FOOTHILL

a journal of poetry



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Diversity Training

It has been an enormous pleasure to learn—based on the handful of aggravated e-mails I've received regarding last issue's Editor's Note (about evaluating "goodness" in poetry)—that some of you actually read these things.

Though I'd written that the note was "not a manifesto," some thought that by cheerleading "innovation," criticizing the most (in)famous statement in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (for shame!), and quoting at length Charles Bernstein—one of those [gasp] Language Poets—that I had planted the journal's flag in the name of the literary progeny of "the two Steins," as Joshua Clover has it: Gertrude Stein and Wittgenstein.

Whatever one might say about the merits of my aesthetic tastes, that a few of you blame the journal for them compels me to respond and hopefully clarify.

I do admire the poetry and criticism of Bernstein and friends, but that hardly means theirs is the only brand of poetry I care for or cite. And in matters of poetic taste, I certainly don't speak for every ... actually, *any*one on the staff, several of whom disdain Bernstein's poetry.

But the diversity of opinion that exists among us is why (if you'll allow me to speak for them now) we all deeply appreciate working on this journal.

The arguments that inevitably arise at editors' meetings over submissions we like or dislike are generally waged on behalf of schools of thought we've been trained to recapitulate and usually as a consequence of little more than circumstance. I, more often than I care to admit, catch myself in moments of persuasive failure trying to champion submissions on the grounds of—and by poorly paraphrasing—statements heard semesters back from various favorite professors.

You don't realize the unoriginality of your convictions until you hear yourself defending them. But this self-consciousness is a steady first step in overcoming the anxiety-of-influence hangover and hazarding expansions in taste. These editors meetings are laboratories for aesthetic reevaluation—the more we disagree, the deeper the education.

I'm not saying there is anything wrong with conviction. I still think Billy Collins's poetry is embarrassingly trite in comparison to Joseph Brodsky's—both US Poet Laureates within 10 years of each other. But there has never been more up for grabs in poetry than there is today. Never have the guardians of poetic taste exerted less control over such an eclectic and decentralized landscape of possibility for goodness and innovation. For a journal like ours, aesthetic tolerance is fundamental. It ensures that our sensibilities are elastic enough to appreciate the necessarily unsettling claims made by innovative and—yes—good poetry.

I recently came across this statement from Stephen Burt on the Boston Review website: "William Empson wrote, and he was right, 'You must rely on the individual poem to tell you the way in which it is trying to be good.' But you must also decide whether you can believe it, and on what foundation (tacit or explicit) that belief stands. Debates about poems tend to rise, like hot-air balloons, to become debates about aesthetics, about assumptions, about what sort of programs and goals for poems a reader or critic would like to accept. I try to accept as many as I can: as many as the individual poems I read persuade me to accept."

I hope you will agree that the poems in this and past issues embody Burt's critical generosity. The pages they're printed on are our flag's emblem.

And in hopes of extending this education beyond our meeting table, we hope you'll grab a tall drink and join the argument on our new blog qua digital salon: *Foothill After Hours* at www. foothillafterhours.com.

Kevin Riel Editor-in-Chief

POEMS

CAMERON AVESON

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO MFA CREATIVE WRITING

To the Horse I Rode up to Kennedy Pass

The frayed lead rope in my calloused hand, what was plant and sun spun into tether, old light woven into taught cord tied to your chin.

I slide the saddle off your back for the last time, soaked from a day of storm and sweat breaking. Your leg swings beneath you, a pendulum of bone

chips and blood, clotted red furrows of upturned skin plowed across your cheeks and your belly. I've been writing this since I killed you, since

I placed the gun barrel into the darkness above your eyes where my tense hand had been circling the wide black plain of your forehead

trying to hypnotize death or you or me, to find comfort in the round repetition of soft words.

A crippled poem, this one, I want to shoot it instead,

because it's not the sound of the bullet or the breaking or your body or our breath collapsing into buckthorn, the dull weight dropping

onto soil that rises for a moment, a thin blanket covering both of us, these words like dusk releasing its fingers from the coat-tails of the day.

EMILY BARTON

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY MFA CREATIVE WRITING

edge of the mudflats at midnight $\, \Psi \,$



the hushed backdrop falls, hits, leaves (restless green upon green), murky shells dig into bare skin, comb for etymology of peninsula tides; misled borders collide, project order like paper cuts archived as scars.

scan too far: forgotten tributes for monuments of daily worship, the way moon sets offshore, reflects the light from elsewhere-coded steps, silent syllables, taken, granted.

leaves—return dusted fossils, mausoleums for the ancient; beyond, galleried shorelines repeat with lighted bodies passing in waves.

