
HIX
EROS
POETRY REVIEW

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*Not Suitable For Domestic Sublimation

by Jennifer Cooke (Contraband Books, 2012)

Reviewed by David Spittle

For a first collection, collated from a six year period of writing, Jennifer Cooke's **not suitable for domestic sublimation* presents an assured and impressive work of linguistic agility, propelled by a restless intelligence and dark, probing humour. Her lines imaginatively splice and sever with the same caustic energy with which they dissect normalized social horrors. Throughout the collection, Cooke enacts and develops her various deconstructions through an exciting attention to formal detail. Whether in the fine print font of 'Reem-oir,' arranged in phallic profile, or in the subversion of self-help step by step guides in 'The Profundity of Cod,' her poetry continually demonstrates an invigorating dialogue between form and content. A dialogue that, at its best, dissolves any sense of separation and instead allows for both form and content to coincide, equally formative in the poem's meaning and strength. This lucid and detailed control of form's relation to content – and visa versa – is what makes these poems so potently capable of reaching 'behind eyes rouged by popular dis / coursing' and, like the unexpected line break, breaking up that discourse.

The collection's first poem, 'The Profundity of Cod,' is a sequence of six steps that encapsulates much of what pre-occupies the collection. Using bullet points to fragment the first stanza, in a way that recalls the moronic listing of certain pamphlets, lends the poem a simmering anger in its parody:

> dog's piss snow holes don't anymore even when
> they are dead these dogs, that in Argos •
> i'm in profile • in profligacy • in sickness •

In the poem, Freudian psychoanalysis, corporate business jargon, dystopian anxiety and comical boredom jostle with 'Richard and Judy's clingfilm interview.' It is a hyper sensitive, necessarily disjunctive (and yet, by no means ever unintelligible) stream of battering attacks on the self. In its cutting portrayal of how the 'self' is commodified, confused and preached at, the poem contemplates a two pronged aphorism: 'your implants eat you • / soul and mystery: appreciate your depth.' The black humour with which Cooke presents (increas-ingly abundant and medically dangerous) implants as surgical 'self-help' cannibalism brilliantly unhinges the vapid impotence conveyed in the stock-phrase 'soul and mystery: appreciate your depth.' The poem therefore comes to position itself between a frightening self-mutilation, in service to poisonous templates of beauty, and the vacuous buzzwords that constitutes all that is wrong with 'self help.' Both are ultimately damaging substitutes,

too often accepted as components of the lifeless, but life-endangering, artifice with which Cooke's poetry fights to reveal. In this all too familiar and synthetic landscape, where silicon reigns and the vague 'soul and mystery' satisfy our demands for profundity, the poem introduces its symptomatic erosion of any true or characterful self. At the end of 'Step 2,' we encounter an anonymous male: 'his eyes glaze over describing himself / as intelligent on match.com. dead' – certainly one of the most concise critiques of online profiling I've ever encountered. An incisive observation later emphasised by the line: 'to be ourselves individually similar •.'

The ambitious centrepiece of the collection, 'Steel Girdered Her Musical: in several parts,' is comprised of twelve poems, created in conjunction with the musician Adam Robinson (there is a planned CD to be released). Interviewed by Sophie Robinson (available online: http://voguefabricsdalston.com/feelings-sophie-robinson-asks-jennifer-cooke-a-few-poetry-related-questions/), Cooke describes it in her own words:

> The poems stage the possible impossibility of a revolution starting at South Mimms Service Station, which is on a junction between the M25 and the A1 (M) as you head north out of London. The poem's evolutionary female leader (the kittenista) is born from a bloody egg on the plastic tables in the service station and the poem continues from there […].

It is here Cooke's imagery, in all its memorably warped and inventive glory, is powerfully showcased. Flashes of hilarity punctuate Kittenista's visceral and hallucinatory conception: 'they make dirty love under the thin light in All Days rooms / among the dried biscuits.' The first poem is a breath-taking introduction to the piece. A bizarre and enthralling play with language ('happy, human-free, here where – JULIE – the place / is fucking firing up your pantry! It burned up down, / the dozy mare'), gives way to a vividly grimy service station where 'Robbie Williams sings crack in the car park' and '14 star loo awards' begin to gesture towards a uniquely dark and delirious panorama.

In 'We've Tasted the Inside of Her Thigh' (part IV. of 'Steel Girdered…') we are offered the initially incongruous pairing of names that arrive with 'the physical work of introducing Beyoncé to / George Bataille.' It is a juxtaposition that sits snugly at the boiling heart of **not suitable for domestic sublimation*. Alongside the assertion in the poem 'II. rhetorique d'Aristutor, or a repudiation of passion…' that 'I like a bit of grit, under the nail,' bringing together Beyoncé and Bataille seems a fittingly emblematic marriage of contemporary culture and a whole host of morbid philosophies! Bataille seems an interesting point of reference for poetry that is so linguistically astute, and as Cooke frequently exercises a dark wit and visceral palette of images, the subversive figure seems all the more relevant and intriguing. The collection rewards (and deserves) multiple re-readings. Able

to be simultaneously deranged, meticulously arranged, urgent and playful, these are poems that challenge and entertain in equal measure.

Down You Go; Or, Négation De Bruit

by Frances Kruk (Punch Press, 2011)

Reviewed by Jimmy Cummins

Frances Kruk's collection entitled *Down you go; or, Négation de Bruit* is a small book that has a very big impact. Published by Punch Press in 2011 this book is a beautiful object in its own right with a wrap around screen printed cover adding colour to a simple but elegantly hand sewn book. The cover, an image of a woman holding a sword aloft is printed across the front and the back, echoes the sense of urgency and force one gets when reading the work contained within. I call this a small book not because the book itself is small but because each of its twenty one sections (numbered one to twenty, with roman numerals, plus an extra one entitled 'VIIa') are minute, consisting of anywhere between one and seven lines set centre page. The space given to each poem on the pages makes them seem even smaller again. It feels as if the poems are in the process of moving away from the reader getting ever increasingly smaller as they travel down 'the mine shaft,' 'this [p]it' or 'the chasm.'

The author too, bound by the subjectivity of the lyric poem, is trapped, the book's own title dragging her 'down you go': in section 'V' she writes: 'I was or am / in the chasm / refracted though the dream had shut.' The longer the author remains trapped in 'this pit [...] blind by white lights' or in 'the mine shaft,' the longer she is apart from the world and in a state of 'Exile!,' 'I am still / on this island I am still / on this island' and no matter how much she repeats this phrase there is no way to return, forever 'Bound underground on Hooks / you put the holes in / the dream Head, / drill geometry.'

