecise
the shared quality
of accents

a need to level
continuously a script

burn spots standing quickly
after not standing

hard to judge
for instance
corners on most people

from the margins
guesswork

some things
born without aid
or antonym

it's common in fading to ignore
a sigh let go

a short descent
radial sob

here in this room together

innumerable the ways
we are not.

GUSTATION

I wanted to know your country I let you order
the terrible green egg the fluid aged five weeks
in the heat then passed ceremoniously
to slurp through the homemade aperture
the aftertaste cast wide sulfuric and murky
all that expires in the deep end of the farm
my most flexible cavity stretched with bird
bird cycling the vein already
bird-powered wrist in my fabric
a little bird soul a shell

If You Think About It

You want everything clear
then you want it altered
sometimes a little more metaphor
hanging up in front.

Like everyone you're busy
tending variables—birth order,
blood pressure. Maybe
you suffer the darker months
in a city that zoos
its occupants and the train
has squeezed a gawker out of you.
There are interactive guides
to patrol your reflexes.

You might say
the body is awash
with industry. The owl strains
to cough a pellet forward
as you wait at the table
gloved with tweezers
to untangle a complete set
of bones to rebuild
a swallowed vole. The mind
bears down to evolve,
to weed through the intake,
a whole sequence
made skinny, tapered
to a glimpse. A friend
crossed out misspelled words
with a ruler. You shoved her cat
more than once
down the chute
but now her name eludes you
because each night, you're a coast
reconfigured by a storm.
Back up from the filmstrip

to see the levers and blue canals
take on abstract qualities.
Moving this fast it's impossible
to follow anything down
to its unhammered root.
Say the edge is more
casually defined and you'll feel
uplifted. The lesson stays
clinical, but the word *artery*
can be a red flower
you shape with your voice
or the name of a country you invent
just so you can leave it.

Karen Lepri

Gut

Also inlet: water
corralled not with

shepherds and not
rope or

fence; collected into
a forearm

or inner part, molded

sand, clay decades
of reeds
matted down.

Not everyone will
call it that

(resting, the swallow

over-
grows, periwinkles
& clams quiet

drowning
in shell)

—feel it there.

Provision

Ten tides, and no assurance. You call
The flattest stones to show you something

(Like purity.) They return a countertenor
That takes all concert to get used to—to hear

Beauty. Many small cuts cover my hands: failure
To wrest calcification from itself. Every time

You suggest gloves, I look up, sharp
Angles of light breaking across water

Through the bars of our bucket.
There're more in my hands and I'm

Breaking off the largest ones. I want
This to be bloodier, saltier—you said it:

We'd hunt them down.

Asleep in a Canyon

After you
breathe

in the clear night, sky
soaking bay

into any dry
strand

your sweat
-streaked head

& body, smoke

what later becomes
the reason, I

come here &
everyone's here

until they start to leave
till finally I leave & we

are really
doing it

both
of us

completely gone
naked under

a whiteness
unforgiving

we try to claw
through rarefied

fibers of having
let each other do

things, many
more than just

steal away
years, shorten

lives we
promised

to stake & water.

I let you
eat alone,

seek a canon
to sleep in. You

leave me
sleep while

having another
take another night

sky into
your veins, and hold it

there, counting
as the years

wash back
with tide

& the bay, how the bay

stills—no shot;
no exhale.

Ancients

Way out, upturned hull, I tell
you, mangled

rigging, underwater

mast, colonies of snails
& algae. Throat your

only part shaded—respite
for the entering

leaving, breath compelled by my

touch, piece of wood you forget
you're eating. And later, boats strewn

high above the strandline, swimming
crisscross schizophrenic

waters. *Wait up*, I say. You

ask if I want to hold your hand, & I
become olympic, muscled

god, sheltered heart
of possible drowning.

The Lying

Consider the limits of exaltation—barkmouth,
firebush, foxlimb: are these

The high pants of justice—
we fall from pedestals

landing soft, whole.

Take a portion of heat, hold
the air as mass as

A series of prayers you have never
spoken, but suddenly

Speak like memory. Just try to hold your tights
at the crotch—each miraculous fit

Still fitting. When the earth
is awash in its own maker,

And the ocean, a crazed
mother, drowns all one hundred

Children. This grief is what you will
navigate, bowed ships

Slicing bulge and sigh.

Serena M. Tome

Sketch #3: Denise Levertov-Ancient Stairway

“Footsteps like water hollow
the broad curves of stone
ascending, descending
century by century.
Who can say if the last
to climb these stairs
will be journeying
downward or upward?”

*I am sure the last
to descend
will be
the crimson dragon
fire—*

*The great deity of destruction
Emblem of passion
will make
this structure
a footstool*

Sketch #4 Li-Young Lee-Dwelling

“As though touching her
might make him known to himself,”

Dirt

The perfect sedative to relax the hankering

Voices inside my head, speaking all at once

Telling and retelling my history over and over again

I cup my hands respectfully and hold her

Gently sniffing her aroma, hoping for a release

“as though his hands moving over her
body might find who he is, as though he lay
inside her, a country...”

*like sweet honeysuckle blooms
plucked violently from their homes,
squeezed until drunk with excuses
that enables one to forget his way home*

Kate Dougherty

If You're Finished I'll Have Your Cup

How did summer appear the morning you returned home?
Sweet like old smoke, clutch me in a corset.

It's hot now and I'm all wet.
 Shall I bathe you? Wash your pieces
 one
 by
 one?

I want to wrap your body in fresh towels
watch you dry.
We can wither cling.

* * *

What is this memorial intangible?

When I threw my computer against the wall it smashed.
I found the K inside a dirty sock and I pressed it.
The rest were gone.
Where's your K? Is she in heaven like you say?
Rot in heaven like you say?

Shimmer Your New 'Do

1

Robot—
says the polka dot girl at night,
says the polka dot girl at morning
when her window's glazed...
It's winter and her glass to outside is whitish glow...
a cloud of snow—
so under her blanket she'll slide hide go!
In bed—alone,
no diary under pillow whispers,
metal,
circle joints, glowing sockets...
*I will watch you fit your frame
and treat your toes like gold...*
New shoes,
red with white dots,
and she tucks them inside sheets—
asks the thing for its opinion,
tells the thing the places they'll go,
where the sun's rays turn red to pink,
where red clay makes the edges orange,
she'll sit, chin on knees,
the nook in between
and wouldn't you like to go?

Her eyelids lower—
and fingernail finds its lights-off switch
the tops of new shoes wriggle,
the toes,
jolting with sleep inside—
running a path to each his own...

2

In spring
nothing left has to die!
In morning
nothing left needs to shift and shake!
In the bedroom,
the echo takes its hold in the corners
mimes
the tree leaves
left
hanging...

Robot—
says the polka dot girl at night,
says the polka dot girl at morning
when her window's glazed...
No digital minutes
wait for her to rise.
No leaves on branch
will whisper her their song.
With it, she wonders,
how her new shoes will fare—
once the red clay thaws to spread?
Tighter,
they figure with the laces,
they pull the sheets under the chin...
She rests it on her fish-bone hand
(on her heel, the strongest).
And it remains,
corners and joints.
It's between her
arm and ribs...

Her eyelids lower—
and fingernail finds its lights-off switch
jolting with sleep inside—

We Wear Our Own Heads

Her fedora spins round the coat hook
fashioned from a stomping stomping calcium hoof.

Nuzzle nose, the beast forever in nickel time.

I crow call, tell you about her,
fry you some eggs.
The noise o'er our heads an automatic radio.

An hour behind and we all can't fit anymore.

But who am I to board it over? A sinker.
A down-and-out waiting for her shot.

A Short Page from Our Day Trip to Americus

Does she think we're in a hot air balloon? Frolicking
in the Memorial Day parade? I told her to forget
the flag at home.

Dear Apple and Silverbelle,

She couldn't swallow the cherry pie!

It was a big lost dirt cake, and she left behind
at least a few teeth.

My shrugging skeleton is usually good at making you
feel at home.

Sweet me,
Bones Barbed, chest stares shameless.

Why don't we just try her again later on,
floss without wax or shine.

Dear Curator

So much to be afraid of: earthquake, mudslide, wildfire, plane crash, train wreck, car accident, nuclear war, riots, gas shortage, Skylab, burglar, rapist, kidnapper, hijacker, mass murderer, botulism, rabies, tetanus, lockjaw, gangrene, infection, germs, sirens, black widow, rattlesnake, calories, high cholesterol, heart attack, Alzheimer's, bird flu, cancer.

Do you even fear them anymore?
I fear them even more than I did before.
The proof is in the pudding. Shit happens.
Shit happens to everyone all the time.

I resist making plans
at a road trip's destination.
Should I say we'll meet for coffee
and leave you at the table
waiting? Glass that won't break.

:autism, alcoholism, pregnancy, marriage, religion, zipper, bathing suit, paper cut, loneliness, failure, burn, onion
& garlic, the perfume lady at Macy's, veal knuckle, unlocked door, broken glass.

My mother runs her finger over the bumps on the bottom
of the jar and they remind her of the baby's crooked spine,
crooked like her father's and grandfather's.

Sometimes this is just how it is.
It's impossible to keep the water pitchers full.

We loved her,
Anon.

Lily Ladewig

Shadow Boxes

Let's build a fire. A shifting location. A change of wind and I can smell myself. Like something foreign. And into the fuller fascination. I can see the Chrysler Building from the window of the subway car on the bridge. I would measure the distance between us footwise. I would pull this epic from you with my whole body. Beneath your bright palms my breasts might become a reality. While my hands, full of acreage. Are budding outside your open. Third story window. The dancers push their painted feet across the page.

I don't remember you putting even one finger inside. Me: these burn blotches, the dresses I wore. An example of the body. The body wants what the body. Wants. Is it so emblazoned? Is it possible to be in a garden and not be in Italy? Each night we managed to consume. Two lobsters each. Apple pie *à la mode*. We embellished the margins with the city. To wake up every morning forgetful. City of fedoras. You might say it was trusting but you would veer wrong. Somewhere, the city of. The shaking of the bedbones. All I want now are your birds. All of them.

Have you ever seen a pecan grove? That was the one time I've been arrested in my life. The wet grass like drunkards. A *fleur de lys* of feeling. It was pressed. I was kicking. The comforter. They called the cops. I've been haunting you for hours now. The trick is to not get too gnarled up about it. Imagine rendering chicken fat. Turning to you then away. The overturning of your turning. The tailored shirt, for example. It can be worn tight on the body, or totally oversized, with tights and a pair of tall heels. I could say what you're expecting. I could be a blond. I could keep going.