JASON BRAUN

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, EDWARDSVILLE MA ENGLISH

Portrait of My Father Ψ



A wooden bear shelved always above my reach, I could only see his ears covered in headphones. I grew straight and branched my hand to top his head. His smile tendered in time with twitch of bass boom and thoughts of god's sharps and flats that carved his heart, tapped two nails into his chest thirty odd years ago.

JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Voice

I am a cubist first and an American second

generally I avoid the rainfall sometimes I drift into a

general dissidence is in the apartment window you were

there for the most part does it necessarily matter

if in the end there are two ways of looking at it

the scarcity of verse the relative ease with which

we shift into the stop and noiselessness is a virtually

all of the aforementioned so what? What is the relevance?

do you mean to say it is redundant? Well, say it, quit

dancing around the fog and rain the rooftops can only

take so much of what has passed for art, an apology

would be too much of an admittance continue to set do tab

outside there is hierarchy I am a cubist first

and an American second generally I avoid the rainfall

JOCELYN HEATH

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY PHD CREATIVE WRITING

Swallowtails by the Shenandoah

A fleet of pale golden sails, vessels run aground on the river's edge:

two dozen bodies moor to the silt, and each proboscis threads through the grains,

desperate for the minerals washed off these Appalachian slopes.

The river's low this year. Meadows weep dead petals

onto the tongues of cattle. The hills' shade can't relieve

the longing—the receded shores paced by countless feet, waiting.

In a week, these drying pebbles could be submerged or parched.

In two, these butterflies will be dying as each new chrysalis erupts,

the feather-shine of the fallen ground into dust.

NATHAN CHARLES LIPPS

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Belladonna on the Farm



At dawn the great grandfather left to deal with crows in the field. He had prepared a wash tin of chucked corn soaking overnight in arsenic. This morning he consecrated the soil with hallowed kernels, with bare hands. And then watched the feast from beneath an alder tree. Watched realization ignite in clumsy wings. Watched the leaping tremble of death stretch out across the purple screen. Watched the crashing of feathers, of plumage crying out from within the shadows of stalks, from within the shade of fence posts his father built a thousand years ago. Watched the fox and wolf gather. And clapping his hands, walking home.

Recalling the Innocence of Asparagus Ψ



I walk these quiet streets in happiness. And in happiness I recall former sorrow, and former happiness.

Slowly—not with patience, but with capture with push of sun in that heavy drought, with osmosis of blood and soil and solicitous yearning— I greet the gentle fern and mark the collected days upon my back.

How those greens leap from the hills, from the maternal nipple of the fields beside the field-hands' low sweeping praying for the root, for the sky sending of sea, for the bed of seed to moan and yelp at noontide. And I see father at the hearthstone burning the lentils for the sake of smoke, for the sake of not smelling the jaundiced earth under his nails. And I hear the loud weeping and popping of green in the oven of his acreage, over the blue exaltations of unmarked graves plowed through and furiously planted upon.

How silent this city tonight! When, in a muffled breath, manmade temperaments of steels and asphalts melt away in this sudden rain revealing pure mouths and limbs

along sidewalks and smiling gutters and and beneath this purple dew blinking in the occasional street light.

Slowly, not in distaste, with lack of taste with the non-tasting of starlight, with the lust for oceanic neon dripping from my beard, my loins, with this gray hand I touch everything, returning in portions those everythings we wed ourselves to, and reach out to, and trembling call out to—death, or love, or cold sweat in waking coitus, or baby breath in the cluster of imperial roses arranged along discarded fragments of autumnal asparagus fern.

In unison, in communally shared solar flares—when that anticipated harvest arrives, knocks on backdoors of schoolhouses and high-situated windows of churches, and vacant courthouses and rings the many bells for more hands, from everywhere, hands becoming dulled shovels, knives, braided sacks of collected spring water, becoming the morning zephyr burning the sleeping bones of my naked face—we approached the firmament of those infinite rows.

And then winter. And then spring. And then dying for the sensual dance of summer.

I search myself in those days—
A fractured palm, outstretched, attached to the spinning door of the sun, living and trying to live with, in the crooked arms of a land, in a quietly forgotten plot, in the concordant breathing of a single field.

Death on the Farm



Who has set the alarm? Who has tucked away the seed? Why the march at dawn? Why this hurry this sucking of wax from comb and spitting and spitting upon the earth?

I go this way daily, I carry everything this way, the succinct ropes of the wind, the crying yellow stones—their dry tears liven the world, cause us to feel the spin. Spinning, driving the spade in, stomping, again, again deeper. And finding in searching, beneath the constant roots, the blind moles and citizens of dirt, what, what morsel of solace, what settled groan will roll from this furrow and shake my hand?