These poems declare themselves as 'Après [after] Danielle Collobert,' an experimental French writer and political activist who was involved in the Front de Libération Nationale in Algeria before joining the Writers' Union in May 1968. Throughout the 1970s she travelled extensively until her suicide in Paris on her Birthday, July 23rd, 1978. Kruk states that *Down you go* began as a translation of Collobert's first book *Chants des guerres* "but the poems did morph as I went along, got hijacked into my poetic cosmology, fitting in a conveniently jagged way within a larger project I have on the go." I must admit that I did not know of Danielle Collobert or her writing before reading Kruk's collection and now my knowledge consists purely of brief biographical information and short excerpts from John Taylor's essay which appeared in *Context* 16. So without knowing more

about Collobert's work I will just say that by invoking Collobert's name, Kruk is at the very least speaking through her 'Smart / Bomb Time Machine device' to 'a writer who has left all security behind and is inching her way along a frazzled tightrope suspended over the most desolate abyss imaginable,' (Taylor) and maybe it is precisely this abyss that these poems are trapped inside, this abyss where the poem finally ends, where 'the orchids are fake, stupid fake island & the forest / the forest mythic behind orchids / it has songs, like Minerals at Night / there is no depth.' As Kruk herself states '*DYG* and *Chants* are both battle chronicles of sorts, but neither is the other.'

It is only fitting then that Kruk's book has the French subtitle 'négation de bruit' the translation of which 'negation of noise' appears in section 'XI,' and it is this collection's relation to sound that is one of its most interesting features. The cover with its bold capital letters and the abstract purple ink stain shouts at the viewer. The frontispiece (which is replicated at the back) provided by Gustave Morin was "made by typing and over-typing my text with a dremeled typewriter. A non-existent but super-present ancient future language. Noisy voids all round" (Kruk) and the end result is a large block of illegible script giving the sense that the reader is in a large public space, like a market, with the continuous chatter of an unknown language. Both the title page and the publisher's page echoes the cover's large bold lettering and it is only once the poem begins that the visual noise stops. However, the fact that these small poems are floating in a vast empty silence does not mean that all noise has been negated. The striking fact is that these poems are soft and delicate pieces filled with violent noise. The poem starts 'Swarms! / we will bang / into the sun Blinded' and the noise created by millions of objects or people crashing into a ball of fiery plasma is continued throughout: 'there's a boat & and it has dead noise / & there, in sand and you hear dead / noise, revolt noise,' 'I ordered a hurricane' and 'then waves of brutal as Cochlea / at high pressure Crush, listen: // Radio, when it's not human.' The fact that Kruk creates situations that create noise as opposed trying to describe the sound is what gives these poems such a big impact. The best example of this is section 'VII,' the shortest of the collection, which reads 'the most Pathetic poem is small people on fire,' and the sound of burning flesh and the screams of pain flood the reader's ears.

Throughout these poems the letters themselves seem to rise up, exploding into capital letters at random on the page. It is as if the letters are revolting, like 'Tiny dogs on ice all round Tiny, Tiny / dogs // & howls' against the negation of their own sound. Each letter, word and poem seems to be attempting to push against the storm which howls throughout this poem. There is real anger and fear in these poems as 'machine & truth shall be crushed by water / or something surging Nervous walls / with their cheap metal flickers.' Kruk is writing and living in a world she does not recognise, or at least one she no longer feels is real, with its 'fake garden, motionless plastic curves,' 'the orchids are fake,' even the 'stupid fake island.' However, it is not just places that are no longer real, people too have become mutated into automatons: 'if there are wires they must be / stilled they must be Stripped / their pulse plastinate,' their 'mouth doesn't / move but there is no word.' But for Kruk the battle and the storm rages on, she writes 'We come to fuck the mutants / We go to mutate them / I am with the mutant / firing limbs.'

Down you go, like Kruk's previous collection *A Discourse on Vegetation & Motion*, is a cut above pretty much everything else. There are few poets whose writing conveys as much anger and urgency while maintaining a level of delicacy and wonderment. If you were wondering 'how stupid it is to wait' the answer is *very* because this collection is now sold out in its original format. But fear not, the text is reprinted in the new 365 page behemoth issue of *Damn the Caesars* entitled *Crisis Inquiry*, which means that if you cannot beg or borrow a copy of *Down you go* from your smarter friends you can at least read the text.

References

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Kruk, Frances, 'an answer of sorts,' private correspondence, 16/06/2013
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Teens

by Francesca Lisette (Mountain, 2012)

Reviewed by Richard Barrett

Francesca Lisette's *Teens*. This book was sat in my house for several months before I read it. I'd got the impression from somewhere – I now have no idea where – that it would be A VERY HARD BOOK. Something which I might find myself admiring (hopefully) but which because of its impenetrability I would be unable to love. And having read it now, yep, I did find it hard. And I do admire it. But, also – hooray! – I think I'm on my way to loving it!

I was put in mind, as I usually am when confronted with hard poetry, of Iain Sinclair's *Conductors of Chaos* intro where he's wondering about 'the meaning' of the works contained in the book and admits to having no idea. Good on Sinclair then for spelling out that poetry is often at its most interesting when it's least interested in calling 'a mallet a mallet,' as it were. This stuff though surely does mean something right? Shouldn't we spend some time trying to work out what that is? Well, hmm, I don't know! *Teens* makes me ask what 'meaning' means!

You open the book anywhere and you're met with great chunks of text. The format of the book is what I'm calling 'kind of A4' and whilst not every page is full of text, many of the shorter poems are very block-y; square and rectangular. So on first glance 'space' – which can often act as a kind of stopping point on your route through a poem; allowing a place to pause and absorb what's just been read and get some sense of what the next line or lines hold – seems at a premium here. Which is all by way of saying just flicking through the book before I'd even begun it left me feeling vaguely daunted. But what became apparent to me pretty early on in my reading of *Teens* is that there's music here. Sure, we're not talking about something you'd be able to whistle after one hearing but music is definitely a strong presence in this work, and once you pick up the tune it'll be that which you'll find is guiding you through the poems of Teens.

The book is split into 7 sections – 4 sequences and 3 lots of single poems...

But before I go any further I should say that what's being written by me NOW is being written off the back of just one complete reading of Teens *– several of the pieces in it I've read over and over yep; but all the way through I've just read the book once. This is not to make excuses for anything I might say in the course of this which might come across as a load of old crap; rather, this is just to try and make clear the nature of these thoughts of mine – that they're kind of immediate responses. I feel that* Teens *somehow resists what might be called 'the traditional review' anyway – I'm trying to imagine what Nick Lezard might say about it. Hmm. Right now I feel that if I were to try and write something about the book again, like in 6 months time or something, what I would write then would probably be entirely different to what I'm writing now. Sure, because I would have had more time to spend with the book but also because as I'll change, with age, what I pick out from and focus on in the book is likely to change with me. Which is just a longwinded way of saying THIS IS A VERY RICH BOOK!*

...and for these notes masquerading as a sort of review I'm going to take three poems at random and have a close-ish look at two whilst the other one I'm just going to quote from for no good reason other than I want to.