Let's scare you up some drama. An 18th century peepshow. A typical entertainment of the time period. Take a look. Through this peephole. The dimensions pile on, revealing a poor paint job. There I was, fearless and standing on tables. Now I am something vivid. You are some thing. Seaward. What are whales? Why are whale hunted? In your sleep I start stealing your slow-ish motions. A puddle of pale blue on the floor. The most delicate patch of it. In the city their hands smell of oranges. Soon I will stop. Matching you stroke for stroke. I count the scratches on your back. I name them like ships.

This is a routine that I made up myself because it utilizes every part of the body. Almost like a window. You ask if it's snowing outside and I say No. Blossoming. Yellow-glowing. Like a good dancer. You do it on both sides. These whales do not have teeth. They are the oldest true fossils. To be recorded on 35 mm. Is expensive. A cut-out of gray pasted against. Sea foam green and the infinite numbers. The baleen of the corset bending. I also cheap out on leggings, scarves, and denim. Increase the white-space. Is it out of alignment? Is it leaf-time yet?

This one is coming to you on its belly. Sleepless, star-heavy. Almost like a burden of fruit. I become a substitute or bottomless. You ask if it's OK and I say Yes. Now I know, I am not waterproof. Something like I gave you. A thousand civilities. Oranges and citrons. I slip on something black. And a pair of heels that stand out. If you could paint an orgasm. This is what it would look like: wind again. I mistake it for your car in the drive. I take down my hair. I take my car to the field, the snow. Fills in between the lines. Of broken. Where the orchards were.

Elizabeth Sanger

The Needle

Would you were where my sister keeps her bones,
deep in her body, perfecting

their whiteness. I know teeth
troubling flesh, nubbin

chewed from the nail. Tasting salt
and alloy. Before we were sisters

lovers in the clipped field
whirled tarantella, courted

hillocks and the electric
fence without consequence,

swam in the abandoned
calcite quarry, its rain

dead of frogs and fish.

The Needle

The road pulls like a half-sleep
protracted. An evening, further

evening unrolls
the overlong length of the road.

In a corridor of rain-thicked trees
smothered idylls are rising.

White wine whispers
through the shifting leaves,

a gilded currency flitted with breathing
An understatement

of breathing. The kick comes
embryonic inside me.

The Needle

In the clearing, the scrub pine's shadow
recedes, permitting light

its butchery. Wildflowers curl into themselves
with mechanized intellect. This is not wilderness

between us, just a predictable distance
overdressed, every occasional tendril, dusk-rushed grove

bearing deliberate resemblance
to the accident we made

writhing in the net of creepers.
There are no accidents. Even the animals--

especially the animals, their choired gaze
so reliably exultant. Nowhere to withdraw

in a smothering underbrush—nowhere
in an assumption commonwealth

in which to find togetherness
is not the way I like it. Consider: we share a literal tongue.

Self-Portrait in Spring

Moony, jasmine dehisces
a pliant seed. Faces

of the beautiful boys and girls,
rooting toward

imbroglio, break dirt.
Blood-orange moon—

spunking palms.
As circumstance

is moral authority, no one
is or is not deranged. Nor is here

to be accounted as snakes
sighing through the tall grass,

a rabbit's imperative
to stomp. What in such plenitude

may resist. The rutted
path ornamenting itself over

already cannot bear
children. But in the creepers,

a rudimentary
musculature is assembling.

Today is your birthday.

Primal Landscape, 4 Ways

I.

Could you step out into this city, as approaching
the crest of its hill
its amber pin-prick

carillon is upswept: could you
go further, o honeyed black

seraph is unkempt, is rising, spreading
its future as pennons sidereal

but that are not the stars.
But on foot there is no nevering
the stars.

II.

We turned back frightened by the carcass of a dog.
As if it were your parents,
in the woods, the hairs of your body
responding

before your body knew further. Your parents

in their perpetual wintering. The gibbous moon came
long ossified, done bone
diffuse in the long

unwatched night. Frightened. As if it were
my parents.

III.

At the end of reverse passage
the plush heathering skies of the canyon
past dusk, and further: could it be

believing in war begins there

still, as the cat on the stony jut practices
its jaw with languor
of the unchallenged: unfueled, knowing nothing

of this modern bargaining, for trust and hedges. And one of us
might have wept for it.

IV.

So lessons in basic geography became lessons in how with hunger
to identify the cardinals. Wild, clustered

back country habitations, huckleberry, hunting lantern, sanctuary

in a stand of pines, a steeple of pines, complications
of electronica, railroads, myth of the self-
made man, *where is the golf course.*

If we were touched it was still a childhood

of strengthened ankles. I have arrived at the end
of drugs so before this
we might tremble.

Laura Kochman

Keys to Missing Teeth

That's the whole tale, and I can't lie anymore. — Slavic storytellers' saying

I. If there really is a house in Westport, it stands on gilded chicken legs. When I come near in a rental, it hops into the gummed-up lake and taunts me with the beak it wishes it had. No mill ever tilled those flat waters of lake feck and mosquito eggs. The forest on the mountain as bad as the house—impassable. Do I look like a helicopter? My blades don't swing so wide, my eyes are not so open. Inside the foul house, there is a room full to the gills with knickknacks and dead potato bugs, some hand-made brooms in the corner. Pickerel? Small-mouthed bass? A handkerchief tied around the forehead. An unsmiling face against grained wood. Scrawled on the garage: "Gil loves Mil," a heart still pounding under white paint.

II. Oh, Gene. Your softly cutting voice always lured me in, your tapping soles under the red moon. A milk jug landscape under the piano. The shepherdess in rosy silk, guttersnipes and penny violets beside her. If you can find middle C, you'll always know the way back—past the grayscale abbey and o'er every mountain. Puddle the applesauce, play your hand. I'd call every morning if I could, from the balcony or the beach, across a crowded room or a pickle barrel. Every softly cutting morning.

III. Late night at the German restaurant and the dark beer is dripping. Mahogany panels surround you'd, enclosing you'd in gherkins and schnitzel. Do you'd see constellations when you'd eat your fried pickles? Would you'd know a constellation from street lights hanging in the air? A taste of turtle soup, a slap on the rear. An apron frill brushing past a white window. A whitened widow. You'd wallow in the sycamores, wade through the evergreens. It is raining outside in the German night, and you'd can't go home.

IV. If there really is a witch in Westport, she sits on the edge of a blackened forest. She eats ferns, swallows their fiddleheads whole. Bird goddess, whooping crane, pelican mouth. Stick your nose into the chimney, give me gifts that I cannot receive. Whose birth do you attend? Whose fingers do you stroke? Go mat your hair, go mutter to yourself. Grind your teeth to bits, but don't forget me, whoever you are. I'm going swimming in the lake, going fishing, going out into the forest where your bony legs can't find me, where your spells and charms won't work. Where I can eat your memory, swallow you whole, bones, bits, and all.

Father to Son

There's really no reason to come here anymore.
The belly's boarded up and gases seep through the chinks
in the wall, the tower I built, the outer rim taken
in the seventh revolutionary war. My flag doesn't fly.
Thunder growls behind the tree line, whips through the ruins,
marks the old precincts. Since I swallowed it,
no sun rots in the blood-filled sky, and light leaks in
only at the margins. Child, to come to the tower, to eat
in arms, to put a stop to sleep when there is no day,
just one tall, dreamless night—my flag doesn't fly.
I will part my lips for the sun like a stone to rise,
like a sound to swell like a son to salvage,

but I make no guarantees, and never have.
I am always awake, and you are always apart.

Fault

Where is the line for limbo drawn?
In the air of body cavities,
that covert no-man's land. In air stale
like vault-air, papery and thin.
Like light through skin, draw the line.

In light of vaults, what is the line?
It is shrill, and nausea-inducing.
It is not a rope, but a scent warning
you away: This Is The Line. Don't Cross It.
It keeps you hungry but doesn't let you eat,
burrowing in your stomach lining and sucking
up your breath, eating from the inside out,

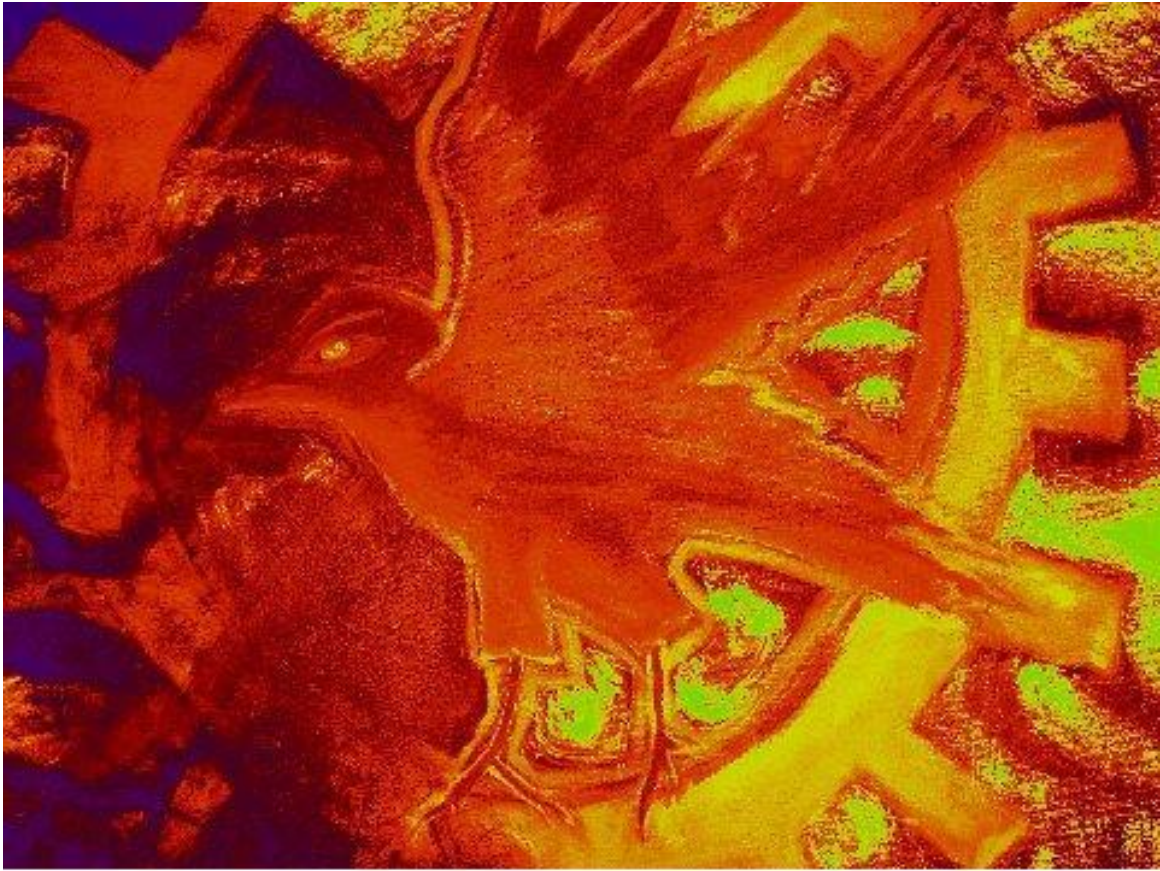
all the pressure of seven oceans in a stomach.
And now you know the line, tow it back
taut from the edge, to stop the swinging,
to ease your tendons screaming,
one hand on each loamy end.

