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From Corset to Podcast: The Question of Poetry Now

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Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959–1995, Chris Funkhouser. University of Alabama Press, 2007.

One Kind of Everything: Poem and Person in Contemporary America, Dan Chiasson. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Observing the claims for poetry is a curious pastime. It's like going to the zoo and seeing a preening cockatoo, a slumbering leopard, and a camouflaged toad in successive glimpses. No wonder Marianne Moore's fastidiously poetic temperament was most keenly invested in a menagerie. For all its variety, a zoo remains a selection, an anthology of animal life. Anthologies fitfully persist in the poetry world, of course, but nearing the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century it seems unlikely that anything resembling the "anthology wars" of fifty years ago will erupt again. One reason is demographic. In 1960, when the two anthologies famously duked it out[1]—the American population was 178 million. With the figure now over 300 million, you would expect it would take at least four anthologies (with no overlap of contents) to begin to replicate that distant moment when the Beats and other outsiders clamored at the gates of official verse culture. But such a simple numerical calculation is misleading: one would also have to factor in the vast increase in the percentage of the collage educated population, and within that educated portion, one would have to take into account the graduates of creative writing programs (of which there are now over four hundred in the US, nearly all established in the past forty years). There are other reasons that make a return of the anthology wars unlikely. Demographic proliferation of poets has been accompanied by a corresponding proliferation of constituencies. The old paradigm of insiders and outsiders, establishment figures and renegades, makes little sense now. Finally, we should bear in mind the hugely transformative advent of the Internet. It may not yet be the first place we turn to find poetry, but the validity of this sentence has an expiration date looming up rapidly. Three recent publications help

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bring the poetry zoo into focus, if not always for the reasons they intend.

Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form, by David Caplan. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Among the virtues of David Caplan's *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form* (2005) is his concern to debunk the malignant view that aesthetic conservatism is politically retrograde. In a specious formula, the whalebone corset was abandoned even before flappers made the scene, yet sonnets continue to be written. Citing Marilyn Hacker's "belief that 'traditional' forms need not advance reactionary politics" (72), Caplan makes a convincing case that "During the last two decades, gay and lesbian poets have dominated the art of the love sonnet" (62). Caplan is aware, of course, that "gay and lesbian" are code words in academia generally for *progressive*, so his profile of metrics in the gay community pointedly complicates the picture by including sado-masochism as a formal prerogative. "My soul-animal prefers the choke-chain," in Henri Cole's memorable line (qtd in Caplan 78). Caplan's profile of metrical aids to sexual politics make this particular chapter stand out (a high point being his discussion of Rafael Campo's sonnet "Safe Sex"), but this is nicely integrated into the book as a whole, which offers a useful assessment of the delicate balance poets face when confronting volatile, disturbing, and otherwise complex subjects in the late twentieth century, a time when the reigning ideology of self-expression maligned formalism as an impediment to authenticity, and free verse was embraced as the golden road to well-being.

As Caplan documents, poets choose forms for many reasons: to stimulate the verbal imagination (like Scrabble or crossword puzzles), as a pact of solidarity with predecessors, as a strategic means of disabling habits and the lazy solutions, and even just for the hell of it (Elizabeth Bishop called the sestina "a sort of stunt" [qtd in Caplan 21]). But *Questions of Possibility* is most interested in *possibility* as socio-cultural reckoning; one cannot help but sense Caplan's entire project concentrated in a single anecdote:

> In 1919, just as Eliot foresaw the sonnet's demise, the members of an all-black railroad dining-room crew wept when a fellow waiter read a sonnet he had just composed, inspired by the summer's race riots and an editor's challenge to address the horrors "like Milton when he wrote 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont'." Quickly published, the poem expressed black rage forcefully enough for government officials to denounce it. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. read it into the *Congressional Record* as a dangerous example of what he called "Negro extremism," just as a Department of Justice investigation "against persons advising anarchy,

> sedition, and the forcible overthrow of the government" cited the recently published poem with alarm. (11)