So, the beginning poem – which belongs to none of the 7 sections, instead working as a kind of stand-alone prologue – 'WHAT CONTINUES': well this poem cheers me. I've have had a shitey day today and now I'm reading 'WHAT CONTINUES' and I'm feeling better. I'm feeling better because of these lines: 'Daily blue alarm of life, lifted in sea's / wrench to be hung too soon' and 'Hidden dolour sours each proclamation' and 'in the bread of giving up we rose / caulked & feckless,' and because of...well there are two further lines which I think are really splendid in this poem (but which I sadly can't be bothered copying out) which tell me, respectively, don't be too down on yourself about being annoyed at N*** for the travel arrangements he worked out as likely anyone else would have been similarly annoyed and, besides, none of it matters anyway; and the second line says to me – something is bound to come along and happen soon which will make you feel better!! The line about 'dolour' I'm sat here looking at thinking – hmm, should I post this to Facebook as a status update? This line suits my mood of RIGHT NOW perfectly. So should I post that line?? I'm deciding not to. Instead I'm picking up my copy of the book to look at this poem again...

'WHAT CONTINUES' is a perfect opening poem. It's telling us life 'goes on' and that what we're going to encounter in this book is precisely life 'going on.' And in telling us that it's forcing us to recognise, also, that writing a poem is an act that occurs in a life. A poem does not mysteriously fall out of the sky straight onto the page. A poem is a result of someone clearing a space in their life to put a bunch of words in the best order they can in an attempt to try to achieve their desired end. No matter how much of a space the poet is able to clear, though, they are obviously never able to totally get away from their life. So in writing a poem about or in response to subject X all sorts of everyday troubles unassociated with the poem and unintended to be part of the poem will, nevertheless, be flitting back and forth across the poet's mind. Lisette, in 'WHAT CONTINUES' then, is reminding us that writing a poem is as much a part of life as going for a paper or playing tennis centre court at Wimbledon (Wimbledon is on TV in the room next door) – some people, somewhere, will always be doing this stuff.

Should this 'of life-ness' then affect how we read *Teens*? These poems feel like they're challenging me to a wrestling match – not in any sense of them being macho or taunting or anything like that; just that they seem to want me to engage with them in a physical way (and having written that sentence I'm now not sure (a) whether I understand it or not; and (b) having thought about it for a minute or two and so feeling I might have a vague idea of what I was getting at, I'm now not sure whether I actually believe the sentence or not. Hmm). For sure, Lisette is 'saying' things with these poems – but I feel it's only part of what she's doing and, for me, honestly, perhaps it's the least interesting part of her project. She's making music. And she's dotting her work with little triggers to send the mind in all sorts of directions. And, for the last week or so, I've become convinced these are less *poems* in *Teens*, more, weird, linguistic structures (so forget the invitation to a wrestling match – I'm now seeing these poems more as linguistic climbing frames featuring the sense of 'play' that such structures suggest). Yeah, more interesting to me than what Lisette may or may not 'mean' with these poems are her endeavours towards the above few ends.

So what do I mean when I say Lisette is making music in *Teens*? Well two things – the second of which is to do with how the poems are initially apprehended by the reader's senses. Now I suspect this won't just be true for me but when listening to music I make sense of it first on a, I guess, physical level – my body responds to it before my mind does (now that's the case to a lesser or greater degree depending on the presence or otherwise of

a number of factors but, I think, it mainly always is true); and I'm responding to the work in *Teens* similarly. But couldn't an explanation for this be that I've read *Teens* lazily and haven't made a massive effort in trying to make sense of it? Well, of course, there could be something of that in what I'm saying now but, whilst as I've said, what I'm writing now are essentially first impressions of the book, I don't honestly think I've been all that lazy. No, I think Lisette is consciously going for this effect of 'body first/mind later'; I think she wants readers to be into these poems and 'get' them almost on an instinctual level before then having her readers go on to think about the poems at length. What makes me think this? Well, to take an example from 'PARENT WAIVER':

> cerebral twixt your giving opal, riot into
> unquestioning graze. His arm now stiff
> sets into lockjaw guns. Bird tastes purity
> and carving, eats its fallow where we fall.
> how to compute by candles. Moved
> to rigid hacking sprays; gurney handles
> mimic sheer LADY. Spread white tips to
> wire distressed carnal lode renown:
> if there's a gaudy spirit now during the
> café parlour, hurt vibes pick the scum.

This is hard for me to make sense of. And I think that's because Lisette wants to make it hard. But does that hardness put me off? No. Because initially it's a hardness I don't notice. And this is where the first of the reasons I'm saying *Teens* has something to do with music comes in. Because initially I'm carried along the passage given above by all the 'al' and 'le' words and the 'd's' and the 's's' and phrases such as 'your giving' and 'riot into' and 'distressed carnal lode renown' and 'pick the scum' which, for reasons that it's totally beyond me to explain, I respond to. And so I've finished reading before it's occurred to me that I haven't really understood what I've just read – which, for me, is true for the majority of the poems in *Teens*. And which, also, was how I responded to, as an example given kind of at random but not entirely, *Hex Enduction Hour* by The Fall. After switching it off after the first listening I knew that I'd had my mind blown but I didn't know by what and I didn't know how.

A second section from the same poem where I think the points made directly above also apply:

> prick entanglement gets called a wet haze
> ((or is it because I'm not you isn't anything))
> terrapin lilo licks the sun like he likes to;

> sequence toke on broad-lipped sun
> crispy gravel shames wrists half to death
>
> splurge out on gore! Popcorn lullaby
> gets prickly at test scores, no dope epidemic.
> writhe is one soul blazes to the left
> summon *we are lollipop heads and messy scabs*

Having talked already of what I'm taking to be Lisette's intentional situating in life of the act of writing the poem I want to go on to talk now, finally, about what I said earlier about this being work demanding a physical response; that thing about these poems being linguistic structures for the reader to climb about on and to play on. To make sense of this it's necessary to consider how the poem is usually thought of – as being 'part of' an object in the world. I mean, Lisette's *Teens* is an object – it's to my right at the other end of this couch. On top of two brown cushions. I can reach out and touch the object that is Lisette's *Teens*. I just did. I waved the book about a bit. The poems within *Teens* we would ordinarily be led to believe are just part of what is going towards constituting this object in the world that is this book. However...!!! Impossible to illustrate as it is (and it is! I'm talking about my overall feeling regarding the book here and just can't isolate a short section to point at and shout 'there! That is why I feel like this!') I feel with *Teens* Lisette has turned this way of thinking upside down – *Teens* the book is an object in the world, sure, but the 40 poems inside are not in any way at all subordinate to the book's 'object in the worldness,' no, those 40 poems are objects in the world in their own right. And...and, well...I have no idea at all what conclusions to draw from this or what any of this means! I think perhaps it's to do with LANGUAGE. And that, ultimately, LANGUAGE may be what *Teens* means (ouch) or what it's all about...Lisette wants us to think about LANGUAGE: the history of words; what words mean; the power of words; and the kind of troubles we can get ourselves in when accepting and using certain nuggets of LANGUAGE unquestioningly.