Too much. I need your arms, your back. And tell me, name this lowering cloud that harnesses my heart to every heart.

Cloud of rain? Cloud of light and bang? First cloud of fall, of chop and gather? Cloud of echo? Cloud of your echo.

Each night I sleep with the sun. Slip her beneath my pillow, between my thighs, so not to see her in day, so not to feel her terrible warmth. Leave me the cold wet of decay. The ancient potato cellar, the kingdom of snails, of slugs,

of invented witches brew—a holy tunnel without end. Let me only wander the endless rows of this field. Let only the newly grown be tall enough to blind, the leaves sharp enough to cut away all strength. Let me only awake and work this field alongside a million broken hands and slow hearts collectively toiling through oblivion toward the constant weeping of the rocks.

RACHEL MILLIGAN

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Why Are Your Pockets Inside My Pockets?

I laid myself to rest inside the moment before the thunder broke, inside the warm, blue-gray

room that is before the thunder broke. I never stopped drawing your body, you didn't let me

finish my sentence. I never stopped drawing the feathered edge of the first time I touched a girl,

the slipshod finagling that dots our lives in teal bursts, the dismissal of "secret" bones. We all

know what glistening means. I drew your body as a net for leaves, as indecipherable shuffling on the

forest floor. I drew your body as a cloud, as the noses of the mice that cloud the floor. Here is

a life rendered in linen and intimate knowledges. When I close my eyes, I am a tiny person inside

my skull, and I am not kidding. The ozone smell is a shell inside a shell. He said, this house is nobody's

house, were you listening? I am learning to breathe. I am making sense of the subordinate life. The

shaded road. I promise to be with you when you die. To divide the mind like a river. I do.

Ian Trapped A Bee Under A Pint Glass In His Bedroom For Three Days And Then Let It Out On The Porch And Watched It Die. Does He Have A Right To Give Me Advice?

Yesterday, you decided to keep me in a stable for the rest of our lives.

You wouldn't tell me what I said in your dream, but I saw my lips

forming around words like two fat worms, like my hands like a baby's

hands. If I was there when the bee was released, does that change any-

thing? Ian & I have never met. He's an exhibit in a museum. You, you

are the chapped crow. You leave me alone to think about everything I've

ever done. You kiss my dark ear tips. You sit on my legs to keep me from

walking. In the stable, I sit on my own legs. I sit on crime-scene lines. I sit

on purple remnants of fire in the fire pit. I sit like a mountain sits. In the

dream, I amble toward the sun. On the bus, I see a woman with a croco-

dile face. I see a schoolgirl holding a goldfish in a bag. I see you. I shut

my eyes. I step toward the setting sun. I get on the bus. I leave town.

RACHEL NEWLON

NAROPA UNIVERSITY MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Membrane •



We'd stand and stare at the absent space between toes Number Two and Three on

both her feet. Skin stretched tight attaching the digits together like Siamese twins.

You should name the twins I'd say.

She giggled at my suggestion, swatting the idea out of the air with pudgy fingers.

Her conjoined twins.

She wiggled and they twitched together like synchronized swimmers. I told her they made her run faster, swim longer, kick harder. She believed her big sister and swore she would never separate them.

They're close, like us.

ALEX RIESER

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCICSCO MFA CREATIVE WRITING

Found in Want

At odds over best methods I am considering taking pleasure—she folds, I fold verbatim. First time there's the one

already sunk on want.
Oaths like beings
found in it, mint
the nose, the mouth:
rescue-ships
sailing the opposite direction.

Disorder choreographed shape
I imitate, my pieces from hers
the sudden revelation of the shape;
thin edge of being
more—this is how we learn
each other
in two parts,
legs she fashioned
under the torso so

that I can tell you what I know of dismemberment: where the jaw-line begun. When others need be described she must be enacted so that shape translates still a preparation how she chooses to be loved.

JOSH STRABLE

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY PHD PLANT BIOLOGY

for speedier clotting

instead of fusion there is confusion, collision of emotion, deserted by reason,

the pipe is punctured

now redundant tension gushes wet skin, electric skins, over folded bones pray

for speedier clotting

mental facts of mental life.

mental facts of mental life. its *vertical* aspect—inclined

planes webbed in illusion. dictionary definition: an

a posteriori psychological reality, who actually uses it, intersects in it.

a selective code; semantic space the richer. hard lump under skin,

young wine on the tongue, stable and subject to change, to change

MILA TANGIER

MCNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY MFA CREATIVE WRITING, MA ENGLISH

Noctilucae

There we are, swimming in the sea at night, amidst all these bright dark things. Our fanning limbs awaken their blue flickers through the black water. They lamp against our skin, with color like lightning, a flash of mock day, when the sky tries to hold in her gasps during the churn of a storm. It reveals how precisely we are not from here, how grace goes bite for bite with calamity, with a catch, that fight before final clasp and the teethed win.