The sonnet was "If We Must Die"; the poet-waiter, Claude McKay. Forms require not only ears to hear them but eras to prepare those ears. The sentiments of McKay's poem presumably had the impact they did because the audience lived and breathed a world of constraints, both vile (racism) and welcome (blues, hymns, and vernacular traditions like the dozens). When poets like Amiri Baraka politicized the medium in the sixties, the audience had been prepared to be moved by different measures: open, expansive, insistent, as in the resounding titles of certain jazz albums, including *Let Freedom Ring* (Jackie McLean), *Freedom Suite* (Sonny Rollins), *Free for All* (Art Blakey), *Giant Steps* (John Coltrane), and the defiant *This is Our Music* by Ornette Coleman. The expressive potential of form is profoundly responsive to circumstance, and as Caplan documents, forms are most effective as local expedients. That the heroic couplet is found in "Genres as different as gangsta rap and easy listening, top 40 and punk, R&B and country and western" (91) does not demonstrate its universality so much as its adaptability. Caplan's intent is to remind us that verse formalism has meaningful affinities with local motivations, many of which have been silently expunged from the record in a kind of scholarly whitewashing: "many studies of 'traditional' prosody fail to mention Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, or any other African-American masters; more shockingly, some 'general' studies of the ballad in English unselfconsciously examine only white poets' work" (107). One might add, the white poets in question rarely extend to actual ballad singers like Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, to say nothing of a younger generation of performers who also published books of poems.

Caplan's title proposes that questions of form are questions of possibility, and that the scope of the possible is inevitably an extra-literary prerogative. Constraint occupied with force and prowess is attractive in art and entertainment alike. If our vocabulary is peppered with phrases like "slam dunk" and "home run" it's because the vernacular reflects and absorbs what is called the poetry of the streets. But what of that other poetry—or should I say, poetry as *other*? A literary genre like the novel does not compel the same anxieties about form as does poetry. This is attributable in part to the novel's later development, and its hybrid nature. In addition, the dedication of a specific bestseller category to fiction plays a magnetizing role, neatly separating commercial wheat from "experimental" chaff. By contrast, poetry is a beggar's art, however exalted its historical status from the Vedas and the

Greek epics to its nineteenth-century heyday, when books by Byron and Tennyson sold tens of thousands of copies within days of their release. Despite its coterie aura, evidence suggests that we are now drowning in a sea of poetry. Even before Dana Gioia's populist initiatives as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and before Ruth Lilly's astonishing bestowal of two hundred million dollars to *Poetry* magazine, poetry had become chic and lowdown simultaneously through such venues as poetry slams and Hollywood endorsements (only Oprah's backing has been conspicuously withheld). Meanwhile, the impervious endurance of the Brahmin view of poetry as genteel high mindedness is a notable symptom, but of what I am not sure. In *The American Poetry Wax Museum* (1996) I offered a detailed history of its role in fashioning the New Critical canon, pigeonholing postwar American poetry as "the Age of Lowell." It was predictable, albeit only in hindsight, that the sheer sprawl and swarm of competing poetries would not impinge in the least on this inherited need to conflate poetry with decorum. The latest exponent of this heritage is Dan Chiasson, a young poet whose outlook as a critic is so happily and heedlessly at home in a bygone era that it might be best summed up in the slogan "I Like Ike."

In *One Kind of Everything: Poem and Person in Contemporary America* (2007), Chiasson returns to the most exhausted of critical preoccupations as indicated in his subtitle: "Poem and Person in Contemporary America."[2] I do not mean to impugn Chiasson's project as *retro* (that it is need not be a stigma), but to wonder what is at stake in a project that tentatively affirms, as if this were news hot off the press, the performance of the "natural." "Intimacy, candor, disclosure—all the qualities we associate with confession are the effects of artifice, deliberately wrought" (5). The salutary instigation of Marjorie Perloff's *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1991) is apparently of little note, much as it provides exemplary scrutiny of mass media exhortations to attain natural expression by means of artifice; and while it's refreshing for a change to find a younger critic *not* quoting Judith Butler, her models of gender performance trump anything Chiasson has to say about the artifice of person in the poem. Chiasson's exegetical strengths are evident in his chapters on Frank Bidart and Louise Glück in particular, as he deftly unfolds the psychological origami of their personae and in doing so fulfills the promise of his thesis that "the unrhetorical, the un-troped, is of tremendous use in the making of poems, perhaps our most radiantly troped and rhetorical literary genre" (6). Consequently, "to some degree subjective life must be coaxed, rather than summoned, into view" (16). There is unfortunately