I'll finish with a further section from the book. Not particularly illustrative of what I've just been talking about (and possibly actually totally contradictory in the way that a sense of what's going on here is pretty immediately retrievable) but one of my favourite bits nevertheless. So what the fuck. From '16. XII':

> Poetry is for everyone, this mean jerk-off
> cruises by my gold-oil thighs and flicks
> sighs of invulnerability relax motor
> engines cool in the night air
> guffing your indistinct haversack

mountains across from you, torn-waisted
white-eyed thorough representative
of the retail folk plaster your vowels up
and sang bar-room honours – slick armies
dart his naked face we are the techno-crisis
engendering future flake sterility plumes;
it's a joke he can't take seriously
aged 35 living off takeaway and wanking
over Sam Cameron

Get a copy of this book.

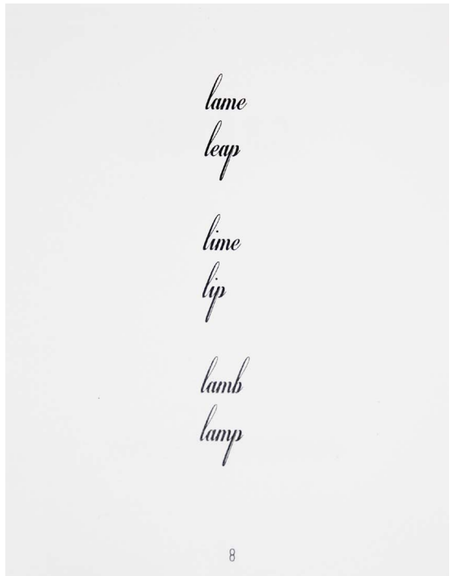
YesYesY

by Stephen Nelson (Little Red Leaves, Textile Series, 2013)

Reviewed by Luke Allan

YesYesY collects 16 poems – 17 including the title – that extend Nelson's longstanding work in concrete and minimal composition, in this case on the subject of (Christian) faith.

The book itself is tiny, palm-sized. The pages and covers are neatly bound using a sewing machine, and the paper – though too glossy – is a good weight, allowing the book to close naturally without it springing open (a bane of the mini-chapbook). The 'old bedsheets and remnant fabric' that we're told make up the covers – evoking, perhaps, the remnant strips of fabric left behind at the site of Christ's resurrection, or the blanket Jael used to betray Sisera (before hammering a tent-peg through his temple) – lends a tactility to the book that primes the reader for a fingering as well as an eyeing of the poems.



Nelson's poems invite close reading. The subtle movements of sound and shape, their bearing along with them movements in sense, is the basis for an analogizing of two experiences central to *YesYesY*: that of religion and that of reading. The eye strafes along invisible lines that fire across the page between visual associations and interconnections. Glitches and echoes that catch the ear cause a redoubled, non-linear hearing, so that a poem can end on its last line as well as its first, or somewhere in between. Hidden-but-evident movement; resonance's non-constituted presence. God. The movement of God among men, the subtle way that may be received, consciously or unconsciously.

In 'lame/leap' six words are stacked in three couplets. In each couplet, the daughter-word is produced from its mother-word via the phonetic transition mn --> p; at the same time, the three mother-words stand in relation to each other by the same function that links the three daughter-words, ey --> ay --> am. This zigzagging structure, prompting a simultaneous forwards and backwards reading, is brought about by harmonies and tensions in the adjacency of sounds. When a thing zigzags it progresses at once unilaterally and contrarily. A snake. In Nelson's poems we are carried along by a perfectly consistent and lucid line of enquiry that is simultaneously multifold and indirect.

This aural interplay is part of a wider ecology of touching in Nelson's poems, which incorporates shape and sense. For instance, the characteristic inversion in the final couplet

'lamb/lamp' – visually, the suspended 'b' for tethered 'p'; and orally, muted ending for plosive – opens the way for an inversion of sense in which the lamb (of God) transits into the lamp, or light, of the world: two conceptions of Christ, the guided and the guide.

In 'open hope' the letters of OPEN fall diagonally into place as the letters of HOPE, with the visual affinity of H and N oiling the transition. The angle of this movement, reiterated in the 'N's diagonal, has a natural, organic aspect, reminiscent of the way light falls through clouds and windows, or the drift of waves along a beach. (In fact, the poem could be realized in either of these environments.) The ease and directness of the move graphically sets up a vision of the ease with which it is possible philosophically and experientially.

Both words OPEN and HOPE are ambiguous in their classification, being both an adjective and a verb (in the case of OPEN) and a verb and a noun (in the case of HOPE). In one reading, hope is described as being open; in another, the poem instructs that hope be opened; and in another, the instruction is to do both, to open and to hope. Again, the poem is a non-linear construct; a disclosed, undisclosed rebus. The calm richness of these poems is a reason to trust them and to take time to allow for new subtleties to emerge. One might note, for instance, the pair of Os, their quiet second-life as a pair of eyes, and recall that what is 'opened' more than anything else in the Bible are the eyes of the converted.

'faith/feather' offers a good example of Nelson's use of typography. At first blush, the profligate combination of floral and geometric typefaces in the collection seems excessive, even naïve. In the poem above, for example, why not just list the words in roman type? One answer is that, like the interplay of glyphs in 'lame/leap,' the exaggerated serifs hint at an interpenetration of sense: a literal interpenetration paralleling a metaphorical one. Another answer, and a more interesting one, is that the typeface forces a significantly slowed-down reading, provoking a semi-theatrical performance of the poem by the reader. This alliterative impediment, caused by the visual distortion, accentuates the featheriness of the feather and the potency of the flower: the tender, intoxicating bloom of faith in man reproduced as the gentle, lavish shaping of words in the mouth. The poem is a little play about the flowering of faith realized as a drama of reading.

The graphic mellifluousness of 'faith/feather' stands in sharp contrast to the austere geometric lines of 'crown.' Positioned at the natural height for a crown on a portrait page, we are presented with a concrete poet's rendition of Correggio's portrait of Christ-and-crown. The presence of the crown *on its own* here, however, draws specific attention the absence below it, filled with the idea of Christ's absence.

