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My wife Susanna for all her help and advice; my daughter Anabella for sleeping enough; to Kristen Gallagher for her suggestions regarding contributors; to Kasey Mohammad; to my contributors for meeting false deadlines and to all of you for waiting patiently!; to the Fund for Poetry and the Young Poets Publishing Initiative for their financial assistance; and to the Writers House community for their continued support.

Published by Michael Magee with support from the Kelly Writers House: http://www.english.upenn.edu/~wh

Subscriptions and queries regarding submission policies should be mailed to Michael Magee, 31 Perrin Ave., Pawtucket, RI 02861, or emailed to combo1@cox.net.

Subscription rates: $10.00 per year, single copies $3.00
Back Issues: $4.00;  Lifetime Subscription $50.00

www.combopoetry.com

ISSN 1525-4151
A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I had wanted to touch on so many things here: on the poems which have begun to articulate a politics valuable in its refusal to meet the rational, euphemistic obfuscation of mediaspeak on its own terms. I thought again of something Frederick Douglass had said, “At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed.” Thought too about those poems which seem to eschew politics, willfully, for the invented spaces where, to quote Bernstein, “the mouse chases the cat,” testament, perhaps, to the poems prophetic role, the extemporization of alternatives. (The ghost of “traditional” — formal, canonical? — poetry seems everywhere in this new issue. A salvaging, a writing through? Make of it what you will but look too to the answers Kasey Mohammad provides in his wonderful review essay.) And I thought most often of Rachel Raffler, whose contributions to Combo and to poetry were cut short senselessly by her death a few weeks before September 11th. Untimely, sudden, tragic — every word I can think of is an impertinent and ineffectual memorial. Thankfully, I am able to publish a few more poems of Rachel’s here. Again, I feel as if I am merely talking around the real significance of the work. So much the better, I guess, “go find out for yourself” — which, as Creeley once pointed out, is the meaning of historein, root of “history.” And in lieu of convincing argument, I’ll leave you with a poem surely born of my own reading in this new issue:

The Big Bid

a vested intern earns his kept secrets
immersion therapy — ceremony —
 arresting officers prefer Secrets
when the greased wheel bloodies the monkey’s money
our uncle mugs the cameraman’s uncle
slips on the back of William Pope.L
recovers in time for the press junket:
one if buy local, two if buy global
strange ocean bobs in strategic ash can
a vast expense stretches along the beach
the lips recede, the seed has a relapse
but placid, plays the crud in a pond scam
a cloud swabs out god’s earhole, itch to each
bone of its bone, the dog shits where it laps

RACHEL RAFFLER

Two Poems

From an email to Michael Magee, September 3, 1999

Four thoughts on New York City

I.
finding
everywhere coronary
attacks of
the matters

at heart/
eradicating that
that! which
bustles not
even

second guessing
words or words

that look
is trained/ i
train while

wonders are
above or below

somewhere/ resuscitate
sometime dusted

off

train panel.

II.

in the crevice/
perhaps

site a time or
list a

number i/ iota
i mean

i blush/ dictionary
perspire

like blocks it
is or does
doesn't matter/ meant
punctilious, i

said punctilious/ say

wandered off in/ the
crowd of

course i rubbing/ my
red shirt

III.

the genius he was/ stuttered
or another through

a thought to have another
catching- now that's a thought

or twittering/ who fails to
mumble always enunciating to clearly

IV.

in a literal
sense (centrifuge)

no, really/ i'm
lost or
dehydrated from
the day's walk:

a resigning romancer/

---

For an email to Alex Turrell, January 16, 2001

...anyway, here's a little something i wrote last night. i'll send you actual good poems later. these two poems are going to be part of my brain likes sparkles series though. once i make them good, that is...which might and might not happen.

IV. the brain unleashes it's reign of terror

what remains of
a pedantic thumb sucked
dry/

and filtered down
to regards for vengeance

as if something/ could
be un done

historicum facticum: rot ceasing
to glisten, an infidel

finds pools of mudd
cacking on for it's

//eye heavy indifference

V. ode breath

re membrance
trips on lane
of evolution.

//but being not too
slow for video:

the easy lightness of escape
look up steady
suggestion hand
on neck

(it settles
milk
on
spoon
my pit of my odemized regression:
leavening
breathing
leaving

From an email to Alex Turrell, February 8, 2001

hey!
here's a new poem for ya! the end is not making me happy yet though.
anyway, thought you might like to read it.

hypo-matic matic

the meat of it
was in the washer

soaking up "Propagations of Noxious Hysteria"

to ponder
and be pondered by)

oh, flatulent desire!
ambrosia to my nervous vista...-viscera!

my anti-delusional is
out on fridays: dancing
the professional safe-and-sorry

the note on the door:
"to persecute a bone: choke on it"

KIT ROBINSON

Las Rosas

Wall demolition
oil tanks
truck full of dirt

The sweetness of signs
MARISCOS
gull resting on a wall

Spotlights mounted
on palms
wash of waves

By running out of capital
ey they built emptiness into the mercado
emptiness is the mother of all

Marriot Renaissance

I've been trying to think
of how to write about
the Circulation Ring

Step up
onto the ice
and head over to GM

A pile of blue dirt
like a perfect cone
is sodium chloride
A trading community
full of life
coming back into the city
Bellagio

The fountains' gigantic splatter
creates a curtain of water
before the Eiffel Tower

Five a.m.
a well groomed man
in suit and tie

Alone at a table
the croupier deals the cards
workers push vacuums

Over the plush carpet
tourists don bathrobes
go out among the crowds

The Venetian

Painted sky
the same light
24 X 7

Everything new at this time

St. James's Court

An organic series
of hallways and doors
doesn't make any sense

"Can I help you?"
"I'm a guest."
can't find the lobby

Can't find the hotel
around here somewhere
get out of the car and walk

The Golden Heart

Dear Miles
having a pint with you
at the Golden Heart

Was completely all right
standing on our feet
on the street

Our poems are grounded
in ordinary language
but do fly

Off the handle
from time to time
outside the Golden Heart

Sheraton Manhattan

Here I lie
insensate
in the Adirondack chair

Of the Russian Revolution
my colleagues
are silent

I too
am speechless
but do speak

Carrying on as if
to illustrate the difference
between history

And this
anatomical moment
resting

At the tip
of the tongue
Hotel Adlon

Come to be
in place of sex
the center of historical Europe
Stands in time
furiously famous
on account
The Brandenberg Gate
covered over and funded
for reconstruction
By Deutsche Telekom
the American embassy
building next door
Security problems
the streets would have to be moved

Berlin

Gong
I will be able to respond
soon
No traction
lobby
of the Hotel Infrastructure
Elsewhere in Europe
anywhere out
of this world