some special pleading in Chiasson's framing of his project, as he takes Eliot's criteria as endemic to modernism as such, claiming that "much of what once counted as 'impersonal' now seems like minimally encrypted autobiography" (7)—a proposition that might have caused a ripple of consternation fifty years ago, but even then it was understood that encrypted autobiography ran riot throughout Anglo-American modernism, from Yeats's Crazy Jane and Pound's Mauberley to Eliot's Gerontion and Stevens's large red man reading. *One Kind of Everything* is itself the kind of book that used to be published about American poetry several decades ago, availing itself of the rhetoric of benign possession, as in Chiasson's reference to the unrhetorical as "our" most rhetorical genre; or, in a telling retention of Harvard jargon, the charge that language poetry "has failed to give us works that delight and instruct" (10). Is it not the case that the defining characteristic of language poetry was to refrain from providing a product that could complacently be presumed to "delight and instruct" in the first place?

What is most disturbing about Chiasson's brush with language poetry is not its superficiality but his presumption that a superficial response is mandated by the apparent weightlessness of the phenomenon itself. In a book devoting thirty-five pages to Elizabeth Bishop, thirty to Frank Bidart, thirty-two to Louise Glück, and nearly thirty to Frank O'Hara, language poetry is collectively consigned to a ten page "Conclusion: Autobiography and the Language School." Chiasson may be on to something when he notes a similarity between the New Critical and the Language school lyric as striving for "a kind of utopia of pure writing and pure reading" (175), but that is an aside in what is otherwise a conspicuous refusal to engage "Language poetry" on terms commensurate with his treatment of other poetry: namely, by reading the work. That a brief extract from Susan Howe's *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974–1979* (1996) serves as synecdoche for a massive body of work by dozens of poets is not only inadequate, but reflects a peculiar blend of cynicism and cowardice. It's not without precedence, of course. In certain quarters, the passing blanket reference to language poetry has served for twenty years as a rhetorical trope signifying "I'd rather not." Elsewhere, Chiasson has made his disdain explicit: "Language poets are all alike and always boring," he told an online interviewer for *Slate* ("On Bad Poetry"). In a more revealing interview he confessed of Rae Armantrout's work "I just can't read it"—although his remark that her poetry is "fragmentary at the level of the sentence" (it's not) suggests that he has not even tried ("This Mere Guy"). In any case, Armantrout and Chiasson both publish poems in *The New Yorker*, hardly a crucible of experimentalism.

It might seem unfair to fault a man's book for what he says online, but it now seems likely that online is the reading venue of choice for most people. Does this apply to poetry as well? It's hard to estimate at the moment, but there is an expanding tide of online poetry magazines, many well edited and better designed than their print equivalents. Chiasson's bête noire, language poetry, is relevant here in a roundabout way, for which a small dose of historical recounting is necessary. Unlike most phenomena in American poetry, language poetry was a group enterprise in the seventies and eighties. If not quite as sectarian in practice as Surrealism under André Breton's fearsome gaze, it was still sufficiently integrated in its New York and its Bay Area centers to exert pressure on the vast middle, at that time dominated by the free verse postconfessional idiom of the writing programs (several of the language poets were in fact disaffected refugees from such programs). Apart from carving out a place for actual experimentation in poetry, and launching the careers of Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and others (including Susan Howe and Michael Palmer, commonly referred to as language poets even though they were not affiliated), the real impact of language poetry was on a younger generation of poets whose plunge into poetry was exactly concurrent with the rise of the Internet. Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse" famously urged the use of the typewriter as a poet's prerogative, but his was a belated manifesto for what the preceding generation of modernists had already done, as documented by Hugh Kenner in *The Mechanic Muse* (1986). Just as the typewriter began impinging on poetry a century ago, the Internet has inaugurated a new poetic domain during the past fifteen years. Unlike Chiasson and similar critics for whom language poetry is menacing nonsense, I would not claim any global characteristics for it—the diversity among its practitioners remains the single least discussed thing about it—but, generally speaking, language poetry primed the first Internet generation with a considerable tolerance for indeterminacy, respect for stochastic operations, and accustomed them to the experience of language pulverized by converging ideological tectonic plates.