The six commas function visually as thorns. But the sense in which a comma denotes a pause, or fragmentation, is also present. Here the commas fragment not a sentence but a single word, so that the reader's encounter with the poem is like that of a child coming to a word for the first time: 'c' 'r' 'o' 'w' 'n'...CROWN. The final associative shift invited by the poem is from the idea of a child coming for the first time to a word, to that of man coming for the first time to the Word.

Nelson's combination of religious subject matter and concrete form is reminiscent of Henri Michaux's celebrated *Quatre cents hommes en croix (Four hundred men on the cross*, 1956). Though Nelson's poems don't contain the anguish of Michaux's, they lay open for scrutiny the same tender debris of a poet's coming-up-against-language in contemplation of his faith, a language that is bound to keep on re-routing that transcendental impulse back into a poem with physical properties, line-breaks, endings. This drama is portrayed in the collection's title, which shows a plotted linearity forced back onto itself, forming an enclosed shape.

The book itself could be bigger to allow Nelson's visually striking poems to stand up on the page. Crammed in like this, the poems have a tendency to bleed off the edge of the page, losing their shape and integrity. A further improvement could be made by cutting the page numbers. In a short chapbook like this, page numbers belong in the same category of data as printer's crop-marks, and should be dropped.

Often when we read a sentence with a mistake in it, we sense that something is wrong before we have identified the particular fault. These poems' subtle auditory and visual nuances have a similar non-direct power; they generate sensual assonances, yessings in the mouth and ear, that precede and then unfold understanding. Nelson's poems trust their reader, and that in itself is worth celebrating. If they succeed, it comes down to this.

Katrina Sequence

by Holly Pester (Intercapillary Editions, 2012); as .pdf here:
(http://intercapillaryeditions.com/holly-pester-katrina-sequence/

Reviewed by Scott Thurston

Holly Pester's *Katrina Sequence* comes in an elegant, minimalist A4 hardcover edition from Intercapillary Space. It comprises three texts derived from online mini-documentaries about the role of ham radio operators during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. In an introductory note, Pester explains how she composed the pieces by listening to the audio of the documentaries on headphones whilst reciting what she heard into a voice recorder, later transcribing and editing the results.

The poems are presented in left-justified continuous verse blocks, so that the line becomes the determining factor in how these fragments of transcribed speech are organised. Approaching the subject in this way seems like a kind of hyper-realism, but one counterpointed by the Language Poetry-like effects of non-sequiturs, which shed light on the richness of the discourse: 'roger roger eye ball reflector,' 'just because of the wind / because of the wind,' 'the people are running the planes.' We also get glimpses of humanity at its best in a crisis: 'we're doing everything we can you guys are doing a great / job,' 'does anybody else need me,' 'this family want to bring food and clothing to this family.' ('this is papa'). In the third section 'he's in texas' we start to get a hint of the politics of the sequence when it appears that the hams are trying to relay official messages from the President who is safely at a distance in Texas: 'i have an urgent message from the president of the united / states to the mayor of new Orleans' – note the accusatory line break. This political dimension can also be traced in passages like the following:

> why have they closed the emergency
> i don't understand

that's right
in the middle of an emergency
[…]
they don't give
a jerry about it

These lines reveal something of the Bush administration's appalling handling of the crisis, whose delayed and mixed responses to the situation cost many lives, and which came in for direct criticism as a form of racial and class discrimination towards the people of New Orleans. If one can nevertheless permit a symbolic reading of this sequence, Pester might be imagining the hams as a figure for poets at their best – picking up wind-borne words and seeking to put meaning into wider circulation, available to all, in times of crisis. As Tom Raworth has it: 'within everyone is an antenna sensitive to the messages of the time: art is beamed to these antennae.'

P.S. - after writing this review I came across an essay by Abe Louise Young called 'The Voices of Hurricane Katrina Part I: The Ethics of Appropriation' and a response by Raymond McDaniel 'The Voices of Hurricane Katrina, Part II: Reflections on found poetry and the creative process', both viewable on the Poetry Foundation website here: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/239906. This discovery was thanks to a footnote in John Seed's Manchester: August 16th and 17th 1819, recently published by Intercapillary Editions. Whilst I do not think that Pester's pieces take the same ethical risks that Young attributes to McDaniel, and remain sympathetic to McDaniel's eloquent defence, readers might find the arguments here relevant to their own thinking about the ethics of conceptual writing, which forms at least part of the context in which Pester is working. ST 21.7.13

City Break Weekend Songs

by Posie Rider (Critical Documents, 2011)

Reviewed by Sarah Hayden

Posie Rider's *City Break Weekend Songs* wants us uncomfortable. Not flayed, cauterized, or, even – as many of its contemporaneous con-texts would have it – a little too vigorously embraced; it wants us uneasy. An egg-yolk yellow thing comprising some 12 poems and the doubly hysterical '*Recipe Corner!*' addendum, this book sets us on the edge of an overstuffed chintzy couch; a perch which it threatens dramatically, with every unsettling

tone-shift, to upend. The rhetorical idiosyncrasies that distinguish Rider's blogwork from the writings of that other fine 'lady-poet' whose body she co-habits manifest less in the prosody of these poems than in the paratextual apparatus and presentation thereof. The chummy, plummy poet-persona summoned by the conjunction of bubbly typeface, rhapsodical biographical note and the exclamation marks which adorn both epigraph and addendum is superseded, in the text proper, by one charged with a more political agenda. Thus, it is in the disjunct between import and purport that the motive power of this text lies. The real feminist-socialist potency of *City Break Weekend Songs* is activated by its inter/intra-subjective dissonance.