Kevin

The end result
of your abstraction
is that you should be writing

More & more
of this down
love is the language
I'm having really big
thoughts right now
Pleasanton, Germany

JORDAN DAVIS

Nashville

Hegemonic rooty-toots placate
Gethsemane collocations punk rock
Go one at a time
auto bodies dispatched to marshes
Flood the bog
and smile,
you're saying hi
But thinking about how to escape false futures
So volunteer some true one
And without barf tango, if you please
Do not volunteer us for death postcards
Profound as our habiliments be
O stalwarts of sodfarm irrigation
I myself cuddling with fir trees' shadows

NOT REAL

meaning unavailable for comment
look! An apiary

a blue glint in the woods

the woman in front saying 'Jesus'

every twenty seconds

I bequeath quangos to Holy Goose

EXTRA GRIDS BEMOAN VEHICULAR CUTBACKS

a gloss

Freedom is apprehended in a belief.
Standards of obsequiousness ensue.
Signage corroding packets, blood school tips.
A song reveals general darkness.
The plaza is overrun by escape.
A shack is voted and unvoted.
The recourse button sticks and fame leaks into the atmosphere of delay.
A pair of children play music outdoors.
Long neutral, the quiet becomes charged.
Someone peels an orange.
The anonymous market opens for the evening.

BRA MAKES CHALLENGE TO OUIJA GROUP

They picked me right up off the boat
Set me on a flatbed
Fastened me into my opalescent pinions
And graduated me with a champale across my ass

Unfurnished rooms don’t impregnate salt lack
But the France apparent preys on their tines

Victory light is deregulated
So’s sex pez

SAME THE PIRATE

I’d like to be a calligraphic homestead for vertigo
Bemoaning overpleasure bismillah!

Glitter turquoise skull graffit giraffe pomp

As though meditation were easy

Things to do in Abidjah

Eat chocolate

Pull
gently!

Participate in wholesale banditry

Change your mask

say hi!

Protozoa attached firmly to shiny propulsion

Glistening and purple and you strain

A trout!

Laborers rearrange the medium-sized stones
And descend by the glowing pylon marked

W
A
T
C
H
Y
O
U
R
S
T
E
P

To a varnished

combo 11
encrusted with macadam

(She levels me with a teaspoon)

(Shofar love note barricado)

increases oil viscosity
destroys your car!

raids on the cake

Tipping one of the logs on its side with the end of a new log
I uncover the char.
The new log goes in and in a second the stove is hissing.
Fire lights from the back forward.
Smoke and vapor rush back through the stove,
The old log rippling with white orange and blue flames,
Gold-red coals falling forward into the collapsing drifts
Of ash at the side.
Then sirens and whistles, a radio near a station
As the bark, flames combed back
As if it were hurtling forward,
Bends up away from the log.
The flue is as loud as someone walking in another room, occasionally pressing
the side of her beer can.
I cross my legs the other way.
Now it sounds like a chickadee.

It made my mom
totally
get an electric guitar

my sister owns that boa

I'm a dolphin, smart!
(But she can't hyphenate
for anything)

MYTILI JAGANNATHAN

summer theater

a man denouncing subway of nonlookers
giant knots of thread original narrator
can't bear his body uncomforted 98-degree streak
sandals wearing out eventual demise the audience all
contracted and breathtaking animal or human please
only to memory flashlight on natal address keep
traffic in your toes your lungs keep pockets from
planetary radio crackle where arm I contingent
labor telling it like hurricane and thirst
this was where doors
shut then
heart arrested by baby's cry as if mine already—

if name is temporary
password peel the faceless away to detention loyalty's
lawyerless joke charge me half of what
I said I missed you left
the park the strongarm state on my right
side a wall of blossom and conspiracy sparrows
startled up in quarter-arc
bankside a girl fronts carousel mirror
eating her way through all the young
magazines gloss and recycled lay waste to
endless war conscious capoeira kicking
constitutional ash crowding for vital signs of each other
I don't want powerless no more

substitute your hands

I didn't ask fire to sponsor me but somebody did. flame in the mouth
of flame in the aerosol of dusk. hand on heart feat of ownership of
blue open sky. flame arrives in the mouth without a lullaby do you
encounter it live.
god on your side didn't I say not to promise defeat? didn't I ask about posture, some grip on emergency because we live it because I'm longing or dangerously leaning.

so shut in the ordinary please give me extra in this time. I am inside slowdown but who's in your glory to meaning, menacing. inside the wedding I was not quite myself, but it's not accurate to say I was "someone else." I left you in sideways splendor it did not sponsor or attack me. attack is where I'm wondering who you are or who depends on presence this time.

because suddenly blown open is our state of mind. because suddenly blown open is an everyday state. because suddenly is an active prod, because suddenly makes me jump, because suddenly hides increment, because suddenly can descend upon us or we can suddenly upon them. because we don't know who's we to what waking what end.

I am finding you in the salience of dream. I am here receiving what you say you don't want but war is already formed. I don't mean to protect you, I mean you instantaneous harm. in twisted sheets of chatter the film is slipping suppressing the embassy of eyes memorized by burns or sun singing the cisterns empty. you who are not made of ink.

because unfinished reads to me from cut script. her hand in a public place a chthonic promise to breath. I carry chants around my neck because the clock shot me to widest clearing of kin. how we devise a response through what remains of the record. how we are made of (suffering inside) that devising.

SARA THACHER

A Typical

page of text very elaborate individually dissection: several blocks a building of some significance over the people towards the street doors windows all out

Condemned nobody: a daughter elaborate house filled with pornographic images every door shuts no doubt she's ready to be one of the early prophets [vestments and investments required] but ended in the well instead

Miracles abound a woman and a monkey and a bird even the clouds rush away its really dramatic without sympathy things that stay: a bird and a monkey the terrain very wild the isle very beautiful no mooring for boats

combo 11
Factory Notes: Eleven-thirty

hot weiners
they had nothing to do
and there was no wind
yeah she heard the

gun
shot— the kicker
don't
don't go
in the front door

Notice:
no new
employees being
accepted

buildings under one roof
we got the rails we got broad street

constructed carriage lanterns
incandescence
turrets, pitch ribbons, vacuum bottles
constructed saturn machine
constructed won't include the word shut down

several points— some though—
not enough:

big sister
charge machines, not men
like this
like this
look at me
seeds and blisters
like that to get out
we can pull
out of the
way or push
in
we screen it
we have tolerance