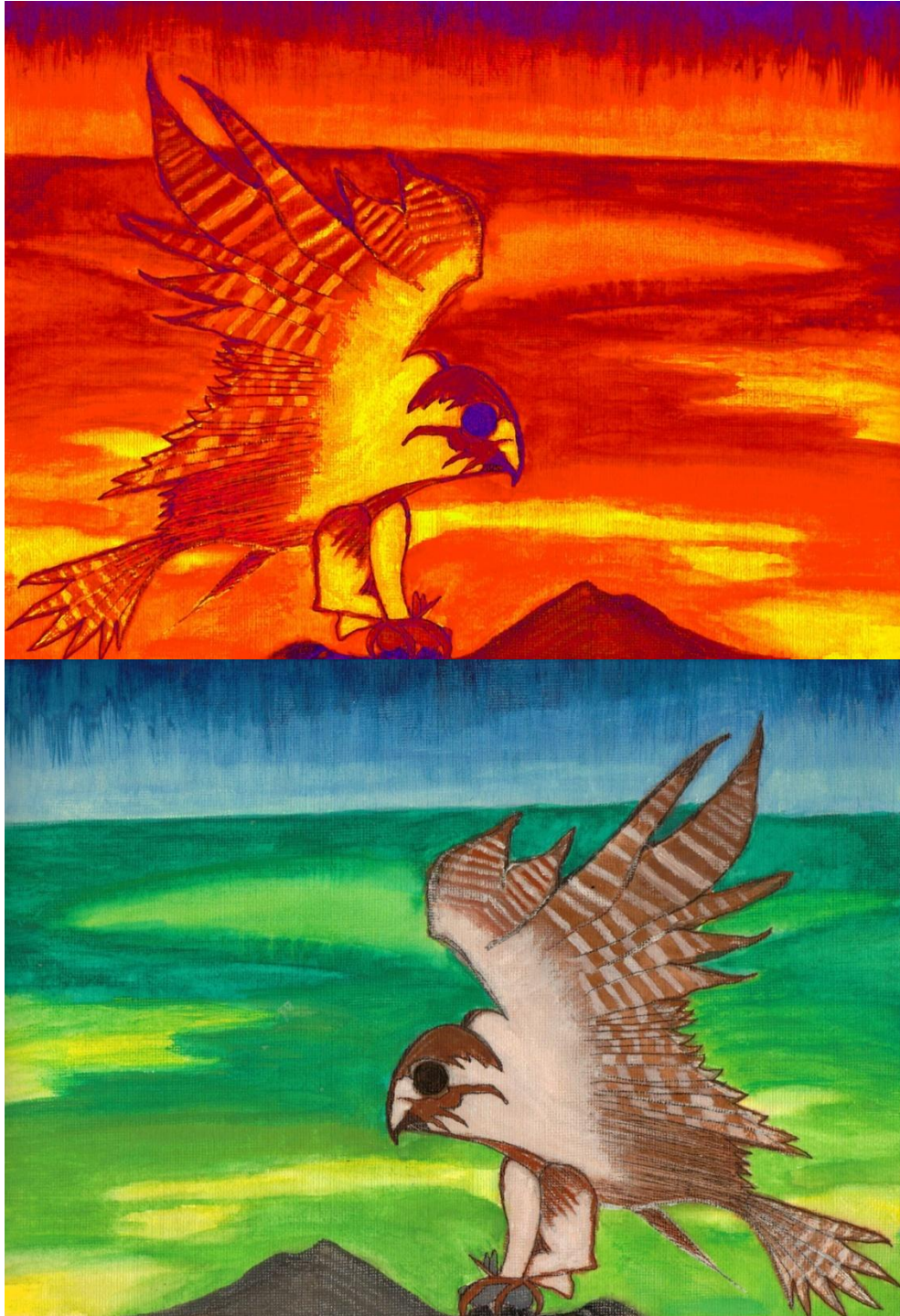
Cell

— for Kilmainham Gaol

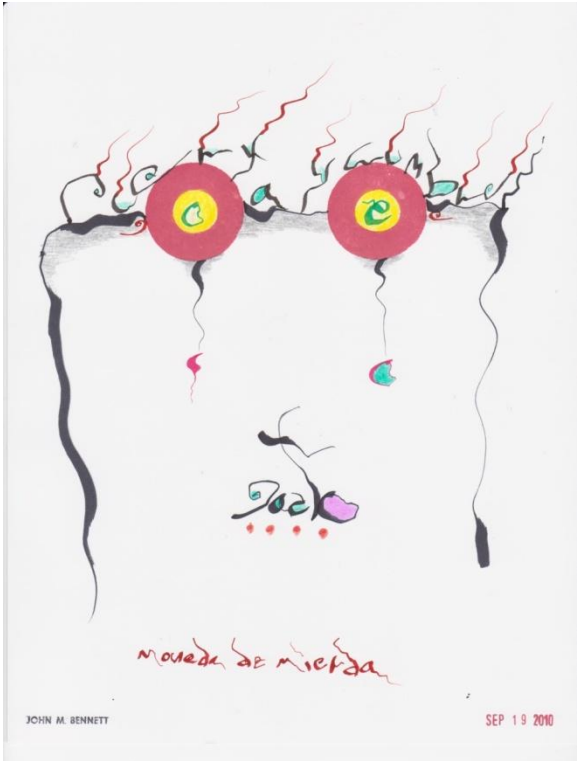
Peer through the slits to the wire, the fading murals.
This place is a relic and a reliquary, the highest degree
of sainthood, curled in, double pleated. Or maybe just eyes
squinting for leftover spatter on the stone wall, the same
wire-rimmed glasses, the shells singing 1916, Kilmainham
aching. Look up to the cathedral ceiling, the vaulted ribs—
digress from your human form. Gather into your cells.
Even in stillness you move with the earth, waiting
like a laurel on a windless day, you are spinning.
It's this body that drags, is fluid, is petulant. Somewhere
in the bones, in the shading of muscle to tendon,
you appear. Locked up like a splinter examined under glass,
sliced into the smallest version of yourself, and still
you press against the frame. Still a fog gathers at the edges
of the long-clear lenses, still something red seeps out
from the brickwork. You know how Daphne felt inside
her tree, her skin peeling every spring like your own
roots you to this moment. *Hard earth of termites and flaking
fingernails, stop spinning. Stop twisting my limbs into being.*

Amy Kohut

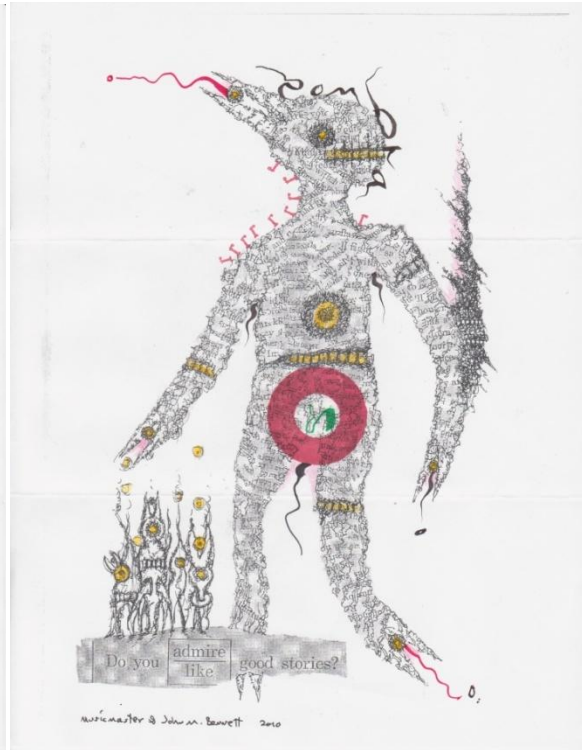
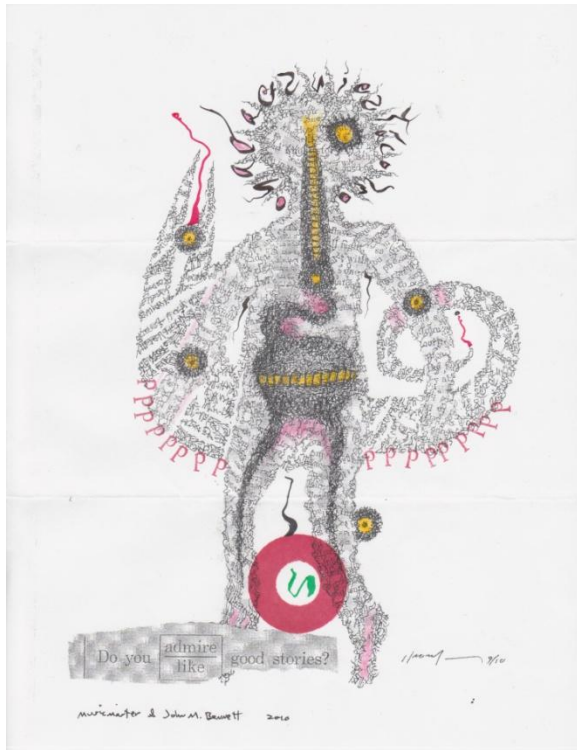