You are pulled down to the most desperate of trenches, where anglerfish conduct feeble sweeps, to make sure that every inch of ocean floor is intact, despite the shadows. Here you find the unlikely pomegranate, split and wet with rubied seeds. You place a fleshed petal on your tongue, and calculate just how far you've been prized away from the sun. You forget that blaze upon the surface of the waves as you eat each seed, every lustered bite.

CAROLINE O'CONNOR THOMAS

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA MFA CREATIVE WRITING

The Biggest Small

He points to his own wrist, indicating others bare bones coming to in a sloppy flourish.

I think he is indicating time. To this day, I think he is indicating time. Beating

with an impatient measure, he says all eyes and nothing and moves along—

pale silence of the hall, my rabbit heart gone rabid

in strange waves like seconds sunken, love pushed open in the wake

while distant winters peel sun from the days.

Small Hunger

what can you do when your life is small like laundry? broken bones calling from the living room, footless birds, of which there were two pecking and hemming, four eyes blank as desert and hungry.

SEAN ZHURAW

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MFA CREATIVE WRITING

The Room Adjacent,

I am in it. The piano replacing iamb, / silence: iamb then—I get it / shellacking the hand-warming sense / of the space. Every word, I / hear, has an under-whisper: / I think it the same music / as uttered just, but to one listen is to lose / the other which I can / with my prized attendant who turns / all that is not / the score in favor / one claimed like / an impulse towards below the crown / I cannot see my past the / piano. My brain blood is windowed thin / by the stabbing offered / through composition / taken, not of mine, / the beats which re-stanza the between / ear-folding phantom—but I let it / narrate my movement. I haven't lived / very long in my eardrum. I'd self / for hours just to be a close-ridden dreg. / I'd attend to. / I sound the pulse alarm as a hive and return to / the room that does not change my own, or we taken. / The speakers in my head are broken. That is, they have spoken.

Background Noise to Such Obsession

I think recording me he / has been my telephone my walls
I write mine / on / on recording origin of I wall who all started

No howing this / this conversation this stake exchange / string ever Here backwards a miming wherefrom a station enters / as to continue

It gotten down were enough to tell it / taken off / away eyes lost About what panning room makes focus of index of headline opening

Opposite a / Jack I not your old voice / actuator for for then for I, / I Recorded over the day / I happened / a response to my exit

My grand entire / until to you tonight I own / the dark I robe / a wait Reckoned circles / depict the cavern of the making / I person / persons

Second / to settle path as I think / one is following me / me he is if He is if he would chance give / him my kill / though still you talk

Talk, you, to newly the divided / cells to line I separates / receiver From congealed ichor / I / do not say that / would you say

Go back for back / for a single room / would know how he loves Me / my object / me as room adjoins the exit he / can be so calm When he knows what I am going though / to worry not my mop / it

Happens / the leaning / the be / the all the outage because / we know you

Know the capture of no source sound in room soon upticks the hands the Hands he has not seen for day and for day / the hands he sets to capture

ABIGAIL ZIMMER

COLUMBIA COLLEGE, CHICAGO MFA POETRY

Again **∮**

in another room hunger lays its head

in my lap

tacit need I set teeth against

if I traced on paper my open hand

it would fall clenched

over night

(when I say it's ok I mean

you are not the first

to ask. You are cherries in May)

some days are whole (hollow) hell

held together by the boy

at the bus stop who sings inaudibly

-

hand all to a stranger

as one would hand out a slice of pie

saying this is not what you are looking for

but it was made this morning

ART

KELSEY KIMMEL

CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY MFA STUDIO ART

iSolated INFINITE

I explore the relationship between human borders and digital space. The porous borders between these entities shape contemporary culture and identity. Amid the digital current, I find myself overstimulated, fighting to stay afloat through multitasking, immediacy, and cramming. My sculptural installations investigate how I see, experience, interact with, and react to digital space. I reorganize the relationship between insides and outsides, invading rather than surrounding the space in which our bodies function. By popping people's "space bubbles" with material and projected forms, I invite visitors to be physically self-aware, to navigate and inhabit the installation's negative space with heightened perceptual acuity.