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codes and language

they don't get it
language of escape
codes absolutely
no plants or
furniture or anything
blocking or placed
on the fire
escape
and was known
that he killed
himself such a theme
such an imagination
every dime sorted by
year placed heads
up or tails up
depending on origin
the other thing
that was important
were stories placed
on the plants and
furniture and complicated
by the language of
escape
codes defying
it and grew
out of growing
up in the absence
of flight and
the evolution
of feathers hand
holding
and the reality
of hand holding

sexuality is obsolete

Fascinating,
who would have
thought switching
them could create a gap
between production pop 'em out, baby
and cultivation?
she was always
visiting
hatred upon them
a visitor with a crow
bar in the study
with a candlestick
in the attic. But no
one ever
guessed, after all
who could have
known in her cast
iron dress what
they believed
was
the smile.

really

it's a matter
of context
there are fluids
and there are surfers

there will always be magicians
and their rabbits
and there is always
the issue
of transformation
how did the bread
get there anyway
gossip
god speak or was it
isn't good speech
enunciation
Gabriel's
at the door
the wolf's
in bed with granny's
nightgown on

Better Homes and Gardens

you plan ahead
you know how to make
money go further
you value the experience of specialists
you like modern, time-saving methods
modest back yards confederate white house
no excavation can be brought home
the 'just-done' look
comfort comes by the block
extra cleanliness makes cover for the old romp and play
comfort comes by the block
even adjustable to many positions
MATT HART

Three Poems

Civilisation is my favorite waste of time

for Simon

I love my friend and so forget to talk.
I shall say, really, What year is it?

Civilisation makes nothing happen.
We are bored, well mannered, bored
and unharmed by it. — Look,
a man standing at the window
with men, more men, other men, a
woman and many women, saying:
We go with them, We were forced,
We were going anyway.

I love my friends. We rarely talk.
They ask me, really, Were you going anyway?

Cruiser

Coming out of, spelling out the, scam and the
taxi means something dicey, adultery
but not too clever.

Hints of a change, stumbling to seventeen locations,
colourful all the way to the getaway—
"Hey, he can barely walk"

Four drivers, four cars. The decoy is mad-looking,
her face full of blood, pouched quite
unlikely red.

A man in his late twenties, absent or barely referred to:
The transport: His cab to the airport is likely just
cover or subplot.

A friend or potential lover, pretending Philly cheese, asks—
Who cares if small fish change streams to
Scotland as something nastier?

Raw Matter: Four Near Misses

boys

In Philadelphia for two years and
finally I find some white noise though
it’s 3 am and I’m frankly embarrassed
to be watching this parliament of Puffy,
everywhere, indivisible, like him
newly friends with your girlfriend. Boys,
vote jealously, cupidity, where
your ills take you, with sadness.
And because you come to hate your
own company, sit up with yourself.

portillo

They say she had a system though we
knew it to be authoritarian, populist and

Two years before his redemptive train ride,
that was Michael Portillo, not worn out,
a periphrastic manner in a jingo’s hat.

Question my motives then. Now ask me why.
I tell you I hate him, spit in his eye.

boys

Let none put asunder
my cellphone, your ear
Let you spend all my cash
at the Casbah, on beer

Sons come back with barbs
like

No-one drinks Double-Diamond

and

Fuck off you old tosser

and

Sat at the green light, desperate
for a crack at Thermopolae, sick
of unrelenting last dibs

O Manes, that he’s beyond slapping,
that weak as he is, that I wouldn’t!

portillo

Time I left here. Punches
never less than gloved.

This, it is your biggest miscalculation.

My chance, you
gave it me. My chance
meeting to regret
or elsewhere.

ALEX LAVIGNE-GAGNON

A Night in Montreal:
07/01/02 9:58:38 PM

Windowpanes and starlight jitter.
atomic tonality with freckled spotlight
through dim windows
dark as Milton’s Cerberus
    with emerald sparks.
angled pane, jutting frequently — the still moon,
white wall marked by fingerprints and holes,
    holes from haphazard picture hangings
though Timeless the sputtering melliflows.
Bronze-brown-black with a green-yellow
disparately spacious on the canvas front —
    war front — musical dabbing,
ahistorical in middle ground
    of ancient fandango spire
mirrored in blue glass from powder shop
in existence due to the minefield.

II

Cold as brightness, black as the Ozone-less
scorched in anticipation of an Apache stop sign,
Final as Arcadia in dissimilar dissension
to the far side unanimity of spectral lightshowman:
non-Amazon curator of frozen stillness —
bottles of stone shine provocation adage
    glued to the snowshoe —
    mallet parked by blue snow,
Crowded as in filtered daylight meted to idolaters
beatified for carpet-maker’s icons
    — reddish —
    splashing milk-hued latex against the Masonite
    plucking angelsong in Paco De Lucia gazelles
for windows budging slowly the wall mice
crooning over wall-warmth
    — only the broken plough —

III

the ageing : the dilatory exist
tomorrow now : tomorrow then
after since : recurring pause
    shadow of the egress
Timeless bespeckled Night
the fingerprints request an age-old baggage
flight, the plane, forgetfulness
    engaging the apple flowerpot,
the border’s wooden peak,
a challenge to digest a fractured Room,
    pieces floating in a bio-cloud Idea
of human exo-/endo-consistency
fragmented — a sudden move
    targeting assemblies
    lining the flight of
Formal lessons in hygienics,
    re-treating the millenary
    as opposed to Rediscover
in plastic emulation of forget-me-nots,
a dietary fibre to the Hill and House.
IV
atonic atom befriend over Often
casual as lampshade carousels —
the soaked-in metal front —
as Windowpane presents elimination
deeded in a parcel
remunercated agent
paused to objectify a landmark.
Beauty as an envelope
cought sidewise in a still shot.
parkside badger angel —
middle of the road —
walking a million miles
abject as saddened butterflies
Hold on Life:
Sages who place wagers
in the cavernous soup kitchen
blanketing the middleman in March,
bequeathed in empty parking lots.

V
the spotted pattern
green in sentries
"I am a forget-me-not,"
does sound sideways
for every "Steal the quarter,"
means a second meal at the Inn Tavern
— moments vanquished Napoleon —
Ever than ever —
Shielded by a batter’s light
a bat’s light
backwards
batting eyelids
Forever in wayward Milton song.

SUSAN LANDERS

14 mgs.
memory runs away to be happy

Put put buys minnie
some butter for fattening.
But what does put put

like to eat? It’s easy
to confuse them
when they are not

thinking. Minnie’s
a good thinker
when not lying.

Something about
lying in a box
minnie likes.

Other people knock
down doors to get
closer to fire.

Should put put
go to work today,
doctor? TV makes

other people feel
so free. Feel me
up TV. All I want

for my birthday is my 2 front teeth. Whose birthday is it? My 2 front teeth.
Minnie says more than she has ever said hasn’t been said by me. Put put goes
away only to come back again like a needle in a shopping mall. Where’s my
present? I hope it’s fresh.