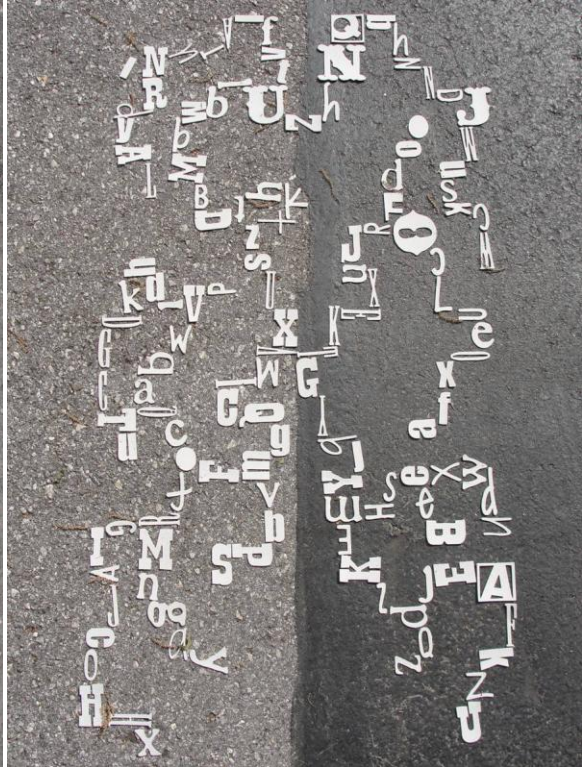
John M. Bennett



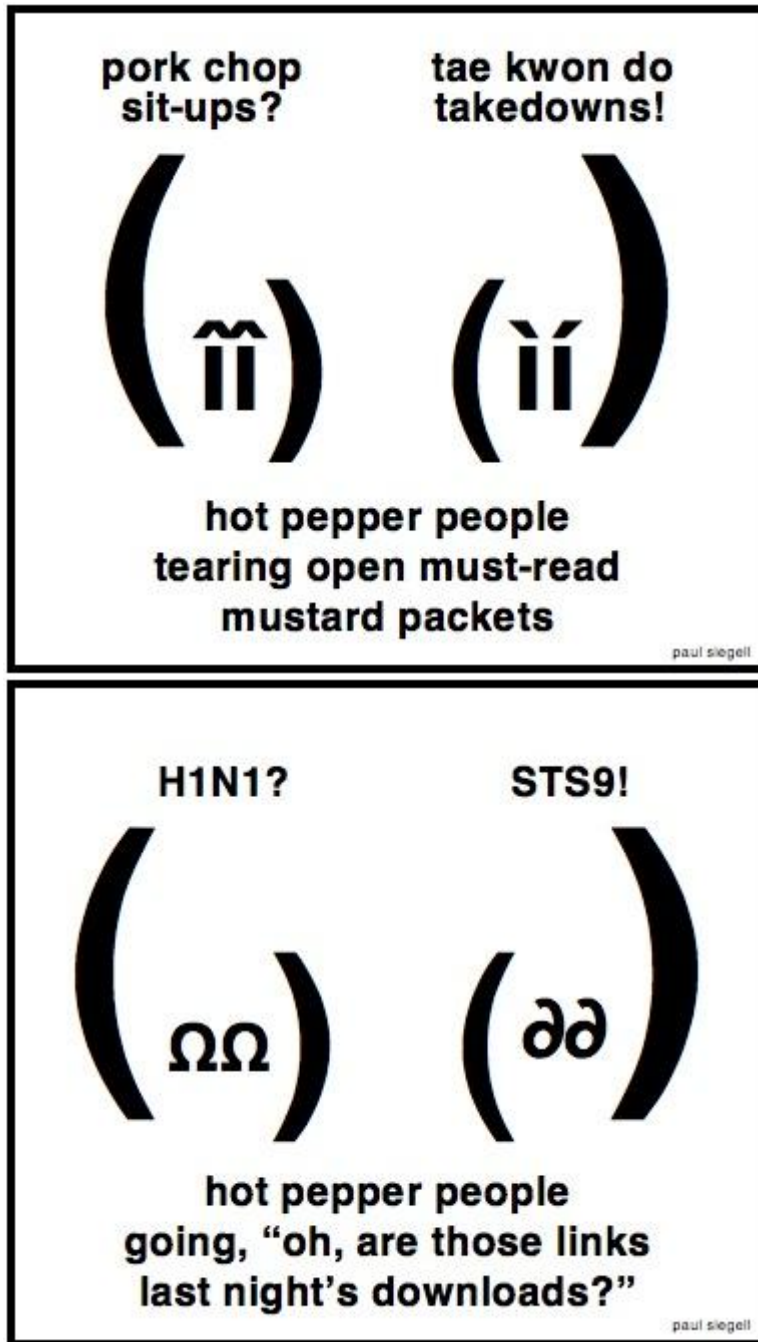
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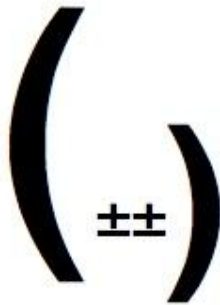




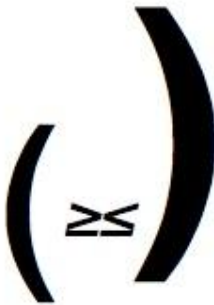
On Concrete: the concrete photographs are a series of site-specific art works that exist now only as images. i call them poems; some may look at them and ask, 'where's the poem?" and i would respond - the poem was the sounds the birds made as i laid down each letter. the poem was the feel of the wind against my skin as i worked outdoors. the poem was the construction workers, the police officer, looking into whether or not i was vandalizing. the poem was the clouds moving overhead, the time slipping away, the shadows moving in as the afternoon became evening. one of the definitions for concrete from the encarta world english dictionary is - solid and real: able to be seen or touched because it exists in reality, not just as an idea. i was the only one who was able to touch these poems in reality, to feel the heat of the concrete as i composed. the poems & memories that resulted remain solid in my mind.



**disgruntled
crustaceans?**



**the woodcrest
train station!**



**hot pepper people
in the sapphire glow of their
yawning commute to work**

paul siegell

Orion?



Ali!



**hot pepper people
wondering who'd look better
in a bad-weather belt**

paul siegell

Karl Kempton

Selections from chewed 2010



CHEWED 2011

These visual poems or sound illuminations are based on Photons made from photos of Bubble Gum Alley and guided through computer programs, none of which are photoshop. Bubble Gum Alley is a narrow brick walled walkway in San Luis Obispo, California. Gum pressed forms began appearing on the brick walls in the early 1960's. Other portions of CHEWED 2011 can be found at Renegade <<http://visualpoetryrenegade.blogspot.com/>> and Tip Of The Knife <<http://tipoftheknife.blogspot.com/>>.

The initial CHEWED series was divided into two collections composed from 2005 through 2006: 1) CHEWED, many sections of which have been published in various emags, including Word For Word. Selections from this first series are being published in book form by Andrew Topel's Avantacular and will be available soon. 2) RUNE 19: Rose Windows for the Cathedral of the Chewed, Scarred and Discarded (to be seen and read at <http://www.logolalia.com/abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz/archives/cat_kempton_karl.html>

My visual poems have been nationally and internationally published and exhibited since 1974. The work has evolved from typewriter to computer b&w to color and now mixed media work currently with the use of a SLR digital camera.

を偽装するためのツール
好奇心旺盛、それはちを
偽装するためのツ
好奇心旺盛、それはちよ
っと火災のファイター
おもちゃのアヒルをしな
いことすべてがデビッド

あなたはアヘンですか？
花とハーブを調合
細心の内側への渴望する

標高約束
去年は綱止めhuecoタン
クguero.
砂利の組成と静脈

地形図をどこにヒット
目利き不在のときに
一つのことには注意

私に頼むのは
文化的な記憶喪失
罪の赦しを推理小説

木星の詩を歌う
メロディック文字列の波
who我々は左のときには
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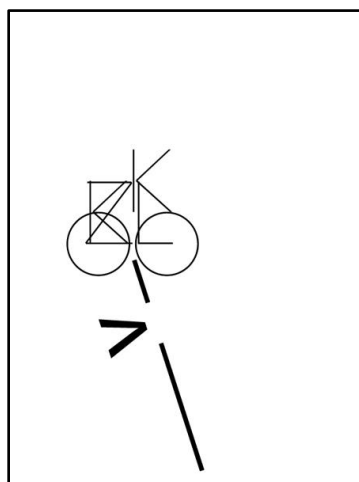
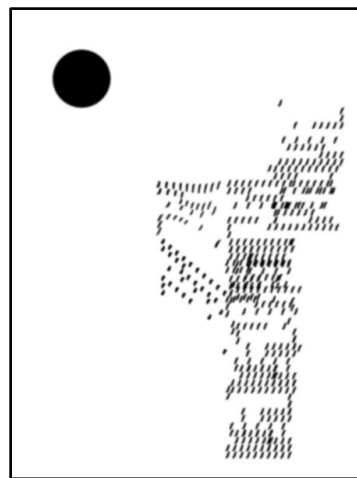
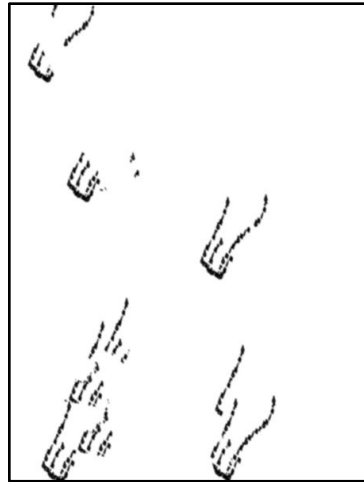
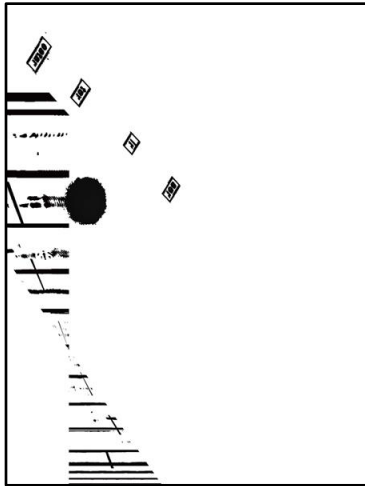
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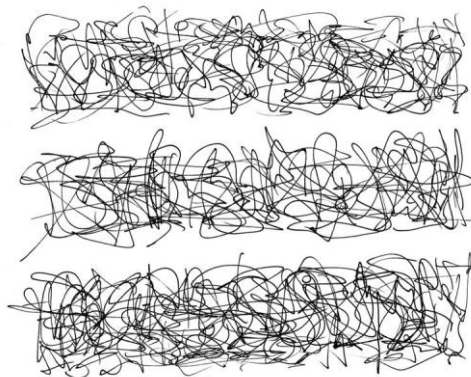
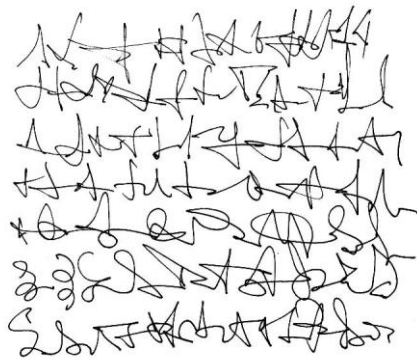
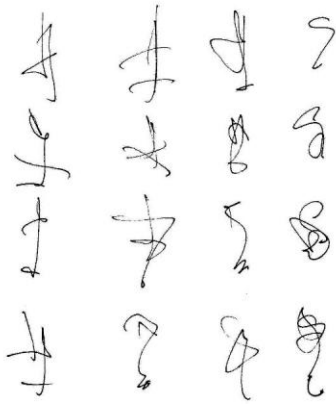
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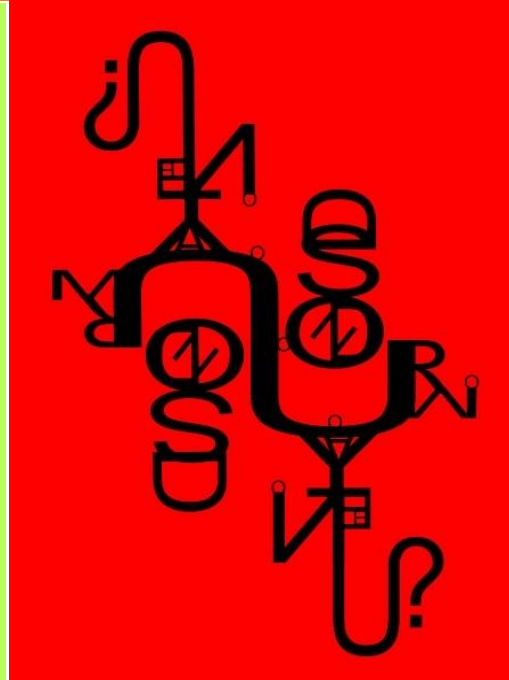
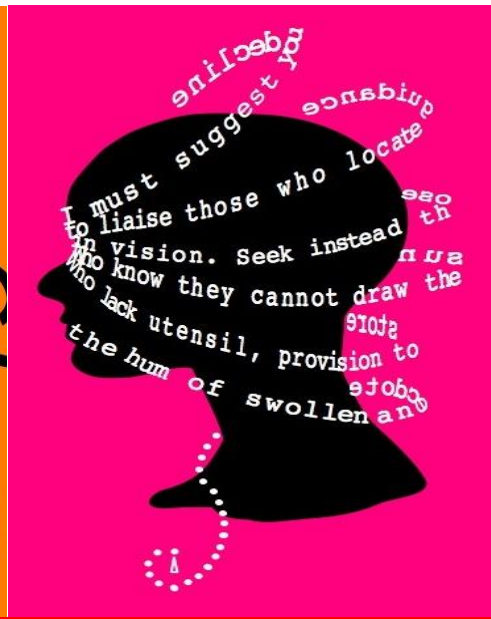
bruno neiva