Daily interactions inspire and guide the way I unite materials. I work with various media because I experience the world in two- and three-dimensional fragments that are constantly shifting. To unite and manipulate these ideas I create "glitches," seemingly errors that, for me, function because of their imperfection. By creating moments when the boundary between the real world and the virtual world is ambiguous, I confound narrative order and purpose. What exists is raw potential: remnants, traces, excess, colors, pixels. Content is no longer actual content.

The following images are from Kimmel's MFA Thesis Exhibition, *isolated INFINITE*. The show ran from March 4-8, 2013 in Claremont Graduate University's Peggy Phelps Gallery. For more information on Kimmel, visit her website: www.kelseykimmelart.com.



Conjunction Junction 10' x 8' x 1' Projection on styrofoam 2013

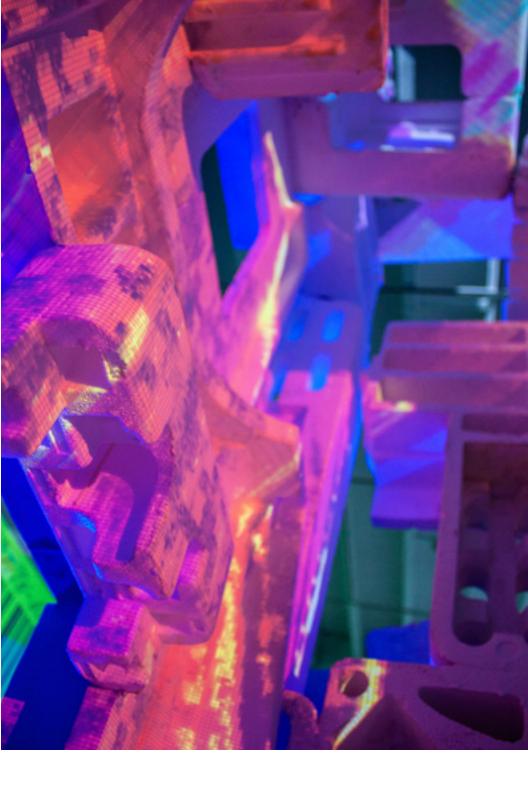




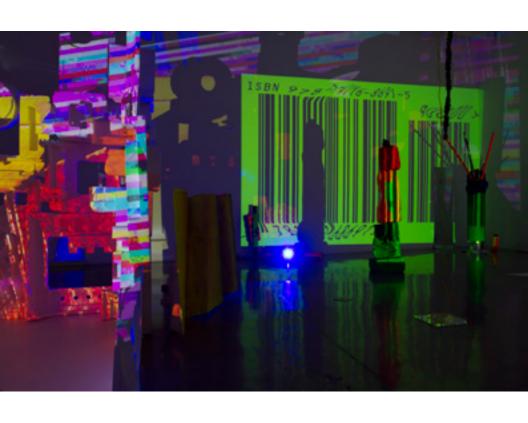


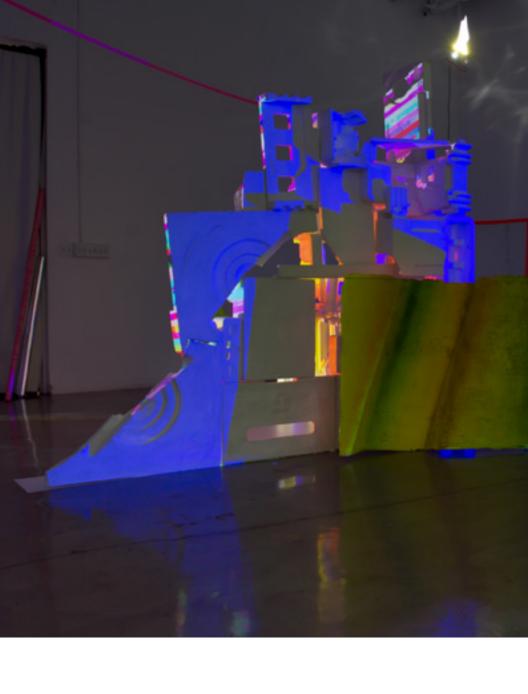
Conjunction Junction and Wrinkle in Time, Installation view, mixed media, 2013

Conjunction Junction Detail $10' \times 8' \times 1'$ Projection on styrofoam 2013