The trains are not strange without announcements. What you know is valuable
if it is not for sale. You got the time? Birds know to fly away. Put put mines
minnie. Mine her. Practice saying it. Enough times to be true. Shush stutter
mummy. It’s too fluffy in here!
Other people are angry for reasons they don’t know are true. The same old story bears repeating though other people feel differently about trains and shopping. Ball stick gun. Gum me a solution. Muck muck. Would you eat it if it were free? Butter king stick waves his nylons. Don’t tread on me says king. Well-wishers are sent down the well.

Check her figure fever cradling its break. Shake the numbers down to the common good. There is no we. Boxes aren’t for closing. The best part about birthdays is the not singing.

On and off are sexy do overs. Side swipe. Car crash glass doesn’t hurt the gutter slug. Watching could be owning. Doctor is good and gay and costs nothing selling sweets outside the market. Living does not complain me he says. He is not worried about not being managed or managing himself. Not everyone could make or sell such a little nothing.

Come to be as coming is being. Child or ill and nothing. Nothing but children or illness means nothing. There is nothing outside the child. Nothing but inside for illness.

Let’s run some more says petunia after lion kills peacock.

**MARK SARDINHA**

**Five Poems**

**more compelling we say ubiquitous**

growth provided couldn’t trawl baikal

to know such fractures of entrenched alliance
give me a fledgling market — do I have two?

or ruin that was to overwhelm the astrologer

an editor of eunuchs

stagnant altitude about her riggings

a boon to the thong business

supposed digging through neptune lucidity

whereupon hubris removed from on cloudy

ex libris: nada / ex nihilo: mazorca

back hatchback of mazda so i can go on like this

fuming with respect, thumbling laurel abieus

fashion dictates it be invisible again

a looseness extended to all replicas

habit of buffaloing, a chart topper since march

slow wick make good hooky devotion

envisaging guard dogs on stun

aurora, if buy-local is watchword

thine fat ass is blocking mine view

with droll comments to escort her

fera mal, the pageant virginity

fortuitous coughing, rabble on the move

one more self-deprecating comic i’m out of here

**enormities which forerun my spirit**

whereupon heights are wired directly

pie men of a better stamp

more of whom are drifting

my uneasiness the pinnacle

this pumps on diurnally

the most popular style is “dressy”

(alias legless) procured luster

lumbering in a dead-heat cabriole

your uniform

it’s sooo describable

what posh schoolbag / darwinian bladder)

hers the great halls and corridors?

hardscrabble incumbent

come bent this plan b plank of straw

a bit buckled feather in the cap-agog:

[drone hearing the rev of engine]

“...fujinomic trip valve for drambuie-snift dew swatch

on a moist exalted double carb ool yes

i.e., correct, my old porche!

what kind of cadre you say for christmas?”

tellin’ ya they make a good limping
separated by a window pane

nosetonose
they are fully grown, obliged
to hunt for themselves
linger
it goes on per diem

it was september there was frost
a mustache drawn with her finger
he looked older
and umber, the moment not lost
merely hidden away

she lived in the battered museum
nearly two years and a day

remind me to admire the past its fortified endemics —

furbelow upon fur

paleontologists revamp congeries ...

another day, another patrick mcgoohan
by sudden smell of involvement is one too
sexy for another? bone further, affecting one exception
model inconsistency = existence boo hoo
the shed of man's tale

furbelow upon fur

social kinetics

cleaving the hem of no-show non possimus, refusal
to role, play dead, comma on end

this line for private mandalas

by act or omission
no animals were hurt or fictitious, sad
about a parking lot?
when they see this thing which is you
has been to introduce a measure of o'der

what's up your spine is your persnickety —
albeit, "wanna pet my lhasa apso?"

"appaloosa!"

but of course blame wasting competence
perforce, the buckner home was inundated —
cursed by triumphal arches
an occasion infamous through no fault of sponsors
so, gobo, what melons do-in your foley stage?

russel earl dent went for x-tra beiges: ecru, tan, brownish,
wane, nude ...
more than a hundred species have been reported visitors:
dick pole, a mere pitcher of balls

fain to indulge the pacific motions of a barber —

let's not venerate this thing more than it is
unto its odd job the lightning rod perceives
the intractible excursion

(o beast and the screams!)

what reward for the finding?
induction from this ribbon, sufficient depth be appreciable
a companion to exclusive possession
habited in nightclothes

having impressed the particulars
here trace a queue of valid friends —
always someone renting this machine
occurred of simple gravities but worthy of our deference?
cognizant the witness weilds his cudgel

a fulvous stamen flirts your ear

benefit by way of joke
something "more than coincidence" roving
eye portraits unto the dim

the view

it is as if tinctured
Linton Kwesi Johnson Meets Margaret Thatcher outside
Brixton Prison, Jebb Avenue, London Southwest Two, to
discuss the machinations of cooptation, the marketability of
delinquency, & the now-defunct factory where all they did was
pack crockery

Madness tight on the heads of
the rebels the bitterness erupts
like the options of the pawn
shop clerk as elementary
school lessons on division
of labor of love
of liquor lottery’s
victual vocable beveled
queue for new-fangled
selfsame coffer icon.
Unmarked truck. Storage unit.
The spontaneity of white
lab-coated gray-suited grin
beating out a rhythm with a fire
& then it became clear:
his name was Market.

Dr. Alimantado Meets Vicente Fox at the International
Economic Forum in Monterrey, Mexico to discuss the reverence
of anomie, the continuity of alliance, & the best dressed tincan
toreador in town

even Michael Manley
I say even Michael Manley
I say the new definition
of foreign exchange
of Coca-Colonized tycoon
dollars for your drum
& bass slogan jockey
on the searing river rust
maquiladora sprocket trophy.

Gimme my gun. Or my poison
flower long-stemmed calla lily
merchant lotion. Or the gardens
of mimosa & bougainvillea.
Spontaneous distillation.
Jorge Castaneda does the
two-tongued mambo.
New wave bookie.
Six-gauge disinterestedness.