Reviewing *The Waste Land* in 1923 ("one of the most insubordinate poems in the language" [170]), John Crowe Ransom noted Eliot's indulgence in free verse, "the medium of a half-hearted and disillusioned art" (168). Ransom implies that those who forego metrics are laggards, social misfits lacking the Can Do attitude. The advent of digital poetry now resurrects this preoccupation with form from another angle altogether: if poetry is to be identified with sheer hard work, the laurel is likely to go to pioneering programmers rather than to adherents of the sonnet or the

alexandrine. Verse formalists, of course, may dismiss digital encoding as beside the point. For them, poetry is hard work with words, not codes. But this debate goes back to the dawn of modernism. Edmund Wilson's famous 1930 book *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (featuring *The Waste Land* as exhibit "A") is named after Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's play in which a character famously remarks, "As for living, our servants can do that for us." Now we might say, of poetry, our computers can write it for us.

As Chris Funkhouser chronicles in his immensely informative study, the history of digital poetry cannot be understood without a sense of the laborious, exasperating, and sometimes lunatic "prehistory" he recounts. In 1973, Richard Bailey sounded a note from modernist avant-garde manifesto rhetoric: "Computer poetry is warfare carried out by other means, a warfare against conventionality and language that has become automatized" (qtd in Funkhouser 79): Marx, Pound, and Shklovsky in one cluster grenade. A quarter century later, Eduardo Kac insisted "A new poetry for the next century must be developed in new media" (qtd in Funkhouser 255)—virtually repeating a chorus of proclamations from the modernist avant-garde ("Once there is a new form, a new content follows," in Alexei Kruchenykh's formulation [77]; "For a new world, a new art," declared Blaise Cendrars [91]). My point is not that Bailey and Kac are invalidated by their perhaps unwitting repetition of older vanguard slogans, but that the afterlife of those slogans has a parasitical relation to evolving technological media. It seems impossible to acclaim the new without repeating bygone acclamations. And this very tendency to valorize the future in the jargon of the past suggests what digital poetry is up against. No matter how vigorous and populous the domain of web-based poetry becomes, it will be segregated from the anthologies, the prizes, and the routine scuttle of literary reputation. In a curious way, Internet poetry can be compared to the American colonies circa 1760: full of enterprise and ingenuity, but a world apart, a realm of negligible consequence to an unheeding mother country and its culture. As this comparison's intended to suggest, a revolution is somewhere up ahead.

In *Prehistorical Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959–1995* (2007), Funkhouser apologetically concedes that web-based poetry is still a fledgling enterprise—as if, somewhere in the back of his head the old racist demand is still huffing and puffing: show us the Shakespeare of the Zulus—but poetry in this new medium will surely function like it does in print: legions of lackluster poets beat down the track before a singular figure appears on the horizon. There will be a demographic foreground to the

eventual arrival of an Internet laureate. At some point (and we may not be far from it) more people will be composing kinetic, interactive, digitally encoded poetry than those who confine their efforts to the relative inertia of a Gutenberg era medium.[3] We are probably already past the threshold at which the greater part of reading takes place in front of a screen rather than a printed page, so it's only a matter of time before poetry on screen begins attracting the sort of attention specific to the medium, and the last hemp lines tethering digital poetry to the book are unfastened. A century from now people may be perplexed and amused at the thought that readers in the past were spellbound by poems fixed in place typographically. Funkhouser's evocation of literature as "sculptural object in electronic space" (173) vividly suggests the gap between digital poetry and the world of Robert Frost. In approaching that space, however, precedents will count, casting poets like Blake and Pound in ancestral roles for a future we remain awkwardly prepared to face. The hypertextual implications of Whitman and Dickinson suggest that, in the American grain, the past anticipated the future.