Five Series





Rebecca Eddy





Derek Pollard

Review of *Speech Acts*, by Laura McCullough

(Black Lawrence Press, 2010)

In Laura McCullough's *Speech Acts*, we are treated to a collection of poems focused unabashedly on the sensual pleasures of language, on the giddy spill of language—of speech particularly—through and from the body. It is no surprise, then, that a highly charged sexuality drives many of the poems, coyly troubling the reflexivity and the nuanced emotionality of the others. But McCullough, unlike many less adept poets, does not rely exclusively on that sexuality to excite and to hold our attention. Instead, she weaves a series of meticulously structured narrative poems into a story about both desire and desire's uneasiness that demonstrates an incredible intelligence and wit that means to mean. As she has the speaker in the poem "All Day I Dream About Sex" state (let us take a moment to acknowledge the wonderfully ironic complication McCullough adds to our discussion of the poems by teasing us with the critical convention of referring to "the poem's speaker" while we addressing a collection of poems oriented toward the very act of speaking): "I am trying to say something as clearly / as I can" (23).

To be fair, both to this poem and to the poet, I must admit that I have taken these lines slightly out of context. To complete the stanza from which I have quoted is to acknowledge that McCullough is also a poet keenly aware of our contemporary moment and the vicissitudes of American poetry and poetics: "...like this bacronym for Adidas / which isn't an acronym at all, but portmanteau. / The owner is Adolf Dassler, nicknamed Adi— / you see, Adi Das?" These twinned impulses—toward clarity and ambiguating play, both intellectual and sensual—animate the poems of *Speech Acts* and provide an engaging tension that further enhances the eroticism and the poignant witnessing of the collection.

The individual poems, organized into three sections in what I presume to be deference to John L. Austin's linguistic taxonomy of "speech acts,"² often trouble the threshold at which thought and speech remain coupled and at which they begin to separate into the misleading "before" of thought and the "after" of speech, that strange, sometimes discomfiting moment in which we can utter with a presentiment of the answer already embedded in the question: "Did I just *say that out loud*?" The poems, however, resist these neat categories of "before" and "after" and instead present a conspicuous and arresting trope that I identify as the physio-textual body: the body as erogenous vocalizing instrument and agent, the material housing (or perhaps "network" is the better term here) by which we thrill at language and its various actions and activities—not to mention its many transgressions. Take for example these lines from "Lanolin's Just Another Name for Grease," a poem from the third section of the collection: "Hold the back of my head, / your hands knotting my hair; / sing that thing / that comes from your throat / while I do / what I do / with mine" (71).

Setting aside the explicit sexuality of this scene for just a moment, let us turn to the musicality of these lines, which is emblematic of the entire collection. Here, internal rhyme, assonance, and consonance jazz the lines, allowing "that thing"—so crucial to the poem—to go unsaid without distracting us by its imprecision. The lyricism is itself gratification, is "that thing" that in such self-aware, self-eradicating moments escapes us, enacting to a degree the very pleasures of the tryst and confirming what Frederick Smock observes in his essay "A Poet's Education": "Poetry, then, is physical. Words embody our experience of the world. Words body forth the meaning of our lives" (77). This "bodying forth" gives rise to poems that range from tenderness and desire to rupture and violence, as we see in both "What Burns" and "Speechification" respectively:

I want to kiss the mouth of another

² "Austin identifies three distinct levels of action beyond the act of utterance itself. He distinguishes the act of saying something, what one does *in* saying it, and what one does *by* saying it, and dubs these the 'locutionary', the 'illocutionary' and the 'perlocutionary' act, respectively" (Bach).

language, feel the small muscles electric
and tingling around their vowels,
the consonants swallowed, the silences
like small maps of a small
engine that rests on both our lips. (16)

...This
poem is not made of speech acts, but is an art installation
like found pebbles twisted in wire around rebar, nothing
suave about it, and lasting only until someone fills its boots
with cement and drowns it in the river like some lousy informer. (11)

Throughout the collection, then, we are privy to (note the etymological echo in “privates,” as well as in privacy) the inexorable meshing of the body and its saying, the vocalization not merely *of* pleasure but *as a means of* pleasure—both positive and negative pleasure—that we as “the talkers talking” of Whitman’s “Song of Myself” so often disregard or leave unexamined whenever we use language instrumentally (2). McCullough challenges us instead to take notice of the edginess of our shared English language³, itself historically flirtatious and etymologically promiscuous, by becoming minutely aware of the many ways in which and for which we communicate. Take, for example, the following lines from “Beauty, I Said”:

I never said that thing you said
I said that time when we were dancing
and everyone was so drunk no one
remembers what anyone said. I’m sure
I said something, but not what you

said I said, and what I said doesn’t bear
repeating. (59)

The repetition here is both mask and undoing. Something is said, but again, it is not named; in fact, it is not recalled as anything other than “that thing” (here transformed from the pleasures of “Lanolin” into something ominous, threatening even), despite the fact that whatever has been said has created a fissure between the speaker and the poem’s beloved. That the repeated word is “said” only adds to the point I am making: that within these poems, the act of speaking itself becomes the decisive moment; the “how” of speech takes on as much significance, if not more, than the “what” of speech.

Then, too, there is the fact that what I have referred to as the physio-textual body is not merely a trope but also an operative principle throughout the collection. The poems tease us, and themselves, into positions of excess and compromise. They sprawl across the pages—in orderly fashion, yes, but excitedly, energetically, pushing at the bounds (or the binding?) of the page. Because of that, they succeed in doing something of lasting consequence: they confront us with ourselves, our own identities, our own zones of comfort and understanding, our own concepts of self and of language. Ultimately, what McCullough gives us is a concomitance of poetic “speech acts” that are at once provocative, erotically charged, intellectually complex, and shockingly aware. In the context of 21st century Euro-American hyper-sexuality, I count it as quite an accomplishment that a collection of poems can titillate us so mischievously, so daringly, and so affectively while resisting the sordid ease and vacuity of sheer spectacle.

³ I use the singular “English” here merely out of convention. For an interesting and sustained discussion of multiple “Englishes,” see *The Story of English*, particularly Chapter 1, “An English-Speaking World,” and Chapter 9, “The New Englishes.”

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A. J. Patrick Liszkiewicz

Are Video Games Stories?

0.2

(25-26 Jan. 2009)

*Begin like this: If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then **video games are actions.***⁴

*

If video games are actions, then I would ask: are stories actions?

*

*Tzvetan Todorov, reviving the distinction made by the Russian formalists, proposes working on two major levels, themselves subdivided: **story** (the argument), comprising a logic of actions and a 'syntax' of characters, and **discourse**, comprising the tenses, aspects and modes of the narrative.*⁵

*

Game actions constitute chains of propositions: if I press this button, then my character will swing her sword; if my character swings her sword, she will kill a particular radioactive mutant; if she kills a particular radioactive mutant, she will be allowed access to a building; if she is allowed access to a building, a level of play will be concluded.

*

*But however many levels are proposed and whatever definition they are given, there can be no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of instances.*⁶

*

*Instance, from the Latin *instantia*, "presence, earnestness, urgency," or literally, "a standing near."*⁷

*

Levels in video games have definition. They *are definite*. But if they are proposed, then so is my desk; if they are propositions, so too is your door. Doors, like desks, are functional objects that afford and direct possibilities. When mutants are killed, doors are opened, and so a level is played. Game levels provide space for play to occur, and objects for us to stand near.