Untitled
Installation view
Mixed media
2013







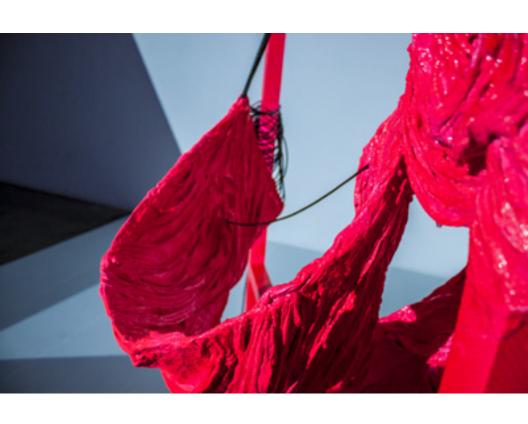
Untitled, Installation view, mixed media, 2013

Wrinkle in Time

3' x 5' x 2' Wood, plaster, chicken wire, epoxy, spray paint, white projection through mylar, and QR code printed on transparent inkjet paper, rubber, contact paper 2013



Wrinkle in Time Detail 3' x 5' x 2' Wood, plaster, chicken wire, epoxy, spray paint, white projection through mylar, and QR code printed on transparent inkjet paper, rubber, contact paper 2013



Wrinkle in Time Detail 3' x 5' x 2' Wood, plaster, chicken wire, epoxy, spray paint, white projection through mylar, and QR code printed on transparent inkjet paper, rubber, contact paper 2013







 ${\it Untitled}, {\it Installation view}, {\it mixed media}, 2013$

Glitched Totem 1' x 6' x 1' Polyurethane rigid foam, pigment, silicone 2013







Untitled, Installation view, mixed media, 2013

INTERVIEW

BRENT ARMENDINGER



Brent Armendinger is both a poet and a teacher. He was born in the small town of Warsaw, NY and studied at Bard College and the University of Michigan, where he received an Avery Hopwood Award for Poetry. He is the author of two chapbooks, Archipelago (Noemi Press, 2009) and Undetectable (New Michigan Press, 2009), and his work has appeared in many journals. This summer, he will be an artist in residence at the Headlands Center for the Arts. His full-length manuscript, currently

titled The Elsewhere Radio, will be published by Noemi Press in 2014. He is an assistant professor of English and world literature at Pitzer College and lives in Los Angeles.

Foothill: We wanted to start by commenting on your website, which is how we first became exposed to your poetry and decided we really wanted to interview you. Lots of poets have websites now, though they are all a little different. For instance, you include a number of writing prompts and conceptual projects you use to generate work. Did you have a specific strategy in mind when you built your website? Do you have any practical advice for a graduate-student poet looking to set one up? Has the payoff been commensurate with all the work you have put into building and maintaining it?

Armadinger: I'm glad to hear that you picked out my tiny string of binary code from the crowd. I'm no web designer—I just used a simple Tumblr form and bought my own name, which is a bizarre thing to contemplate. I was invited to do a reading in Los Angeles, and I noticed that the other readers had links to their websites, so I thought maybe it would be a good idea. It gives the audience a larger sense of who you are as a writer—you can direct them to your publications, as well as give props to the journals, presses, writers, and artists you admire and believe deserve attention. You can also speak about your intentions, but of course these are always evolving and undoing themselves. The painter Agnes Martin said, "I don't talk about art work because I don't think it is expressible," and to a large extent I agree. In terms of the prompts, I was inspired by the artist Harrell Fletcher, who has a list of projects on his website that

he invites others to finish. I am always having ideas for things I want to do while I am in the middle of some other project, and I suppose I put them up on my website to both remind myself and to also give them away. I hope that the website helps some people find their way to my work, but I have no idea whether or not there's been a "payoff." That being said, the work that's gone into it has been extremely minimal.

FH: What other digital platforms have you used to circulate your work (i.e. social media, blogs, etc.)? Because many of the conceptual projects you describe on your website use various situations, settings, and places to encourage production, have you considered using digital spaces like Twitter to spur your writing? Are there other digital frontiers that interest you as spaces for poetry?

BA: I don't consider myself to be all that savvy when it comes to digital media. I have a hard time engaging with it in a meaningful way, to be honest. I often feel disconnected when I'm online—I actually find that the whole thing just gets in the way of the kind of openness and receptivity I want to cultivate in myself when I am writing. There are people I admire who do really innovative and exciting work with it, however—there's Matias Viegener's 2500 Random Things about Me Too, for instance, which was composed entirely on Facebook. There is also Bhanu Kapil's amazing blog, Was Jack Kerouac a Punjabi?, which seems to me utterly present and alive. It seems like we are too often communicating at each other on the Internet, and work like this makes room for a kind of reciprocity. But for now, it's just not something I feel very capable of. I am, however, very interested in disappearing technologies. In the PoemBooth Project, for instance, I gather raw material for collaborative poems from recordings people leave on a public telephone. (You can call the hotline at 1-877-EAT-POEM). When I first started doing this project, I was struck by the way people's voices wavered and stumbled, by the raw unedited humanness of it. So yes, I'm interested in what parts of us get through these technologies that are harder to experience in writing alone.