The emerging conditions of digital poetry are succinctly indicated by Michael Joyce's observation: "print text stays itself, electronic text replaces itself" (112). With this, the legacy of print fixity as a requisite of literacy is dissolved. Furthermore, the distinction between reader and writer is significantly blurred. In Funkhouser's criteria, "'cyberpoetry' does not necessarily qualify as a cybertext if the reader's input makes little impact on the poem's construction" (241). For partisans of the print canon, this menacing prospect might seem to imply that *The Waste Land* (1922) will henceforth be available only in its draft version as "He Do the Police in Different Voices," as "readers" mutate into something more like *fans*, enabled through technology to apply filters to their aesthetic input channels. The digital sampling endemic to hip-hop—which also enables Hollywood commercials to convert John Wayne and Humphrey Bogart into posthumous pitchmen for new products—is now extended to the world of poetry. But the media environment is an evolving complexity, as Funkhouser is aware: "Vivid poetry is now charged with additional dimensions, and poets continue to cultivate a complex relationship with language in a society of linguistically simplified popular media" (224). The animation and interactivity undertaken by digital poetry may well be a compensatory sop to a "readership" all too disinclined to *read* in the first place. Some of the material that passes for poetry online has a greater affinity with video games and cartoons than with anything that is generally understood to be poetry. Nonetheless, the challenge to the conventions of poetry is unavoidable when the digital environment reallocates the reader's share of

the compositional process to a degree previously unimaginable—or even tolerable. In a telling distinction, Funkhouser says "digital poems not only have a surface but an interface, often with transparent depths to explore" (148). These depths are reflected in the way the online Electronic Literature Directory organizes materials into eight categories: Hypertext, Reader Collaboration, Other Interaction, Recorded Reading/Performance, Animated Text, Other Audio/Video/Animation, Prominent Graphics, and Generated Text. Pondering these categories, one senses entire domains of critical vocabulary collapsing into irrelevance.[4] How does one begin to address texts about which it can be said, "There is no convenient way to reproduce the poetry; the only ways to document the program are by video or by screen capture" (231)?

Where computers are concerned, the practical challenges are momentous. Reading Funkhouser's fastidious chronicle, one cannot help but admire the pluck and fortitude of these pioneers who spent years to get a computer to produce faint simulacra of what a stoned undergraduate could produce circa 1969—but *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* is also the kind of book that will help you remember that 1969 was also a year when computers helped put astronauts on the moon. Funkhouser's title is sagely chosen.[5] Consider the following account of Charles O. Hartman's experiments with his "meter checker" programs AleaPoem and Scansion Machine: "Hartman discovered that the complexities of combining human language and computer programming into a provocative yet understandable text is handled more capably in the creation of prose, which could be shaped into a poem. Thus, the AutoPoet's metrical filtering was removed and a writing tool called Prose was invented, which generated a series of syntactically correct sentences that were then edited into poetry" (68). This could pass for an allegory of modern poetry in general. Throughout much of the twentieth century, various constituencies of verse culture launched fireballs of innovation, countered by strategic "returns" to the possibilities Caplan enumerates like sestina, the sonnet, the heroic couplet, and the ballad. Now out of the computer a swarm of new terms emerges: cin(e)poetry, electronic poetry, holopoetry, hypermedia poetry, hypertextual poetry, infopoetry, net poetry, new media poetry, poetechnics, transpoetics, virtual poetry, web poetry, polymedia, or in a phrase with unfortunate geriatric implications, "computer-assisted literature" (102).