*

If narrative is a hierarchy of instances, then those instances are past. If stories comprise a logic of actions, those actions have already played out. Narrative stories are not actions; they are the selective documentation and ordering of actions, fictive or otherwise. *History, I am told, is a fiction based on fact.*⁸

*

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized

⁴ Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming, Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2006, p. 2

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, Stephen Heath, trans. Fontana/Collins, 1977, p. 86-87

⁶ Barthes, p. 87

⁷ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=instance>

⁸ Italicized sentence stated by H. Sulzdorf in conversation with the author (Dec. 2008).

and is never seen again.⁹

0.1

(24 Jan. 2009)

Dian Wei, personal bodyguard to the warlord Cao Cao, raced across the battlefield at Chi Bi. Cao Cao's fleet of ships had sailed to Chi Bi, and his armies were attacking the allied forces of Liu Bei and Sun Quan. But his advisor Pang Tong had betrayed him: after tying his ships to one another, Pang Tong had defected to the enemy's side. Now Dian Wei had only two minutes and thirteen seconds to find Pang Tong, and stop him from setting the ships ablaze. Realizing the gravity of this moment, Dian Wei paused and saved his game.

*

The Battle of Red Cliffs, otherwise known as the Battle of Chi Bi, was a decisive battle at the end of the Han Dynasty, immediately prior to the period of the Three Kingdoms in China. It was fought in the winter of 208/9 between the allied forces of the southern warlords Liu Bei and Sun Quan and the numerically superior forces of the northern warlord Cao Cao. Liu Bei and Sun Quan successfully frustrated Cao Cao's effort to conquer the land south of the Yangtze River and reunite the territory of the Eastern Han Dynasty. The allied victory at Red Cliffs ensured the survival of Liu Bei and Sun Quan, gave them control of the Yangtze, and provided a line of defence that was the basis for the later creation of the two southern kingdoms of Shu Han and Eastern Wu.¹⁰

*

Dian Wei looked at his map and, using the directional stick on his controller, cycled through the list of Allied Forces Generals. He found Pang Tong standing atop a cliff, at the eastern edge of the water. Taking a sip of his Pepsi, he rechecked the list of bonus conditions. Apparently, if he could also take the nearby Eastern Base within the next two minutes and thirteen seconds, he would be awarded three hundred extra experience points. The man-giant Dian Wei lifted both of his forty-four-pound halberds, un-paused his game, and rode off to punish the treacherous Pang Tong.

*

Cao Cao had moored his ships from stem to stern, possibly aiming to reduce seasickness in his navy, which comprised mostly northerners who were not used to living on ships. Observing this, divisional commander Huang Gai sent Cao Cao a letter feigning surrender and prepared a squadron of capital ships described as mengchong doujian. The ships had been converted into fire ships by filling them with bundles of kindling, dry reeds, and fatty oil. As Huang Gai's "defecting" squadron approached the midpoint of the river, the sailors applied fire to the ships before taking to small boats. The unmanned fire ships, carried by the southeastern wind, sped towards Cao Cao's fleet and set it ablaze. Within a short time smoke and flames stretched across the sky, and a large number of men and horses either burned to death or drowned.¹¹

*

Pang Tong had been defeated; the fleet was safe. But Dian Wei had only ten seconds left to capture the Eastern Base. As he pounded the gate with his halberds, he knew it was too late. He had failed in his task. Forfeit were the three hundred experience points. *Dian Wei is too slow*, thought Dian Wei. *He was faster in **Dynasty Warriors 5***. Frustrated, he paused and restarted the battle. Good thing he had saved his game.

0.3

(28-29 Jan. 2009)

⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 255

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Chi_Bi (first paragraph)

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Chi_Bi (eleventh paragraph)

*Any game that requires reloading as a normal part of the player's progress through the system is fundamentally flawed.*¹²

*

Reload: are video games stories?

*

*In the classical narratological framework, a narrative has two distinct kinds of time, the **story time**, denoting the time of the events told, in their chronological order, and the **discourse time**, denoting the time of the telling of events (in the order in which they are told).*¹³

*

Events in games are never told, because they *are events*. You fire a rocket: a car explodes. Unless, of course, you fire a rocket and immediately pause the game. The rocket waits mid-flight, while you run downstairs to answer your phone.

*

Discourse, from *dis-* "apart" + *currere* "to run."¹⁴

*

*A player at different points in time would be in different modes of engagement with the game. As an analogy, a soccer goalkeeper is still considered to be playing the game when the ball is at the other end of the pitch (i.e. the goalkeeper is unable to influence the state of the game).*¹⁵

*

Gamers watch other gamers play games. They cheer, laugh, and offer advice. They read and write guidebooks about games. They play-test and debug new games. They reminisce about and replay old games. They form guilds. They speak jargon. (They pwn noobs.) They pause to rest their thumbs.

*

*Save games are manipulations of game time. They obviously allow the player to store the game state at a moment in play time and then later continue playing from that position.*¹⁶

*

Bookmarks do not "manipulate" narrative time, any more than pause buttons "manipulate" game time; each merely marks a place in an external, linear progression. Manipulation connotes alteration, extraction, even refinement. *Manipulation*, circa 1730: "a method of digging ore".¹⁷ Ore is not mined merely to be enjoyed as ore. It is part of a process. Mining is a confluence of processes. To save a game is to halt processes; assessments can be made, mistakes can be fixed. The miners can punch out and go home. But miners' hands are still dirty at the dinner table. Their backs and necks ache in the evenings.

¹² Chris Crawford "Chris Crawford on Game Design" in Rollings, Andrew, and Morris, *Game Architecture and Design*, Scottsdale, Arizona: Coriolis, 2000. Quoted and cited in Jesper Juul's "Introduction to Game Time" (<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/teleport>) without page number(s).

¹³ Jesper Juul, "Games Telling Stories?" In *Games Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (<http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/>). Quote is from section entitled, "Time, Game, and Narrative."

¹⁴ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=discourse>

¹⁵ Michael Hitchens, "Time and Computer Games, Or "No, That's Not What Happened," in *Proceedings of the Third Australian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*, (IE 2006). Yusuf Pisan, 2006, p. 50

¹⁶ Jesper Juul, "Introduction to Game Time" (<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/teleport>). See second paragraph beneath "Save Games" heading.

¹⁷ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=manipulation>

*

One is a *reader* when one reads. *Gamers* are still gamers when they pause and save.

0.4

(30 Jan. - 01 Feb. 2009)

Reload: to save a game is to halt processes; assessments can be made, mistakes can be fixed.

*

Knowledge gained through a previous play throws up a deep problem with the whole notion of "interactive storytelling": what the fact of videogame replayability--in that you can always try again--means to narrative. One problem is that great stories depend for their effect on irreversibility - and this is because life, too, is irreversible.¹⁸

*

SUMMER, 1990: Adam Liszkiewicz, age ten, fights his way through the last castle in the original **Final Fantasy**. Thanks to his Official Nintendo Power Guidebook, he knows which hallways to take, what waits down those hallways, and how to leave those hallways alive. Adam even knows about the hallway with the secret, waiting at the very top of the castle. After hours of battle--after weeks of anticipation--he reaches the top floor.

The map in his guidebook looks like a large, gray "X" with a rectangle at its center. Inside the rectangle waits the last battle, the end boss, the *final fantasy*. He ignores it. Instead, he walks to the bottom right point of the "X" and enters a small, closet-sized room. There it is: the secret. The *Masmune*. The most powerful weapon in the game. He smiles, picks up the weapon and, using a transportation spell, promptly leaves the castle.

Though this means he will have to replay the entire castle, he doesn't mind. Now that he has the *Masmune* the castle should be easy. Besides, he couldn't save his game without leaving the castle. Once the spell resolves, Adam finds himself standing in a field of long grasses. And also on a beige carpet, holding an NES controller. *My hands hurt*, he thinks. He pauses, saves, and shuts the game off.

*

Glitch (n.): a defect or malfunction in a machine or plan.¹⁹

*

When Adam returned from lunch, or from playing basketball, or from cleaning his closet or perhaps from sleep or a bath, Adam doesn't remember, he was ten, who remembers what they were doing when they were ten, it doesn't matter, all that matters is that the next time he turned on his Nintendo Entertainment System, his save game was gone. His save game was gone. Maybe it was dust. He removed the **Final Fantasy** cartridge and blew, put the cartridge back in, crossed his fingers. Pushed the power button. His save game was gone. He got a Q-Tip and some alcohol. His save game. Was gone.

*

If the object of one's analysis is a medium in its entirety, must only those aspects of the medium that resemble play or a game be considered?²⁰

¹⁸ Steven Poole, *Trigger Happy*, New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000, p. 99 Immediately after the phrase *effect on irreversibility*, Poole includes a footnote: "This argument is suggested by Alain and Frederic Le Diberder in *L'Univers des Jeux Video*".

¹⁹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/glitch> (first entry).

²⁰ Galloway, *Gaming*, p. 21

*

Adam threw his controller across the room.

*

Glitch (n.): 1962, American English, possibly from Yiddish *glitsb*, "a slip."²¹

0.5

(03 Feb. 2009)

*We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end.*²²

*

I delete the above quote and, in its stead, quote Santayana²³; then, I tell another story, about another saved game, about another *glitch*.²⁴ I delete nothing, and include the Santayana quote and second story as endnotes. I delete the endnotes. I contradict myself. I worry that I contradict myself. Perhaps you should ignore this paragraph.

*

*A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history.*²⁵

*

My phone rings: it is my fiancée, driving home from a friend's house. She starts telling me about her day, about a movie she wants to see. I rocket-jump over a wall and accidentally drop my phone. *Well sweetie*, she says from the floor, *I guess you're playing a videogame, so I'll talk to you tomorrow*. I get burned to death by a Pyro. I forget to tell her I love her.

*

*Behind a performative and demonstrative logic: the obsession with historical **fidelity**, with a perfect rendering...*²⁶

*

I get the Pyro back, of course.

²¹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=glitch>

²² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1994, p. 10

²³ *Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness... Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.* -- George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998. p. 82

²⁴ "22 NOV. 2007: Adam Liszkiewicz, age 28, is playing **BioShock** on his Xbox 360. He has been tasked by a madman with killing four people, and photographing their corpses; these photographs are to be displayed on a stage, in the central room of a particular game level. After the third photograph is displayed, the madman locks Adam in the central room and sends numerous henchmen to murder him. Adam defeats these henchmen and, of course, saves his game. Unfortunately, the game does not recognize that all of the henchmen are dead, and so the doors out of the central room are not unlocked. Despite an hour or more of searching and experimentation, Adam finds no other henchmen, and no other way out. He does, however, find others like him, discussing the glitch in online forums; according to them, there are no patches available to fix this glitch, and all that can be done is to reload an earlier saved game. It is at this point Adam realizes his error: **he had only one saved game.**"

²⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 262

²⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 47 (Author's emphasis)

Tom Hibbard

The Roof Garden

*In a nest of small hills
sounds of the railway resonate
at once in a skylight window.*
-Allen Fisher

Following the elections of 2010, partly as a reaction to them, I took a planned four-day trip to Washington D.C., traveling via amtrak and staying at poet Buck Downs' row house on Burke Street near the Anacostia River and including a Sunday afternoon poetry reading at the Washington D.C. Arts Center, where Buck curates the "In Your Ear" poetry series.