FH: One of your conceptual projects in particular, Mi Cartógrafo, we are especially interested in hearing about. On your website you write: "I spent the fall of 2011 and the summer of 2012 in Buenos Aires, working on a project I'm calling 'Mi Cartógrafo,' which consists of my 'ambulatory translations' of poems by local writers in public space. For every word I didn't understand, I made myself walk the number of blocks corresponding to the line in which that word appeared. Then, I stopped and asked someone what the word meant to them—not only its definition. After that I sat down, usually in a doorway, and wrote from that word and the ways in

which it corresponded to my surroundings. In this way, the poem pulled me through the streets, asking me to interact with the city and its inhabitants in a way I would not otherwise. I am interested in the ways in which a poem might be an echo of the place in which it was written." Where did the idea for this project come from and how much work did it yield? How often do you use invented situations or encounters to generate poetry?

BA: I'm not sure exactly where this idea came from, which I suppose is why I trust it. What I can say is that I traveled to Buenos Aires in 2011 to work with Eloisa Cartonera—a collective of writers and activists who make very simple, inexpensive, beautiful books out of cardboard that they buy from the people who collect it on the street. Since I was already in Buenos Aires, I decided to do a writing project there, and the idea for Mi Cartógrafo came to me. I've always been interested in site-specific work and unconventional ways of understanding geography. I like that while translating these poems, I was made to do something with my body. It felt important that I give up some of my own autonomy as a North American engaged in the complicated act of translation. I'm very interested in the idea that words are physical and that language is actually embedded in the street somehow. I'm thinking here of the artist Joseph Grigely, who writes, "Imagine if every word we spoke became palpable and dropped from our lips as we spoke."

Of course, the project still seems fraught to me, and I've had many ideas about how I'd do it differently—what's been helpful is to write that failure into the work itself. I've also had all sorts of conceptual ideas while walking the streets, like making a vow to paint inside the shadow cast on a building every year on my birthday—and these are also entering the text. I have several notebooks full of thoughts and scraps of conversation for each intersection I was taken to—lots of raw material. I'm now turning those notes into prose poems, and that's a much slower process.

At a recent event, Anne Carson said my middle name should be Parameter—that's probably the best flatterbarb I've ever received. I guess as I've become more mature as I writer, I've come to see poetry as something that's the result of multiple attempts at sifting. It's not necessary to be so methodical about it—Robert Duncan, for instance, was doing that all in the single moment of holding his pen to paper. But I think procedures can be helpful. When I lived in San Francisco, I went to the Zen Center often, and I came to love all the forms and the bowing. I think we all need help getting out of our own way, if that makes sense. I am still very much in my own way, of course—but I think the procedures help me see that more readily.

FH: Some of the conceptual projects listed on your website almost seem to be equal parts writing prompts and performance art. Do you think of them in this way? Do you always segregate artistic process from product, or are there ways—with audio/video recording, photography, etc.—they can inhabit the same finished work of art?

BA: This is such a great question. Maybe I'm just a closet conceptual artist with no actual artmaking skills! I love language, but I also distrust it, and I distrust myself with it, so I've invented situations that I hope help me to be a little more honest. All of this is still rather new for me—I've only really been exploring outside the field of the page for about 10 years. I would like to think that process and product are not separated in my work. In Mi Cartógrafo, for example, my "definitions" for the words I didn't originally know interrupt the standard translation of the poem, and the intersections are identified—I do want the reader to have a sense of the process, of the way the poem spread out for me. I'd like to strike a balance between opening up the process for my reader and letting some things fall away. I have so much raw material for this particular project that I will probably not use all of it. I'd like to think it's okay—maybe even necessary—for this kind of loss to enter the practice of writing.

FH: We publish a lot of poetry by graduate students in creative writing MFA programs who would eventually like to teach at the undergraduate level. Of course, it is no secret that gigs like yours are hard to land. Can you discuss anything other than writing excellent poetry that MFA students can do to make themselves more marketable to universities? Do you regard the MFA as more of an artistic apprenticeship rather than professional training?