Throughout the book, mutually incompatible images and ideologies bump up against each other; ardent (though frequently stoppered) revolutionary aspiration abuts a flippant complacency. The forecast is for capitulation. Made complicit in this ambivalence, we strain towards 'the row that will never erupt,' alternately surrendering to and walking away from 'the significant ideological shift that is occurring right now / but which I just don't, like, feel in my guts' ('Move away, never come back'). The first poem, 'Meadows,' introduces several recurrent tropes. In this parody of the contemporary urbanite's fetishization of the rural, an initially romantic description of pastoral industry – the mundane sorting of pulses and grains – is rendered implausibly exotic by the sheer Boroughs-Market breadth of produce concerned: 'red lentils, / buckwheat, quinoa, petit pois, / edamame, pearl barley, black rice, / oyster pulse cous cous, poppy seed.' The site of this epic sorting is no peasant kitchen. Although the poem opens with the image of a house that 'stands idling o'er the fields,' that promise of stillness is immediately betrayed by the unpunctuated columnar rush which succeeds it. The violence of this shift from stasis to throughflow is only amplified by multiple evocations of visceral rites: 'an old flute playing in the blood,' 'burn out the pit of this,' 'rebirthing from mulch' and frequent reference to degeneration, decay and imminent loss: 'the stacks are going, the wealth is gone,' 'this is a landscape of copses / a whole great nation built on fairyring.' If meaning here is somewhat elusive, it echoes the poem's own construction of an equally fugitive and ephemeral material world. Twice the implied reader is petitioned by an unidentified speaker to 'untin me here'; a command that is, like the poem, more committed to the site of its action[1] than to the performability of that intransigently cryptic favour. Incongruities repeatedly disturb rural isolation. Surfaces yield surprises. Mysteries are concealed 'under a blue fog'; we sense that 'there's something rich beneath.' The remoteness of this idyll dissolves when Birmingham suddenly materializes nearby and, within one comma spliced line, the promised picturesque of 'this copse' collapses bathetically into 'blue plastic.' Escape, whether from the urban or – as when a crowd of 'tank clad wives / army sons' unexpectedly colonize the mid-section – the

1 [unfolding us into a meticulous land-art action that would have us 'prick a pin around the hinges of the land']

industrial-military complex, is impossible. The dream of fleeing the social real, of becoming 'gorgeously apolitic' rings hollow as an estate agent's promise. Notwithstanding the sensual pleasures derived from fondling – and describing – the issue of the landscape, the speaker's drive to gather a 'demos to riot with' belies an impatience with (and ultimate rejection of) even the temporary 'city break' suspension of sociopolitical engagement.

A similarly riven topography troubles the title page, where 'Meadows,' 'ruined cottager,' 'Tower Burn' and the two sections parenthetically labelled '(folk)' cleave from the ostensibly more urbane edges of 'Leeds onextra' and 'That Coke Is Far Too Expensive For You, Melody!' These poems are rife or, indeed, ripe with images of temporarily arrested revolt and barely restrained violence. In the London of 'slumber perspiration,' 'protesters play sleeping lions with rioters.' Is the speaker who chants 'I know what happened to the bees they are buried on Lindisfarne' the same she who, in 'City Break,' admits to 'bachhandhing [*sic*] a bankerite across threadneedle street'? And if so, what dire internal split is causing her to boomerang back and forth so jarringly between urban action and rural retreat?

'be HAPPINESS: now' lampoons the rhetoric and rank avarice of the self-help industry. And here, in an italicized epigraph, we find the breathy, exclamation-marked jubilance Rider's of online prose. Evocative of the claim in '(anyone--anyway--anyhow)' that 'These lines have been [...] borrowed from the feeble-minded,' this poem presents a collage of distorted book-titles, vapid aspirations and floppy new-wave thinking: 'because, I never asked you to be my friend / & no one can disappear completely / terror isn't something you can just pop in the sea / i want to ask my spring greens the story of their lives.' In formal deference to its impoverished content, the left margin disintegrates raggedly. Soft thinking wanders from its rightful left-side edge, meandering vaguely across the page. Yet a trace of melancholy subtends the satire. The speaker acknowledges the allure of learning, not just how to be happy in this Big Society, but 'HAPPINESS' itself, and right 'now,' even as she pillories its pseudologic as 'bad science.'

Posie Rider is a feminist poet; one who writes both feminist poems and poems about feminism. 'City Break Weekend Songs' is a book of feminist poems that attempt to identify and to analyze the aporia in their own ideological fundament. When, in 'WATER is COOLER!', the speaker observes: 'I find myself in my atmosphere / in this miasma of cunt,' we are not given to understand that the battle has been won. This poem, perhaps more explicitly than the rest, voices the contrary impulses that push us towards revolutionary utopianism and away from the disappointing realization of these aspirations. The exclamation-mark ridden 'ADDENDUM: Recipe Corner!' is dedicated to providing instruction '[a]s a little treat' in the baking of cupcakes 'shaped like little vaginas!' It abounds in booze-soaked, undeserved, you-go-girl self-congratulation: 'Place the Baking Cases into a cupcake tin. Well done – you've completed the first task. Have a Gin Fizz!' All of the ingredients it calls for are, in line with the liberal morality of the rest of the

book, ethically sourced and produced according to (mockingly capitalized) 'Fair Trade' and 'Organic' standards. Projecting a vision of historically-contextualized feminist bakeathons, the poem-as-recipe delights in how cakes can 'swell like an excited mons pubis' and advises that, while they cool, we '(Relax with Luce Irigaray).' Into this glossy magazine-style cheerleading – '(Clit City – here we come!)' – is threaded philosophically dissonant fear of female flesh as a threat which must be policed. Having laboured over the production of these anatomically correct cakes, we are warned: 'Don't eat them! They are extremely fattening. A glass of Chablis is far more appropriate. Yummy!' The drive to instate a feminist community is countered by a(n again) melancholic appreciation of the grossly attenuated ends to which this impulse, like the leftism with which it is entwined, can be put.

The Odes To TL61P

by Keston Sutherland (Enitharmon, 2013)

Reviewed by David Grundy

The Inhumanity of Keston Sutherland's Odes to TL61P

This poem, or series of poems, is an ode – rather than the song of praise that implies, a love-poem, perhaps, but more or most likely a lament for TL61P, the code for a now-obsolete replacement door for a Hotpoint Tumble Drier. It is an attempt to write a poem directed towards a non-human object. But such an attempt does not exist as some spurious 'object-oriented ontology,' some 'ethical' attempt at bringing into being a fantasized 'inter-objectivity' between the human and non-human worlds that tries to escape human mediation and thus overlooks the actual real of material human labour, the actual mediations we live inside. Rather, it is a means of relating to objects produced by humans which does not give them an agency of their own, as Bruno Latour, having internalized the logic of capitalism which Marx satirizes, would have us believe, but realizes them as living, or, more accurately, dead, because these objects contain the dead labour of those exploited under capitalism and as capital itself.

TL61P is at a triple remove: it is a code which stands in for that which it exists as a replacement product-part for – code stands in for replacement door stands in for door stands in for the dead labour that produces it and that it reproduces. The obsolescence of TL61P, turned into the 'inhumanity' of a particular letter-number combination, a 'word' or series of signifying objects turned into affect-less code, the arbitrariness of the sign, is a deadness like the deadness of dead labour, a mere statistic. As a specific object, the tumble-drier door is in part chosen for its deliberate arbitrariness, or the gesture of choos-

ing it is made to seem that way. Pick an object and fix on it as if it meant more than it did, constantly wanting to mean more than the shit you do mean, poetry's poverty aspiring outward in teenage belief. Or, as Sutherland puts it in an interview in Naked Punch, "seizing on a very improbably specific detail of consumer society and trying to make from that some image of the whole" – which is, after all, what consumer items, commodities are, encapsulations of the labour that produces them, the products of a complex (and now global) system of exchange and exploitation which they both cover over and embody with their shiny desirability.