The grand saga began at the Milwaukee "Intermodal" train and bus station on a gray mid-November Friday afternoon, drinking coffee, the only customer in a tiny soup cafe, getting ready to board the train for Chicago. It seemed like the excitement might start early as a rather large number of police gathered for the passenger security search at the gate to the boarding area. Repressive-looking motorcycle police in knee-high patent leather boots gripped their holsters. A K-9 Swat officer with dog appeared to be examining lottery numbers with another policeman standing at the condiment counter in the snack bar, not to mention private uniformed people preparing for searching the gathering crowd of passengers.

After waiting in line but with minimal security contact, I found myself sitting in a whisk-broom-clean train passenger seat all to myself, with my heavy H.P. laptop, book bag and plenty of electrical outlets. I powered up excitedly as I waited for the train to leave the station, my nose nearly pressing the window, looking at huge rust-stained concrete posts with much anticipation of fields and forests, loading docks and backyards of America that the train would soon be passing nostalgically as of trips from early years.

Chicago's Union Station is an impressive piece of 20th Century architecture that opened for use in 1925 and still, in its cathedral-scale vaulted ceilings and mammoth neo-classical gold-painted ceiling-high statues, resonates with the nation's historic past in a way that modern sound-proof airports have never been able to achieve. Though the cavernous Great Hall is no longer milling with travelers, the marble-like floor still gleams, the clocks still provide times from international zones, the large wooden waiting benches are still oversized and imposing. Several friendly city workers were setting up a Christmas display as I watched, with basketball-sized tree ornaments worthy of the approaching frantic Second-City holiday shopping.

Waiting below at the crowded departure gates was as chaotic as Ellis Island, with children, babies hidden in mothers' blankets, luggage, candybars, soda containers, pods of plastic chairs, television screens, hit-or-miss boarding calls for Saint Louis, New Orleans, Seattle. As darkness began to fall, I was again seated on the train, looking out the window, the Capitol Limited beginning to glide into farmlands east of Chicago, headed dimly toward small towns, Goshen, Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, the forest-covered Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers around Harper's Ferry and on to Washington, D.C..

**

*and all our labor
shall be in delight*
-Buck Downs

True to his promise, Buck was at the station when I disembarked the next day. He supplied me with a pre-paid pass for the D.C. metro, and we were off to his row house in the Hill East area to unload baggage and then the National Mall, emerging from beneath the ground, like foxes, into an extremely exhilarating moist air, as after a

solid cleansing downpour, near the Washington Monument. Government workers were busy taking down scaffolding and grandstands following a walk-a-thon for the homeless on the mall, as we crossed toward an impressive array of government buildings many of which seemed to me to look like the Jefferson Memorial. As we crossed, the massive bleached white Capitol Building, with steps in full view, was directly to our right. We were headed to the National Gallery, which I had told Buck I would probably prefer to the Smithsonian if we had to choose. I hadn't seen Washington, D.C., since I was in high school.

We spent the afternoon mostly in the newer west building of the National Gallery, viewing a breath-taking exhibit of "small French paintings," Edvard Munch prints, American Modernism, the grotesque Renaissance anomalies of Arcimboldo, and then, in the east building, the permanent *belle époque* Chester Dale collection. Among the small French paintings were a Manet still-life with rose, seaside landscapes by Boudine and Jongkind, Fantin-Latour flower vases, Pissaros, Monets and even a Constable cloud sketch. The Munch exhibit consisted of thirty prints many of which showed lovers intertwined as twisted tree trunks, thematically similar to his famous work, variations of a print titled "The Scream."

**

diversity insures unity
its own but also everyone else's
-Tom Hibbard

Nourished on some of the most famous, not to mention worthwhile, paintings in the Western tradition, including Renoir's "Little Girl With a Watering Can," we departed the Gallery and began wending our way along Pennsylvania Avenue, past many new buildings, past the National Treasury, the Wesley Hotel (where Buck regaled me with the tale of how the word "lobbying" evolved from former President Grant's activities in that very hotel lobby) until we arrived, somewhat circumspectly, at a familiar black iron fence at a distance from the taciturn, peaceful-looking White House, with its trademark light fixture hanging above the front door. I might have gotten misty-eyed, but the small crowd was so quiet and contented, like the murmuring night itself. The U.S. Presidential residence did not look at all imperious or fancy. Nor did it seem overly large. The usual media photos showing it far away from the iron fence seemed to me quite inaccurate. It was not distant or detached. Parts of some of the rooms inside were easily visible and well lit. I seem to recall a bright pink wall in a second-floor window that looked as though a child might go racing past it at any moment.

We walked on, past well-preserved vintage townhouses, through neighborhoods of ambassadors and embassies, then sections that blended into unmemorable city blocks. At the crest of a small hill, near a turn, we entered the modest east-Indian Aroma restaurant for dinner. Following an excellent meal and conversation, we again set off, until Buck advised me that we were in the Adams Morgan area, on 18th street, with a little more lively street crowd flowing along the sidewalk, East African, Italian, Middle Eastern and Japanese restaurants, not forgetting The Reef with its roof garden bar and restaurant. At a shadowy door on 18th Street, flanked by brightly lit businesses, we entered and climbed the stairs to the District of Columbia Arts Center (DCAC) second floor studio and gallery, where the party was underway for a piggy bank fundraiser, the artists having hand-painted ceramic piggy banks for auction. On the wall in the background was an endemic flower-splotched all-covering drapery, and in back toward the exit to the theater was a small cash bar.

Buck is a board member of the D.C. Arts Center. We met and talked to several other staff members of the center, including B. and LeeAnn Stanley and others. Fueled by an Arts Center publication from a past exhibit titled "Abstract Realities," the discussion became intense and turned to Mark Rothko (Faith's favorite artist) and the idea of modern "perspective." At last Buck and I departed for his place, anxious about tomorrow's full schedule of events. Despite cold temperatures for D.C. that night, the blue inflatable mattress with blanket on Buck's hardwood living room floor proved to be fairly restful accommodations.

**

*light in itself offers pleasure or is
an end in itself or there the self begins*
-Cole Swensen

The next morning, after a shower and coffee from Buck's interesting and functioning kitchen/bathroom basement, decorated with clippings from small arts zines and event posters, we were out the door fairly early, headed for the metro and the Foggy Bottom station near Georgetown and the East Market area. Drinking coffee from bowls in the sunlight of an outdoor breakfast cafe, we talked about movies, particularly some good ones that had been on Turner Classics--*A Foreign Affair*, *Palm Beach Story*, *The Sweet Smell of Success*; the virtues of Claudette Colbert, Burt Lancaster, Jack Webb, Jean-Luc Goddard and many others. Crossing the street to get to the restaurant, which we considered turning down due to possible too high prices, I caught a glimpse of the Capitol building again and in awkward tourist fashion snapped a photo from the cross walk in the middle of the busy street.

After breakfast was something I had been looking forward to for quite a while, a main destination on the trip's itinerary, Bridge Street Books, owned by Philip Levy and managed by well-known poet, Rod Smith. The book store, on Pennsylvania Avenue, was in small colonial-style area, with perfectly restored and painted English and Italianate building facades nearby, a median of endless fruit trees and cobblestone sidewalks. We arrived at the small red-brick building just as Phil was opening for business at twelve noon. The inside was cozy, as expected, with a stairs and second floor and a bathroom off in a broom closet area. Buck and Phil conversed while I quickly began to browse. Bridge Street is one of a handful of book stores in the country that has a significant contemporary poetry section. It's sister book store is Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee. Phil asked about Woodland Pattern. As it turned out, he was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin.

Buck had some business to take care of and left me to my devices in the upstairs poetry section. With fifties-era jazz saxophone on the sound system, I thoroughly perused the shelves for authors I might not be able to find elsewhere, possibly that I had seen read or heard about, Beat titles I might not be familiar with, foreign writers, post-modernists, anything that suggested striking futuristic compassion or element-battling social progress, such as John Godfrey's *City of Corners*, which I had recently read. After an intense search, I had narrowed my selections to Edwin Torres' *The Function of External Circumstances*, an author Buck had recommended, Borges' *Poems of the Night*, a critical book about Russian poetry, Jackson Mac Low's selections in *A Beautiful Thing*, at last purchasing the Russian criticism and later the Borges.

*what's not what's
me what's not
is---*
-Edwin Torres

We bade Phil a sad farewell and hurriedly departed. As it turned out we were a little behind schedule for the poetry reading at the D.C. Arts Center. We ended hailing a cab in order not to be late, which as it turned we weren't. In fact, it seemed we had arrived in a time warp. We again climbed the stairs to the gallery, where we had been the night before, but all was different, quiet and unlit. We walked to the door in the back, descended another outside set of stairs, into a solid concrete, black-walled three-sided theater, that actually looked quite appropriate in my mind for reading contemporary poetry. As we made minimal preparations for the performance, it was so quiet that I thought everyone must have forgotten about the Sunday afternoon event. And yet I wasn't anxious. Buck and I had become characters in a Samuel Beckett play. A poetry reading with each of us reading his poetry to the other, each of us a vast audience, appeared an interesting prospect.

It wasn't long, however, before fellow reader, Allen Fisher, a London poet, energetically descended the stairs, like a swordsman, saying he had brought several people with him. The other reader, Katy Bohinc, originally from

Cleveland, also arrived, as did Buck's co-curator of the well-known reading series (someone had asked me about the reading before I even left for Washington) Maureen Thorsen. The place began to fill to a respectable degree. I took some photos of Buck and my fellow readers.

I felt slightly sluggish when my turn came to read. It seemed I had endured a lot to get here. I read from a manuscript titled *The Sacred River of Consciousness*, loosely and idiosyncratically an ecologically themed collection which I had been working on for quite a while. I felt somewhat confident in the material. I'd read it several times previously, and I'd done much more research for these poems than for anything I had written before them. I was allotted twenty minutes. I had a small clock in my pocket but lacked the presence of mind to use it. I don't know how long I read, but Buck seemed to think it was a much shorter than twenty minutes. Even so, I felt that what I had read had made an impact due to my emphasis on content rather than style. Several people came up afterwards and commented on specific parts, which I took as a good sign.