Reverend Been There Meets Dr. Seen Some in the talk show
waiting room the day before the international summit in order
to discuss the unpruned velocity of antithesis tabulation, the
creative function of corruption, & consignment as a metaphor
for existence

Unabombing will get
you nowhere
while the hired
applause claps louder
"& that’s ‘bout when
I got an education
‘bout my education,
Doc, when for the
first time I saw the world
end" to undo the
undulatory the
normativity functions
as a hinge
ruled out
from the outset
in other words

Poem that begins & ends with a line from Rod Smith

the actual flakes of makeshift geniality
before the collapsed ice shelf of goodbye

because withered freight of sugar-free rub-a-dub mathematic
after the smattered fraction of spectacle will insist you smoke
your radical theory from here on out of the hardwired humdrum closet and into the People’s Republic of

Chomsky feeling all lacquered & rapturous & I know nothing will ever be the same except for the resistance to the present of the present divided by familiar flap of flag at fifty-five times defunct comeuppance askew in the cradle

Poem that begins & ends with a line from Laura Elrick
demand is not need, local is not local curbside is not curbside, windows not windows
go-go booted flicker dance track of inequity hook fact hook fact hook

because the space race gave us Teflon because business confidence

because Bolivian tin because of a sudden glut of odd little binomials dancing at the dancehall’s extremely cirrhosis debt vagabonding in the minimum adjacent female intensive confinement center

Poem that begins & ends with a line from K. Silem Mohammad
collateral poaching front: plea-bargained rifle bark meandering racecar trump: bumper crop traffic jam

there must be something wrong with the water table the brand-new president of the United axiology of nested reverence: there there sweetheart the convergent discrepancy of extreme mediocrity

won’t bother your noisy carpet or your statistically significant delicate exorcism

until the expensive iconoclast frowned heartily never arriving in Salem by bookmobile

Poem that begins & ends with a line from Joan Retallack
 the sudden Technicolor salute guiding my finger-trembling

showcase showdown unexceptionably clicking toward glut of psychosis tropes sliding from the heretofores the there & there only guns and hearts rhyme perfectly in

Spanish channel two-hour special on much-publicized communal norms

where empty shelves are on special as myth’s urgent isosceles smile

Poem that begins & ends with a line from Haruyette Mullen
Quantum mechanics fixed my karma wagon but not my high-tech metallic crapshoot indexed under smooth-lipped extortion. The parity of scarcity & the scarcity of parity. The feedbag as muzzle as the gentle sway of glitter-bingeing on the scent of random.

[& two-thirds of what was said was said to avoid a lawsuit.] So insert the pleasant metal disconnect into the buckle: contraband leader scattering scat sporadically.
Imaginary Standard Distance

Where the scenery is finer, and life is a thesis
Blue equals blue and lemon equals lemon
Here at my desk or under the umbrella
There where the waiters spread tablecloths
Markless as the sails blooming on the bay
As if one could go from easel to mural
Factoring in more canvas, purer economics,
But not the arms’ desire to hold, no
Speaking of the roses grown to obscure the rose-names
Each appears as your personal copy
And Sebastian is Viola’s brother
And Viola is Sebastian’s sister
And that is all the axiom you get
When the bugle wakes up as sculpture
Solstice enlarging the pupil
Under the logo’d umbrellas
I’ll have worked out the laws for this
Till my hair turns penciled

Anecdote of the Dovecote

I.

Look, we leave the saint tournament empty-handed.
Those competitive saints of France, with their candlepower,
thieving renown from the city to which all eyes should
be cast—in the heavens; and, nicked into the sides of the
ambulatory where peds make the rounds of tombs of kings,
leading by comparison to a new sense: "redder, lighter,
and stronger than crane, lighter than granite, slightly
stronger than cinder, and redder and deeper than zinc."
That would be dove-gray, or in alabaster in chemises of mist
would they make the countryside their protégé—with
swords not words; so many trees mean riches, and sumptuary,
like a vocabulary.
Where the vocabulary changes everything changes, for now we are
speaking of saints and raspberry bushes, giant cows like
menhirs in an appreciating field.
And the doves would leave the sumptuous dovecotes and eat the
peasants’ portion.

II.

The empiricities are gleaming in the hindsight of the sun.
Their canals flow evenly as a temperament, lacking the melodrama
of the old spires, the obsoled currency of emphasizing
the proviso that the saints are like a painting that puts
nails & holes in the wall it depicts.
September, "yellower and paler than rust or average russet,
yellower and paler than average copper brown."
The harvest is academic, crows in procession on the green,
starlings giggling in the library, sparrows kissing in the
street.
Prosperities are not solitary.
In the Euro fortress.
The petrified architecture across which ancient gorgons passed
their eyes stare blindly back as we, in our sentimental
detours, laterally wander jobless, from tanagers to
teenagers, when the pacifist dirigiste is surprised
someone else must be hungry and requires this fruit of us.
A Day in the Country

Arcadia says Et in New York ego. In rookeries; In bulbs whose derivatives casually toss.

The silence of a claque was a rooster of waxwings. The cloud jangled with simulated cold call.

It was said that no bull shall be bigger than its brownstone. The slang evolved from compliance to monsoon.

Bartenders were erected around the excursion. Tall tales revolved great glass windtunnels;

the fact was alive with lip service like bishops. We wandered in the All Saints' Day like a climate.

We, like a quiver, wandered lonely. No rumble was identical to any other in a sow.

No rump was identical to any other in a spa. We were borne farther & farther from tennis.

We were borne farther & farther from décolletage on waxwings. Delta wave was served, under cantilevered snakebird.

To true the stretcher around a chutney was to enter a molehill. Dusty viziers inherited the field glass.

Contempt as magical lacewings replaced the professorate. We climbed the parapet to the dean and odometer.

There is only one orphan but at least one copyright.

The Intrigues

If every page was a frontispiece, and a book not that laborious farming to some catastrophic end which copying eyes would retrace, then I could dispense with jealousy, I mean genealogy, and be original every time, for the conversions that inspiration is. A phantom face value haunts me, but the inverted library; candles at the bottom of the pool;

these are the ghosts of the glass house designed to be invisible in a wilderness; or I could begin to incorporate all the reflections of things that certify their inversions. Meanwhile the music strobes so rapidly it uncoils in understanding, not time, adrift in technical registers holding relations in light patterns all the night til morning's mimosas under blue sky enbowling our nicer noise to a gold-stringed noon acoustic.

A, I do not know if you are negative or intensive, in a city like a double window whereby all images of real-life death, like photography a kind of painting different ways around the park and through it shadows feint across paths fallen trees. If it is spiritual having applications to make, dogs patterning imprimatur, let flowers grow always in defiles gluing flame to flame in endless Spring duplications. Under the arcade, thinking the landscape in the mirrored building is the true outside a sparrow butts its reflections like handwriting meeting itself on both sides of a diary page. And not to be trapped in a dream, a journey as far as the looking glass, which extends along an axis that displaces the eye as midpoint, or befall ourselves.

The argument that year was that "hyacinth" should not be used where "flower" suffices. Here where brand-name vices include Lust and Envy and Representation, is it the latter that leads me to sleep too much, or is it vernacular lavender softening the rocks that makes, well, déjà vu seem avant-garde? The nights are cool, and accumulation at the heart drafts the ghost I told you about, that generates a book out of two foci and places it so to read its term in its definition, a glow on the horizon that is also my sunburn. It goes about with a movie playing on the underside of its umbrella, tropical red as the ghost devolves to dew blobs and whispers of the lawyers of Argentina and Gibraltar.
The Veined Minute

I.