But it (the Hotpoint dryer door) also comes to take on specific qualities: not because it functions as an exact 'symbol' so much as because it is forced into a certain level of metaphorical affect by the pressure placed on it to be 'worthy' of its centrality to the poetic project, to 'live' up to the attention violently or lovingly directed at it. Thus, the tumble drier dries out the wetness and sweat of dirty clothes and turns them once more into new and gleaming objects, as if just taken from the rack, though at the same time it wears down and fades the colour of those clothes with repeated usage, giving the lie to its own rebirthing function; just as the commodity tries to dry out the blood and sweat and wetness of the dead labour that produces it, makes that undead labour non-human. Addressing the ode to it doesn't quite attempt to make it human again, because that would just be a parody of the process of dead labour's congealing, but suggests, by imparting it with that trace of humanity, the displacement of real needs and desires onto fictitious or all-too-real material objects, and thus, implicitly, how love might be re-directed from the object-made-human to the human, which, under capital, is made object. Not to consume or 'exhaust' that object, but to realize the inexhaustibility of it, in Adorno's terms: not that TL61P is that which to which one must direct an inexhaustible love, but that the conditions in which that love might so be directed to the human could be thought, against and out of a visceral, strenuous and comprehensive attempt to live through the wrongness of relation which gives rise to Sutherland's project.

This has, of course, has been a part of Sutherland's work for several years now, from Roger Ailes and Hot White Andy ('Roger are you there,' 'Hot white Andrew Cheng'), the displaced figures of love – nefarious Fox News figure, Chinese middle-ranker, – but, in the Odes, it is taken to a non-human extreme. Giving oneself up to an inhuman object, to the totally other, is what one is required to do under capital every day; the condition of sacrifice, of human blood, of human flesh, propitiation to the money-god. Through an absolute attempt to inhabit and make potently manifest this state, Sutherland attempts to move through that condition into a place where it might be possible to imagine some other condition – somewhat akin to that state Will Rowe discussed in a paper at the Militant Poetry and Poetics conference at Birkbeck this past May, in which one would have to live and feel and think as if one had completely inhabited and passed through the condition of absolute,

paralyzing fear which at times seems to psychologically prevent the thought of any kind of resistant counter-action to prevailing internalized propaganda.

It is another question whether or not we find this project to be successful or not, and whether or not we believe that poetry per se, or a particular kind of poetry, or this particular poem, is the place for this attempt, an attempt which can clearly not exist without the movements for social change with which it seeks to act, both existing as the conditions of possibility for the other. And it is another question even whether the poem itself does want what it, and its title and general schematic framework, claims. In that sense, perhaps the above is merely a ventriloquization of certain theoretical positions which exists as a merely conceptual, rather than immanent-critical approach: no praxis here. But perhaps this can be a start towards thinking outside these boundaries, towards a properly close reading that challenges the claims made above.

The Odes To TL61P

by Keston Sutherland (Enitharmon, 2013)

Reviewed by Lisa Jeschke

If poetry readings are – among other things – live performance, they work as a kind of poor theatre, with little material means in support. It's as if you wanted to make a vast heterogeneous theatre performance but the only means of production, the only channel available, was a telephone line: so you call someone as an attempt to compress EVERYTHING into that call. On 14th May 2013 at Café Oto in London, Keston Sutherland read from *The Odes to TL61P* (Enitharmon, 2013), as such an attempt to compress EVERYTHING that necessarily needs to be said into one particular call. The *Odes* are super-restless, they're SUPER with all that term's implications of trash and globalised minimal-maximal communication – and yet, as matter, as either words on a page or a voice in a room, they are, on a surface level, sensually unproviding and unconsoling, like a mono-channel. But this mono-channel is not entirely limited by the walls of, in this case, Café Oto, just as a telephone line might in fact evoke a whole theatre or, the reverse, a theatre performance evoke a mere telephone call, sort of as in, say, Beckett's *Not I*. This reading felt SUPER-concerned with the fact that we form material co-extensions not only of the spaces we find ourselves in, but also of several simultaneous historical periods past and present – for example as numerically visualised by the sequence "2013," or as conceptually apprehensible as "late capitalism." Not that 2013 or late capitalism are imaginary conceptions, rather we see them as we look at each other, in our voices and physiognomies and bodies:

> I am a real hole for you, not a barely noticeable flimsy crack; David had
> a stupid way of laughing and a fucking ugly blush. Hasten defections.
> (p. 64)

The hegemony of life lived in its time might relativise – though not erase – the problem of authority in the reader-audience relation: if there are all sorts of exterior factors and hegemonies running through and exceeding the time and the structural politics of the occasion of the reading, the authority of the poet might (also) seem miniature. One of these exterior factors is the textual material: if the words already exist on the page and are to that extent pre-recorded, of the past, then the now of the live situation is kicked in its back from behind; like when recorded voices of the dead haunt us as ghosts which are materially present, in exactly one voice that struggles to speak them all.

This is what the *Odes* seem – partly – concerned with: the question of containment, and who is contained by what, and what is excessive of whom, that is: what is the relation between poetry and everything else, naively to be called, perhaps, the world? The *Odes* seem to demand to be more than poetry, and they demand of the world to be more than the world. There is an attempt at absolute and excessive openness, where the word and the world would spill into and over one another swallowing, exceeding, incorporating, intruding upon, violating [without object]. Which one is smaller? And which one is a co-extension of which? In terms of size and scope, what is our beginning reference point, if poetry is one material form forming part of further material forms, in a relationship of geometric translations? But: before this poetry can contain the world or be contained by the world or all and both at once, the *Odes* are bound to struggle with reaching the excessive openness they gesture towards in the first place; the demand is not yet its own fulfilment, and it is their necessary and pathetic struggle – in an emphatic, politicised sense – with what they propose that defines the *Odes* as: work. The *Odes* work, but perhaps less like humans than like fleshly virtual computer game worms, advancing by slowly eating their way through everything and anything that crosses their way:

> Pope's descents to Beckett's dips, Keats astride a grave betimes, a Nige-
> rian sex slave. A Nigerian sex slave plying its overstretched, hedged, oily
> ass at the dusty fringes of the Biennale to drunk sponsors of the Euro-
> pean tents. Or what will not debase so much as shatter, or what will not
> rejoin but soon rip up, or rearrange with gratuitous violence, undo sav-
> agely primp or outright annihilate. Our amity is fitted for division. You
> won't say anything more radical than sex. (p. 29)

The prose line eats through the boundaries of poetry, only to be contained within the

boundary limits of the prose line itself: i.e. where prose initially seemed to test the limits of poetry, suddenly the occasional bouts of verse and mock-verse in turn seek to question the limits of prose. As do those prose lines standing out beyond the mostly standardised page margins:

> ground to splitting air, the poor should live where they can afford to
> not where they are, redistributive justice; it became a country
> full of torture, omnivorous ravenous gut for riveting blood,
> rigid Muslim centrefolds, radical grievance pornography,
> there are some porn films in which a woman is only
> [...]. (p. 37; the final line of the quote is the beginning of a block
> in standard line length, those above stand out in excess.)