In the end, the potential of these varieties of digital assistance will intersect with the products, priorities, and possibilities invested in print culture (unless, of course, in some unimaginable future the web poets become perfectly indifferent to the whole kit and caboodle from Chaucer to Plath). Consider a hypercard

program by Jim Rosenberg called *Intergrams* (1993). Funkhouser writes, "A single stanzalike form emerges from a mass of unreadable text" (166). He continues, "Passing the cursor beneath the center of the bottom box brings up the following:

> "connection child seeing first flying helm spokes
> as madness feather floe knives
> owing us a smoother stunt haphazard other world
> safe enough without the stacked
> dimness peddler tether flight totem scrapings
> blown together for starting a memory fire" (166).

As I remarked earlier, language poetry acclimated readers to the diminished ratio of signal-to-noise in passages like this, albeit before hypertext or digital programming methods were widely available (and, in any case, none of the language poets appear to have had any familiarity with the work surveyed in *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, which goes back to the fifties). If language poetry now appears to be a bit passé, as it does for many in Chiasson's generation (though not for the same reasons), it's because there is something archaic about turning page after page of printed books and encountering word salad that *plays* much better on a screen, in live action. One virtue of digital poetry is that the reader is alleviated from the subliminal expectation that a printed poem might end up in the canon. How a canon of digital poetry will emerge and be handled I do not know, but the noun "monument" will surely seem an inept way of characterizing it. Our future in pixels will not be monumental.

The development of the Internet has revitalized the lived experience of open source culture through file sharing and the fugitive, if enlivening, circulation of materials beyond the pale of copyright, which is the legal mechanism for fabricating cultural production into monumentality. Ubu Web is one of the longest running instances of a web-based clearinghouse for innovative poetics, and its webmaster, Kenneth Goldsmith, has also authored numerous conceptual books, including *Day* (2003) (consisting of a single issue of *The New York Times*—the morning edition of 11 September 2001: Goldsmith's dramatic gesture of consequential inconsequence—laboriously typed out as raw text unalleviated by visuals or graphic format), *Soliloquy* (2001) (a transcription of everything the author recorded himself saying over the course of a week), and *The Weather* (2005) (a transcript from radio of a year's worth of New York city weather reports). According to Goldsmith, "In conceptual writing the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work." He adds, "When an author uses a conceptual

form of writing, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the text" (98). Characterizing *Soliloquy*'s 487 pages as "relentless and unreadable," Christian Bök suggests such work is "a genre of word processing or data management, in which our tedium is the message" (66), disclosing the reservoir of boredom latent whenever the medium is itself the message. Considering the excess or waste product of Goldsmith's books, Bök reflects, "Words become disposable pollutants in a milieu of urban ennui, and language is sublime, not for its quality, but for its quantity—which in turn has an uncanny quality all its own" (65). Goldsmith's books uniquely impinge on poetry today: their sheer bulk makes a tacit mockery of the monumental impulse, the canonical imperative; their putative unreadability draws attention to the constraints and opportunities for reading itself in the different venues of print and screen; and Goldsmith's insistence on getting them published as books—perverse as it may seem for a webmaster whose site offers a sizeable subset of "Unpublishable Books"—draws attention to the twilight of book culture as we know it. For those who thought *The Making of Americans* (1925) was the end of the line, Goldsmith implies, think again. The real end of the line is when the concept exists weightlessly in its own environment, while investing hundreds of unreadable pages, perfectly bound, in Bataille's category of the unrecuperable remainder. Just how much of the publishing industry consists of comparable product unconsciously or intentionally perpetrated is ours to infer.