Berlin: the professors are attired in friezes and fluting.

In Paris it's domes and colonnades.

New York, fountains.

In the city posed by their dress statues are abstracted into buildings.

Whose next remove is the monograph.

So it's impossible to travel without the dictionary.

A ruler marked with letters.

The incommensurates A and A like two summers laid against a grid, crossreferences of skies and harbors:

"Such an index to consciousness desuetude was when we met
in line like chestnuts
in a chiasmus of existent and non-existent towers
the sun shone off like a tractatus
mingling generalities
made at least three levels of flowers
shout out to each other to grow faster."

II.

Rain is a small revolt, falling word for word

on the same summer we reread every year

with a different mind; the thing we fear
is irrevocably so; that we do not remain ourselves

sleeping in the same bed every night.

The cathetus of the canal, slightly below the cathetus of the bridge
which lies
above the cathetus of the street

all feint under lamplight from the museum window.

The space of the world ending where the space of the work begins.

The black canal, the white statue, the violinist on the bridge
either end of which represents either
the policeman or the pickpocket
make the sort of flower
our mise-en-scenes accommodate
for being unoriginal.

III.

Egyptian pigeons,
Pompeian pictographs;
everything's distinction flattened into style,

made into the rafters of a world so easily cached

sunrise and sunset become operational

as pop songs when the skylines fade from bar graphs

and we sit, benched in the dark whose battery we are

beneath the holograms averaged together.
Revolution remains celestial in its provenance
like the only extant copy of a play
never to appear dressed in the world
unless, taking the sum of all cross-references
to lovers as hope's circumference
a company puts it on in the park
where the leaves are unfurling like wet chicks
and the bodies are beginning to be undraped
one by one like the index of flowers.

BARBARA COLE

f r o m

situ ation come dies

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this time the captain has turned on the seatbelt lights.
three, four, shut the door
it's the iodine in the water—
need more iron

Turn around bright eyed
Punished as a girl of seven for over-pronounced g's.
Resulting overcompensations: said "sin" instead of "sing"

What the world needs now is another Disney cartoon gone Broadway musical
said "saw" instead of "song"

went upstairs to kiss a fella

At 3, my mother enrolled me in a YMCA "Cooking with Kindergartners" class. We weren't allowed, obviously, to use the stove so our quote unquote cooking entailed essentially an early version of culinary presentation arts. For instance, one of our classes was on Frank the Frankfurter which basically involved taking a hot dog, cutting a slit half way through the length of the wiener to make legs (we also weren't permitted to use any knives, so the teacher did the cutting too). Our part was decorating the furter with condiments. The instructor
demonstrated how to make "Frank" by forming a ketchup smile, mustard eyes, mustard bow-tie and ketchup buttons. Improving on this design, I opted instead for a mustard pearl necklace and kicky A-line ketchup skirt.

Thank you for holding.

I am conscientiously careful as to how I say 'what'—a frequent peppering of my speech—a carefully pronounced 'what' the eyebrows raised to connote interest and curiosity as if to say, 'how's that?'

There is no cost to complete this form.

But, I mean, I don't understand.

Shut the door, would you?

And, like, if I can't understand it, shouldn't it be, like, not so hard?

Sometimes you need a little finesse, sometimes you need a lot

the implicit politeness of 'pardon' without explicitly begging 'excuse me'

We are gathered here today
But he says "wut" staccato and, she thinks to herself, this is one way that he is very much a

Stand with feet in alignment with your shoulders and breathe

Power automated door—

KEEP MOVING

When the teacher came around, inspecting our dogs, she told me that my Frank did not look "right." I explained that mine was a Franny the Frankfurter—a girl frank.

The teacher, frowning, told me next time to follow directions.

The tears welling up, I struggled to wipe off the disallowed necklace and skirt but ended up just leaving an orange stain on the weenie and ripping my bun.

Coming soon to a theatre near you.

Did you remember your mother's birthday?

fizz fizz

Hey, would you turn it down?

"When you disagree with someone, do not feign agreement for the sake of 'keeping the peace.'

Change the topic.

Look away.

If you are sure of your ground, you may disagree actively and emotionally

Did you feed the dog?

For customer service, press 1

For assistance with your account statement, bill, or billing dispute, press 2

Wait, so what are you saying?

these mini dramas staged in grand scale still trying to cut out carbs

Do you know what you want?

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down

You got the right one baby, uh, huh

Federal Methodology: a formula, defined by statute; used to determine the expected family contribution (EFC) for federal

Oh, I meant to ask you
To hear these choices repeated, press the star button

Your handwriting: a ghost I will never grow accustomed to.

What the world needs now is another Hooters

When the wind blows

It's not so much a request as a desperate search for an answer:

Givemeacall?

Don't touch that dial.

Why can't you stand up straighter and an infallible memory is not the gift everyone seems to think it is


Do you know where I put my
so turn to work because what else can silence
Can I make an appointment?
I don't recall asking for cooking
lessons as much as I remember
wanting an apron.

And just look at all these nooks and crannies
you
were
saying...?
all I ever wanted was a more efficient goodbye
it's the way you ask a question as if you already know the answer to this
and everything
So make a point of being neat
And mind your manners while you eat
hold on? Can you hold on?
That'll be $29.52

Please remain seated until your row has been called.
In my earliest memories, I am pretending with my mother that we are neighbors—housewives in adjacent houses—imagining myself her equal in domestic prowess and back-fence friendship.

with every year, the checklist becomes more improbable. the timetable rendered impossible.
The scenario is the same each time:
ritual already a joy at 4
Listen up please.
get off my father's apple tree
Again, this issue of influence.

**situ / ation / come / dies:**
*Barbara Cole*
Handwritten Press, 2002
Reviewed by Thom Donovan

**One Trauma Theory**

what did I tell you // that realizing - sudden and alarming. like blinking sirens in the rear view mirror. It was there all along, gradually approaching - part of the realization is the knowledge.

Writing as memory in emergency. What we have always known was there, but never called into question, or don’t have the guts or smarts to too often. When I read Barbara Cole’s work there is recognition: what "I" knew, what "we" know (too well?), but do not have the courage often enough to articulate so lucidly so intensely.