BA: I know so many amazing writers, most of whom are also gifted teachers, who do not have a job like I do. It's humbling, to say the least. I love what I get to do for a living, but it is not the only way to be a writer in the world. I don't think this gets stressed enough in MFA programs, and I find it dishonest and unfair. So many promising writers believe they will have only "arrived" when they get a job in academia. The world needs poets to be everywhere—in the classroom, absolutely, but also in the hospital, the laboratory, the courtroom, the grocery store, the farm, the library, everywhere. I got my MFA because I wanted two years to be immersed in poetry. I had no idea I would also love teaching so much and actually be pretty good at it—I am incredibly grateful that it is such a part of my life today.

FH: Why did you choose to get an MFA over a PhD? Were there specific pragmatic considerations that led to your decision? Given the proliferation of MFA programs just in the past decade, would you recommend them to any of your undergraduate students who would like to follow a similar career path to yours?

BA: It was five years after undergrad that I decided to get my MFA. I was in a private workshop in San Francisco at the time, and my teacher said that I should go for it. She told me to only go where they would pay me a stipend because nobody should go into debt in order to be a poet. I got into the University of Michigan, where I worked with amazing poets like Thylias Moss, Anne Carson, and Linda Gregerson, and I was a graduate student assistant for David Halperin's fabulously controversial "How to Be Gay." I was in a really supportive, talented cohort of writers—I'm still close to many of them. This was in 2001, before the big push for writers to get the PhD—it wasn't even on my radar, and I doubt that I would have survived it. What do I recommend to my undergrads? I tell them to go get an MFA if they are ready to really challenge themselves as writers for two years and to be supported doing so. I tell them not to do it because they want a job. It may indeed happen, but that is not the reason to get an MFA. I tell them to travel, to intern at small presses, to go to summer writing conferences, to take communitybased workshops, to remember—again—that there are many ways of being a writer in the world.

FH: Is teaching English and creative writing something you always wanted to do or simply the next best thing to being a full-time poet, which, of course, is a profession only the independently wealthy can afford? Does teaching make you a better poet?

BA: I think that teaching is a part of my spirit, and it has definitely made me a better poet. I am much more attentive to my own habits with language after spending so much time responding to student work. I'm also interested in the idea that teaching is a kind of poetry. Part of what a teacher does is make space for poetry to be in the world. I think the impulses that guide me as a writer also inform my teaching—that engagement with risk and unknowing, that abiding of liminal space. I would be so bored if I were a full-time poet, and I would probably be a bad poet too! My students teach me things all the time. They are capable of doing things with language that I simply can't, and being witness to that is one of the best things about my job. As a teacher, I think it's really important to point to what's valuable in an unfinished piece of writing, while also helping the student to push it deeper into what it wants to become. As a

teacher I face the same question that I do as a poet—what does it take to honestly communicate, to ethically respond to the facts of another life?

There are, of course, many ways of being a teacher and many ways of confronting these questions. Before and after I got my MFA, I lived in San Francisco, where I had many jobs: I was an adjunct at several different colleges, I taught a workshop for senior citizens, I worked at a health food co-op, an HIV services agency, a bookstore, an organic farm, and a vegetarian café that doubled as a queer cabaret.

FH: As with being a professor, the graduate-student workload is prohibitive. How do you keep from getting burnt out and stay creative? Do you keep regular writing hours?

BA: I try to devote the first part of the morning to writing. It's not easy, of course, given that my work as a professor can sometimes feel more "urgent." But I have to remind myself that my students need me to be engaged in my own creative work, and I certainly need it for my sense of aliveness. I also swim—not enough at all, but I find it necessary, how you can't really do anything but concentrate on breathing. I know so many poets who swim. There should be an anthology about this, or at least a panel at AWP. Maybe we could hold it in the hotel pool.

FH: On your website you have a link to an article on the history of chapbooks from *Jacket Magazine* by Noah Eli Gordon, which he ends by stating: "The chapbook, in its momentary focusing and sculpting of the reader's attention, is the perfect vehicle for poetry." As the author of two chapbooks, *Undetectable* and *Archipelago*, what are the advantages of publishing in this medium? Do you agree that it is an especially beneficial vehicle for poetry?

BA: I love that article. I put it there because most people outside of the land of poetry don't seem to know what a chapbook is or why it's important. I tell folks that it's the poetry equivalent of the short film. You can do something inside that concentrated space that's not possible in a longer medium. When you think about it, it's somewhat of an analogue for the impulse of poetry towards distillation. The poems in *Undetectable* are of a singular focus—the body and its precariousness—and for this reason the chapbook seems a fitting form. *Archipelago* has a more contemplative and theoretical bent, and the poems revolve around the experience of longing. A chapbook is a great way for emerging poets to get their work out into the world, but there are plenty of established writers publishing chapbooks because they are attracted to the form itself.

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