What, then, of the well-wrought urn? Will it yield the field to the well-designed program? There is a culture of dedicated sensibility, curatorial with respect to such refined verbal artifacts, that will undoubtedly persist in singling out touchstones and insulating them from a presumed tide of rubbish. There's a contrary initiative, plausibly beginning with Whitman, that happily submerges the nugget in the muck—for the sheer palpability of the contrast, if nothing else, but for its instruction, too. The monuments will not disappear, even as they recede into the curio displays that grace antebellum homes under the curatorial auspices of historic preservationists. But it's the vitality of poetic *mess* that constitutes much, even most, of American poetry. Profusion and excess reflect the American condition all the more accurately when unintentional. Whitman aspired to variety, but his catalogue rhetoric ends up being, well, Whitmanian. The real glut is elsewhere, shared out among legions—or, snapping at our heels, in bytes. That is to say, like the migration of labor in globalization, the Internet is not a docile medium, and it will not readily support a category like

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"American poetry" except as a quaint historical cipher. Talan Memmott proposes that digital practices take us "Beyond Taxonomy" towards "taxonomadism" (304), sending out a call for *poeticians* or participant observers to appear in response to new media. "There are no guidelines for *creative and cultural practice through applied technology*," he writes (with emphasis), "and it is therefore up to practitioners to develop their own (anti)methods. Each creative application is a new event marked by individual theories of media applications" (305). Asking for each new practice to prompt its own theory, Memmott is unwittingly appealing to the most robust and tantalizing hope of German Romantic theory: "Every poem is a genre unto itself" in Friedrich Schlegel's audacious supposition (qtd in Szondi 93).[6] It looks like, going back to the future, we're finally beginning to catch up to the past.

Notes

1. The combatant anthologies were *The New Poets of England and America*, edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson (1957), and *The New American Poetry*, edited by Donald M. Allen (1960).

2. The fixation on "selfhood" in the study of American poetry reflects the shadow cast by confessional poetry, about which Chiasson's belated, if commendable, initiative is to debunk easy conflation of poetic text with self-expression. Previous studies of selfhood include *Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry* by Charles Altieri (1984); *The Still Performance: Writing, Self, and Interconnection in Five Postmodern American Poets* by James McCorkle (1989); *What I Cannot Say: Self, Word and World in Whitman, Stevens, and Merwin* (1989); and *World, Self, Poem* edited by Leonard Trawick (1990). For a searching approach to the subject of personal expression, see Susan Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (2007).

3. As one measure of the demographics involved: there are seven million bands posting their music on the Internet site My Space, according to Eliot Van Buskirk. The implications for poetry are harrowing, to say the least: now anybody who wants to get their work out there can, and probably will.

4. The inadequacy of the traditional terminology of criticism is a matter of concern for many of the contributors to *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories* edited by Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss (2006, based on a 2002 conference at the University of Iowa). The single term that the authors most frequently avail themselves of is *materiality*, which may reflect a certain level of anxiety about the dematerializing power of digital media as such.

5. The most audacious proposition of Funkhouser's book is its title. Using "prehistoric" to frame an approach to poetry using computers before the advent of the World Wide Web is a way of bit-mapping Paleolithic cave art onto a moment of

advanced technology that those over fifty can still remember. Students think I may be pulling their collective leg when I tell them about my first experience with a computer as an undergraduate: it was *a* (and *the*) campus computer; and the term project involved hauling a big box of punchcards over to the building housing the computer so the data could be read into the machine, producing results in the form of a printout. In that "prehistoric" era, computers didn't have screens, which were still the domain of television (commonly black and white). Even recalling this now I sense a caveman's pelt on my space age body: *The Flintstones* gleefully collapsed the two aeons of Funkhouser's title into Saturday morning cartoons for those of us who experienced the 1962 missile showdown at the international O.K. Corral as a callisthenic exercise in scuttling under our desks, cockroach-wise, if not yet wizened by reading Kafka.

6. Rei Terada makes the same claim in response to the Modern Language Association's 2006 thematic emphasis on lyric. Arguing the futility of perpetuating current levels of ideology critique ("The last, benedictory function of lyric is to be the lure that attracts suspicion to aesthetic ideology as such" [199]), she suggests letting go of the lyric both as whipping post and cherished icon in order to see what might happen next. "If the new objects are new enough, they'll change methods of attention," she suggests. "Compared with finding out what comes next, it isn't important what lyric is" (199).

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