**Meanwhile**

*I can only read you*

*autobiographical*

which is far too distressing so stack it all in neat piles
perfect corners

Autobiography may seem easy, but there’s a lot a reader may not want to bother with, that doesn’t seem interesting because it has nothing to tell us about our condition or the condition of the person writing it. This is not true of Cole’s work, which emerges both as cathartic exercise (the stuff of the stage) and memory’s exigency (words as wounds and shocks that make us remember, that compel us to re-inscribe the histories of our experiences). Her work is also concerned with how we relate to each other, and how too often we don’t / can’t more successfully. The on-going tragi-comedy of Cole’s work seems founded upon such mis-communications and trajectories of error.

*Catharsis*

*Punished as a girl of seven for over-pronounced g’s.*
*Resulting overcompensations: said "sin" instead of "sing"*

combo 11
Not catharsis for its sake alone. One must have their analyst and/or friends and/or readers to tell their experience to. One may recall so much pain and awkwardness growing-up, assuming roles, being punished being disciplined, performing, refusing to perform the person others would desire them to be. In Cole’s poetry, the necessity of telling/witnessing/conveying becomes a productive activity confronting acculturations, relations of power, and disciplinary apparatuses at the most fundamental structural levels of family, school, church, mass-media—de-centered and centered locations of consumption and production. There is a disparate sadness about her experience that comes through in the work. Are there any that were not the bully or the bullied, the child who wore the proverbial dunce cap or the complaisant (thus complicit)? It seems that so much of what often infuriates us, and that we might work to transform, can be traced back to those formative moments. Cole’s autobiographic work sets her experience into collagist constellation with some of the most urgent problems of the present. Her writing is traumatic, at times compulsive, while also aware of the pitfalls of nostalgia and sentiment. How admirable that so much hurt and pain should be transformed into a politics about how we (inter-)act, how we treat each other, and how we use language on a momentary basis determine relationships at every level of a society.

Remembrance

But no that’s not it because actually it has been over for a long time, so long that suddenly you cannot remember when it wasn’t over.

It’s the realization itself that is so baffling, like a delayed post-script.

...an infallible memory is not the gift everyone seems to think it is

The structure of traumatic experience may be this: that what has happened is not actual yet, has not registered as reality, as an event with a place, and actors and words, and actions occurring within a continuum: memory or history.

To write in the wake of trauma is to attempt to account for inexplicable experiences. To write to remember does not seem a choice, but may be a necessity for the traumatized. Writing is the eruption, the interruption, of that time lost; in psychoanalytical speak, the writer of traumas writes "acting out" to establish a distance from which one could view the event’s occurrence. Recognition is safe-distance, whereby realization becomes knowledge. Retrospectively, the wound is articulated by what is written: "like a delayed post-script.”

Couldn’t Relate

it’s the way you ask a question as if you already know the answer to this and everything

and then there is her "what" which is like her "why" - accusatory, scolding, annoyed, as if to say "I'm pretending I don’t know what you just said when actually I did indeed hear you and am already pissed but I'm making myself even more pissed by making you repeat it"

Barbara’s work in progress, situ/ation/come/dies floats effectively in a post-aural environment of cliché, artifice, image-nation-excess, brand mythology, commercial interruption, and immanent re-collection. Reading the pages of the work, I feel as though I am channel surfing lyrically, clicking from advertising jingles to fragments of an autobiography to monologue and soliloquy.

Oscillating between center stage and the wings is a complaint turning argument: At some point you must start again. There is an impulse both to destroy and to gradually dismantle what we have inherited, what we use — the conventions and customs which operate us and through which we have come to operate - through ironic echoing and scathing criticism. I mean obstruction... switching to I meant destruction.

situ/ation/come/dies holds a mirror to its reader. If one of the most effective modes of resistance and criticism is echoing, if not repeating verbatim what someone or something says, Cole's work may be (micro-) revolutions un-televised. Or truly tele-vised, in the sense that the text immediately reflects a signal shattered, problematically transmitted to the reader. Differences, abscesses and sutures are written by locating clichés and free-floating bad language within the space of the page where they find tension among reflexive commentary and analytically rigorous critique.

What I do find obscene is the sense that there is no escape from artificiality; that the plastic environment of noise and visual pollution ridden with cliché, overused phrases, overblown metaphors, overly sentimental and aphoristic fervor should not only be unquestioned but fully embraced.

Are we not all guilty of such obscenity, hosts parasitically attached to an inattentive, un-thoughtful, and convenient vernacular? To tentatively track such attachments through (out) and from (within) the work may be the transition from realization to knowledge, and from a fantasy (of) relationship to a real knowing that this universe is merely a version of what could be, that something must change, that we may continually start again — somewhere, anywhere, somehow. The word "politics" should indicate that there is no end, that nothing...
is complete, and that reality necessarily changes. Through Cole’s work a politi­
cal drama is enacted on the stage of the page. The conflicting players are the
words we said and that we did and didn’t never mean to say; what we did, what
happened, that may only now be being recognized. Emerging and making its
way.

*Italicized text sited from Cole’s books Postcards and situ / ation / come /
dies, as well as the Rust Talks Newsletter, published on-line at
epc.buffalo.edu/ezines/rust/8/index.

Jennifer Moxley, The Sense Record (Edge Books, 2002)
Reviewed by K. Silem Mohammad

"I can not thwart / Suspicion." This five-word sentence distributed
over two lines begins "Grain of the Cutaway Insight," the first poem in Jennifer
Moxley’s The Sense Record, and the five-to-two ratio might signal the broken
echoes of iambic pentameter—five feet, two syllables each—that pervade this
poem and others in the collection. Taken together, the two lines fuse into one
line of regular iambic tetrameter, and that measure is in turn suggested by the
distribution of words per line taken as yet another ratio: four-to-one (four feet,
one line). Moxley’s metrical ear is tuned to a beguilingly irregular rhythm, and
she freely begins and interrupts iambic sequences, continually shuffling the
beat just a half-breath ahead or behind of the melody, as in jazz. The effect is
alternately graceful and clumsy, as of a ballerina stumbling: "My thoughts are
too awkward, too erratic to rest / at ease in the beautiful iamb," she writes later
in the poem, and describes herself as "wanting [lacking? desiring?] otherworld-
ly metrics." For otherworldly, read Romantic, Wordsworthian, transcendent;
these are key registers in Moxley’s style, sometimes so dominant as to suggest
that her entire body of work is a skillfully naturalized collage of the Prelude.
(Although her intertextual webbing extends much further than that: in this one
poem there are references and allusions not only to Wordsworth, but to George
Oppen, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and arguably Archibald MacLeish and / or
Wallace Stevens.)