My fellow readers were both excellent, also more polished than myself. Katy B's reading included a radically powerful poem titled "The Revolution." Performance artist Fisher having been on a U.S. reading tour was not nervous at all and read joyfully and with much variation for a substantial amount of time. His reading was impressive. Later, as I stood talking beside the wine and soda bar in the exhibition room, someone, I think Maureen Thorsen, walked up and gave me a decent-sized wad of money, including change, my cut of the afternoon's take, for which I was extremely gratified.

**

*What sober inebriation
Gives me words for a glorious cause?
Pure adornment of Parnassus*
-V. Trediakovsky

Following the poetry reading, in keeping with tradition, the readers and members of the audience adjourned to the Reef's roof garden bar and restaurant a few doors from the Arts Center. Plopping down on a stool away from the bar, somewhat spent and bemused, with the day's NFL football game barreling along on a distant TV screen behind the bar, I found myself sitting with Rod Smith, whom I had not met previously, puffing expertly on a filtered cigarette, as though in the manner of a master cigarette smoker, perhaps Kerouac himself. Smith's surprising "Hi Tom" greeting pulled me out of my doldrums. The open rooftop was unusual and exciting, but the day had turned windy, grey and cold. People seemed on the verge of needing sweaters and jackets, but the poetry had been thought-provoking and warming, and everyone stayed at least for a while. Buck and I moved to a long table with Fisher and his entourage, trying to talk about the London poetry scene and other subjects. Poet Doug Lang was in the group. Tina Darraugh and Peter Inman were also at the table. The group all thought about ordering dinner and continuing with the discussion, but the cold gusts pried us apart. Everyone, including several young black members of the audience, began to disperse. Back on the street, Buck and I had dinner in a cafeteria-like restaurant called the Diner. We ate sandwiches and then picked up some coffees at a near-by Starbucks.

**

*These images and objects arise from
the depth of my mind, where history,
legend and fantasy are mixed.*
-Felisa Federman
(from "Abstract Realities")

Armed with lattes in to-go cups, we were walking again on a fantastical night path through mysterious D.C. residential neighborhoods, Buck guiding the way, back to the outskirts of Georgetown and Bridge Street Books. As it turned out, Bridge Street was also having a poetry reading that night, featuring two women poets, Cole

Swensen and Sarah Riggs. Despite a few *latte* spills on my coiled hand, we arrived at the picturesque commercial corner pretty much in tact. We entered the book store in the middle of Riggs' reading, with Buck bounding up the stairs to watch through a hole in the floor and me sitting across the cash register desk from Phil, slouching somewhat from the king-sized grilled chicken sandwich that Jennifer our fellow-D.C.-worker had warmly served up at the Diner.

The lights were dim for Riggs' reading, and I was unfamiliar with her work. But I enjoyed immensely talking with her following the reading, finding out that she was living most of the time these days in Paris. What a nice person. I knew Cole Swensen's work fairly well, having reviewed her excellent collection *Goest* for the online journal "Word/ For Word." After the reading I mentioned to Swensen "Word/ For Word" editor Jonathan Minton, a big fan of hers, whom she remembered. She autographed and gave me a copy of her new book *Greensward*.

The night seemed to have warmed up from the earlier cold winds at the Reef. Buck and Cole talked calmly on the sidewalk outside the book store. The trees in the Virginia/Maryland area still had much of their autumn color, and the November leaves hung quietly in the Colonial American light. Both poetry readings had gone well. It had been a good night for poetry in the nation's Capitol. In some extensive virtual nowhere down the road, disjointed communal values had been brought back into alignment. The words had created a renewed order. I felt connected with myself again. Buck and I talked informally in the well-lighted metro car as we took our last ride of the day back to Burke Street.

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There is no moment that can't be the pit of Hell.
There is no moment that can't be the water of Paradise.
There is no moment that isn't a loaded gun.
-Borges

Washington D.C. had been a dedicated, hospitable weekend host. And I hoped I had not been an imposition. The weather, as it intermingled with the late-autumn season, the near-by ocean breezes, had been at times fantastic, at times grey and cold. The dispassionate work-a-day riders of the metro had provided the usual uplifting diverting feeling of universal purpose and assurance as they went to and from their destinations during the pre-December weekend. The architecture had been ornamental and gay, out of the pages of *The Education of Henry Adams* or Mark Twain. I had escaped the upsetting four walls of political and economic turmoil at least for the weekend. Buck and I had one more restaurant meal late on Monday morning, in reappeared sunlight, at still-chilly outdoor Irish restaurant called Bread and Chocolate in the Eastern Market area. The only other outside customers were a lady at one table and two soldiers dressed in their light-colored camouflage uniforms at another. The pastrami sandwich on toast I ate would have made an Italian draft horse pulling vegetables to market sleepy.

Buck got me to the train station via the metro where we said good-bye, and I waited for the Capitol Limited to depart back to the Midwest. As dusk approached, the train began to board, and once again it pulled out beneath the street lights, embarking on the venturesome all-too-brief journey home.

Contributors' Notes

John M. Bennett has published over 300 books and chapbooks of poetry and other materials. Among the most recent are *rOlling COMBers* (Potes & Poets Press), *MAILER LEAVES HAM* (Pantograph Press), *LOOSE WATCH* (Invisible Press), *CHAC PROSTIBULARIO* (with Ivan Arguelles; Pavement Saw Press), *HISTORIETAS ALFABETICAS* (Luna Bisonte Prods), *PUBLIC CUBE* (Luna Bisonte Prods), *THE PEEL* (Anabasis Press), *GLUE* (xPress(ed)), *LAP GUN CUT* (with F. A. Nettelbeck; Luna Bisonte Prods), *INSTRUCTION BOOK* (Luna Bisonte Prods), *la M al* (Blue Lion Books), *CANTAR DEL HUFF* (Luna Bisonte Prods), *SOUND DIRT* (with Jim Leftwich; Luna Bisonte Prods), *BACKWORDS* (Blue Lion Books), *NOS* (Redfox Press), *D RAIN B LOOM* (with Scott Helmes; xPress(ed)), *CHANGDENTS* (Offerta Speciale), *L ENTES* (Blue Lion Books), *NOS* (Redfoxpress), *SPITTING DDREAMS* (Blue Lion Books), *ONDA* (with Tom Cassidy; Luna Bisonte Prods), *30 DIALOGOS SONOROS* (with Martín Gubbins; Luna Bisonte Prods), *BANGING THE STONE* (WITH Jim Leftwich; Luna Bisonte Prods), *FASTER NIH* (Luna Bisonte Prods), and *RREVES* (Editions du Silence). He has published, exhibited and performed his word art worldwide in thousands of publications and venues. He was editor and publisher of *LOST AND FOUND TIMES* (1975-2005), and is Curator of the Avant Writing Collection at The Ohio State University Libraries. Richard Kostelanetz has called him “the seminal American poet of my generation”. His work, publications, and papers are collected in several major institutions, including Washington University (St. Louis), SUNY Buffalo, The Ohio State U.

Jim Berger is a senior lecturer in American Studies and English at Yale. His publications include a book on post-apocalyptic sensibility (*After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, U. of Minnesota Pr., 1999). He is currently working on a book on depictions and ideologies of cognitive and linguistic impairment in modern fiction.

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Rebecca Eddy is a visual poet from Cornwall, England particularly interested in interdisciplinary poetics, semiotics and catachresis. Her work can be found in a variety of journals such as *Otoliths*, *Moria*, *Other Clutter* and *Stride magazine*. In addition, her work has been exhibited in Europe.

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Tom Hibard's work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Big Bridge*, *Sidereality*, *Poetic Inhalation*, *Milk*, *Jacket*, and elsewhere. His poetry collections include *Nonexistence*, *Gessom*, *Delancey Street*, *Human Powers*, *Nocturnes*, *Songs of Divine Love*, *Enchanted Streets*, and *Assembly*.

Kara Imre received her MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College and holds a BA in Writing and Theatre from Emerson College. Her work has appeared in *Jellyroll* and *Spooky Boyfriend*, among others. She lives and writes near the PEZ candy factory.

Karl Kempton's visual poems have been nationally and internationally published and exhibited since 1974. He edited and published *Kaldron* between 1976-1990 and is co-editor of an on-line edition published by Karl Young at . Some of his works can be seen at Logolia, Unlikely Stories, eratio, and Blackbox.

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Gracie Leavitt is an MFA candidate in poetry at Brooklyn College. She has a BA in Human Rights and Creative Writing from Bard College and am a member of the performing arts group Kolekt::f in collaboration with East Coast Artists. Last September Kolekt::f mounted its first full-length play at La Mama E.T.C. in Manhattan, and we will debut another show there this October. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *La Petite Zine*, *Caketrain*, *2River*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Defeffable*, and *elimae*.

Karen Lepri is an M.F.A. candidate in poetry at Brown University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Best New Poets*, *42 Opus*, *Konundrum Engine Literary Review*, and *Center: A Journal of Literary Arts*. She is an assistant poetry editor for *Inertia*.

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Derek Pollard is co-author with Derek Henderson of the book *Inconsequentia* (BlazeVOX 2010). His poems, creative non-fiction, and reviews appear in *American Book Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Court Green*, *Diagram III*, *H_ngm_n*, *Pleiades*, and *Six-Word Memoirs on Love & Heartbreak*, among numerous other anthologies and journals. He is currently a contributing editor for Barrow Street, Inc., and is on faculty at Brookdale Community College, at Pratt Institute, and at the Downtown Writer's Center in Syracuse, New York. More information can be found at www.twodereks.com.

Stephen Ratcliffe's books include *REAL* (Avenue B, 2007), *Portraits & Repetition* (The Post-Apollo Press, 2002), *SOUND/ (system)* (Green Integer, 2002). He published *Listening to Reading*, a book of essays on contemporary experimental poetry, with SUNY Press in 2000. He lives in Bolinas with his wife and two and a half year old son and teaches at Mills College in Oakland.

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Ian Seed's new collection, *Shifting Registers*, is now available from Shearsman. See <http://www.shearsman.com/pages/books/catalog/2011/seedShift.html> for details and review by John Ashbery.

Paul Siegell is the author of three books of poetry: the forthcoming *wild life rifle fire* (Otoliths Books, 2010), *jambandbootleg* (A-Head Publishing, 2009) and *Poemergency Room* (Otoliths Books, 2008). Currently in Philadelphia, he is a staff editor at *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and has contributed to *The American Poetry Review*, *Coconut*, *Rattle* and many other fine journals. He has also been featured in the *Philadelphia City Paper*, *Paste Magazine*, *Relix Magazine* and elsewhere exciting. Kindly find more of Paul's work (poems, comics, videos) at his [ReVeLeR @ eYeLeVeL](http://ReVeLeR@eYeLeVeL).

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