"Grain of the Cutaway Insight" looks on the page like a textbook sam­
ple of field composition: short sentence fragments stacked unevenly atop one
another in a slender cataract of bisected clauses. Its alignment, then, is visually
with New American Poetry, and sonically with nineteenth-century formal tradi-
tion, while on a third level, its poetic sensibility is firmly situated in a (post-)
Language-centered context. Starting with those first two lines quoted above,
the identity of the lyric "I" is aggressively staged and un-staged, tempting the
reader with apparent statements of desire, intent, and other modes of presence
only to keep that presence at a foggy arm’s length. This tactic is not new in
itself, of course: it is a distinguishing feature of abstract lyric from Stevens to
Ashbery to Language-affiliated writers like Michael Palmer and Lyn Hejinian.
Moxley’s poems, however, fuse abstract lyric with seemingly straightforward,
even confessional, verse monologue, as indebted to Wordsworth and Robinson
(for example) as to the modernist writers who themselves were responding to,
reacting to, and sometimes rejecting those earlier poets. In fact, one of
Moxley’s basic conceits is to write as though the break with the nineteenth cen-
tury had never happened, albeit in a mode which would not be possible without
that break.

This prescription ends the poem:

The poem therefore must be
a fit
condolence, a momentary
and ordered form of the emphatic
question, around which continues to gather,
despite habitual despair,
the moving
and needful Company of
thought, attentive
to existence, quiet and ever perpetual.

It would be easy to dismiss this sentence as luscious nonsense; it would also undoubtedly be possible to generate a number of more-or-less convincing analyses extracting something like a coherent message from it. The latter suggestion is naturally the more appealing, and yet there is a further complication: in a sense, the work of interpretation has already been done for us, pre-supplied by the poem’s conspicuously self-fashioned relation to the modernist tradition it simultaneously inherits and deconstructs. The message of the poem, in one way, is obviously something like “poetry is a subtle and necessary mode of perception,” and the obviousness of this gives the message a metadiscursive spin, making it something like “it is no longer possible merely to observe without irony that poetry is a subtle and necessary mode of perception.” And thus the message is stripped of irony—or is it? Et cetera.

Moxley’s voice is inscrutably literary, in the sense that, whereas there are many poets currently coming out of MFA programs with polished, anachronistic discursive styles whose assimilation of modernist predecessors like Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore is ludicrously empty, serving as no more than a marker of one’s entrance into a rarified aesthetic “marketplace,” here the effort is doubly surprising—it is surprising that she uses the register so skillfully, and it is surprising that she uses it in such a way as to throw into question whether we can dispense with the traditional effects of literary eloquence as hastily as some of us might want to. (Rebecca Wolff’s Manderley is another new book that challenges both tradition and knee-jerk reactions against tradition in similar ways.) Moxley writes from a position of sincere insincerity, “as though in this present I’ve nothing left, / no matter, no catalog, no poetry” (“The Second Winter”); her expertly pastiched persona is hollow, and knows it is hollow. But rather than go for the cheap pathos of positing this ironic self-knowledge as itself a form of metaphysical value, “as if / convenient nihilism could be transformed / to hearth and home” (“The Best American Poetry”), Moxley keeps the breach open, and never allows full identification of the speaker with any embodied reflective subject. Even when the poet speaks “as herself,” addressing someone in her life (her partner Steven Evans, poetic parent-figure Robert Creeley, et al.), and when she deploys positively historical deictics, the moment of reflection is itself always deferred just as it is coming into focus, much like that lagging iambic beat. “The moment / ‘I’ speaks I’m gone” (“To Those Who Would Equate the Public with Themselves”).

This is a book that repays close reading, in both the general and technical senses of that term, with insight and sensual pleasure. It is beautifully rhetorical. It wears its artifice proudly at the same time that it questions the very function and social value of artifice. The ambivalence it enacts makes it a text capable of engaging both those readers working with a relatively mainstream modernist vocabulary, and those who have sharpened their teeth largely on avant-garde responses to that vocabulary. This ambivalence, however, is not just a case of casting a wide net. Moxley writes in “sphere of generality / on content,” an open letter to the journal Open Letter (Eleventh Series, No. 3, Fall 2001) that “poets who adopt the formal devices of a previous generation inherit not only a particular way to break a line or make a stanza, but an entire stance—historical, geographical, political—towards their materials.” In Moxley’s own case as well, the adoption of by-now-archaic formal structures involves a certain commitment to content, that is, to the ways of treating subject matter which are possible when using one form and not another, and to the particular attitudes toward such content which must inevitably be summoned by superimposing oneself as poet against the images of one’s predecessors. Discussing Kevin Davies’ Comp, Moxley writes that “the poet’s power to judge is constantly undermined by the content of the world he has chosen to represent.” The world that Moxley chooses to represent has a similar but more complex effect on her status as observer, and on the knowledge which that observer is witnessed to possess: her evaluative capacity is not so much undermined as placed in multiple quotation marks, making it impossible to tell negatives from double negatives as textual subjectivity fades into the historical vanishing point. Unlike the subject in Davies’ nightmare world of contemporary market (un)reality, Moxley’s subject is not fractured into a pulverized state, but refracted into relatively intact microcosmic splinters of identity.

In "Fixed Idea," a poem about an injured bird (!), Moxley strikes a Shelleyesque pose, apostrophizing the badly mutilated creature:

Bird, demi-bird,
half-phantom torso in wind-wave suspension,
your invisible freedom is not arbitrary. Nor will my myriad recastings exempt us from the obligation of picking one single, totalizing life.

Here as elsewhere, Moxley signals her awareness that the poetic gesture is always an ethical gesture, and one that requires a committed politics, whether personal or social; and yet, by referencing her own "myriad recastings," even to affirm that they will not provide an escape hatch, she raises the suspicion that this moment itself might be one of those recastings, rather than a privileged moment of authorial reflection outside of the text (as though such a thing were possible). The sentimental expectations that attend the poem’s occasion are similarly juggled when the poet (ironically?) indexes her allegiance to an anti-
sentimental poetic: "I have no natural compassionate impulse and / therefore believe I have swallowed the key." Writing the poem's moral insolubility into its compositional moment, she negotiates a context, however contingent and conditional, within which compassion finds a voice despite that deadlock.

All of this raises problems even as it impresses, and it is not clear that in every case Moxley has succeeded fully in achieving the "sincerity" which she cites as a necessary if not sufficient condition of poetry in her open letter, or whether she has sometimes fallen into the trap of writing "in the persona of the person she wishes she were" (to paraphrase her comments in that letter), rather than satisfying the demand placed upon the poet to "remain independent in the art." Occasionally, as in "Fixed Idea," the motif of displaced subjectivity can come off as a kind of dodge, and the tone of some poems comes off as slightly precious. There is considerable fascination, however, in watching even the feints and postures of a truly gifted poet. And if The Sense Record is an imperfect exercise, it is nevertheless the best kind of imperfection: that which comes from taking risks and going in uncertain directions in the service of one's art.
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