Sometimes a spade needs to be called a spade, i.e., a grave needs to be called a grave. These passages of direct and violent accusations against this state or State of things are mixed with long sections of linguistic parody: where 21st century language is extremely rich and testifies to an, to our, extreme poverty of thought and experience, virtuosically:

> Besides paedophilia, which now means the sexual love of prepubescent
> individuals in particular, we now have hebephilia, a diagnosis for the
> sexual love of individuals in the early stages of puberty, but not earlier;
> ephebophilia, a diagnosis for the sexual love of individuals lately pro-
> gressed out of puberty (these last two are sometimes also called koro-
> philia and parthenophilia); (p. 55)

It's like we can be anything we want to be, but only 'Reactionaries think life should mean life.' (p. 38) Which might be an echo of Adorno's epigraph to *Minima Moralia*, 'Life does not live.' Which, in turn, seems like a condescending thing to say to people who might feel a mistrust towards someone else's (objective?) judgement of their lack of life when to them (objectively?) their life might feel more like life than like a lack of life. But as in Adorno, deadness in the *Odes* is not morally assigned to *ennui* or spiritual emptiness in the bourgeoisie – which has been the gesture and accusation of some earlier 20th century avant-gardes – but is concretely and analytically linked to capitalist forms of wage labour and production, as well as to this government and this day's day-to-day politics. The poems display how we are hurt and dissected and killed in our day-to-day lives, and in fact how we hurt and dissect and kill, as if the active and passive voice all melted into one another: the argument implies it is our reps (politicians and artists! structurally) who suicide society, not the other way round.

The *Odes* feel like that absolute and absolutely ugly and megalomaniacal and even ridiculous(ly) teenager-like longing in Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* – where the hugeness of the demand is itself something that might threaten the order of the state: the state of things, but also specifically the State. This seems like a massive demand for and of poetry: the desire for all wrongs to be righted. But regardless of the individual's desire: 'If there will be a revolution in the UK, it will require the army.' (p. 65) Suddenly the revolution appears small – limited to this UK kingdom and its army – and, even worse, poetry appears tiny, toying, poor, removed – quantitatively. But qualitatively it fights against its poverty by channelling a huge world (involving the sun, the moon, the stars, the revolution, every single fucker who dares to be happy, every ghost of a life hovering around unhappily, every dialect spoken anywhere, every word dead and alive) into a single line of speech. Which is all asymmetrical: this poetry is fucked.

Top Ten Tyres

by Gareth Twose (The Red Ceilings Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Tom Jenks

"Call it bricolage or: indeterminate facade"

I tried not to base this review on a barrage of tyre-based wordplay, but, as the below shows, I failed. This book has the zip of the Pirellis on Fernando Alonso's Ferrari and the grip of the spiked winter treads on Lenin's armoured limousine. As always with Mark Cobley's persistently excellent *The Red Ceilings Press*, the physical production of this book is as luxuriant as a showroom brochure, fronted this time with a close up of a sleek, factory fresh tyre that might lead us to expect the contents to comprise a raft of performance statistics, or advertisements for platinum wheel trims. But *Top Ten Tyres* is no more about tyres than *Hamlet* is about cigars. Twose uses the notion of the tyre to create moulds into which text can be injected, with the poems being grouped into fours, each headed with the name of a brand and its vehicular position: *Avon – near side front*, *Avon – off side front* etc. The most cursory read through reveals that there are more than ten of these and that the relationship with the heading of each block to its content is no more than passing. Some of these blocks are ten lines in length, some are more, some less. There is no easy solution to this work. It cannot be inattentively thumbed like a copy of *What Car?* in a dentist's waiting room. Twose's work does what experimental work should: it makes demands on us as readers. It does not present us with a snap shot, rather a slow, panoramic reveal. Meaning is not offered to us: rather we, as readers, must make it, if we feel the need to make it at all.

This is a book with a framework that is not really a framework, working almost subliminally with the nuances of product and the litany of livery, with the white noise of advanced capitalism and the buried structures of an alternative. It is deeply intelligent work that does its work meticulously.

The text is disjunctive, a molten, multiply enjambed hybrid of written and found material, not so much a patchwork as a montage, or a series of overlays. *Top Ten Tyres* is densely striated, but also transparent in that Twose does not keep anything out. Like Zukofsky's *A*, Twose's work is not simply a view of the world via a repeatedly asserted single point of reference, more a prismatic conglomeration of multiple, partial and fragmentary perspectives. Reading *Top Ten Tyres* is like channel surfing on a Freeview box, or viewing the world from a late night black cab blurring along a radial road, or rollerblading around the Trafford Centre after having your mocha laced with peyote. All human life is here, from *I Can't Believe It's Not Butter* and Hellman's mayonnaise, to Katie Price's ear and Paris Hilton's eyelashes.

What must not be overlooked in *Top Ten Tyres* is its wit. By wit, I do not mean puns or whimsy, although these are both shots in Twose's locker, rather the term in its learned, Lawrence Sterne sense of robust, eloquent, dextrous, ambidextrous play. Twose's humour is not slapstick. It does not proceed by gags and punchlines, rather by a skilful blizzard of references and a production line of precision tooled images, delightful in their absurdity, Day-Glo in their sensory impact. There are too many to mention individually, so I'll pick out three favourites: 'marzipan penguins for Christmas'; 'significant peril for sleek aubergines'; 'debt-sodden ostrich in a leotard.' The first is the sort of thing you might buy on Bid TV in the small hours after one too many Babychams. The second, in a better world, would be a newspaper headline. The third achieves the rare feat of being both absolutely tangible and totally unimaginable.

Top Ten Tyres is a work of what Marjorie Perloff calls radical artifice: a text in which language is not simply a content delivery mechanism, rather a thing in itself. Twose's language is not designed to be invisible or neutral. It is not meant to be looked through, or to exist in the background, like Pan Pipe muzak in a lift. The pleasure comes not from what is happening, but how what is not happening is shown to not happen by the medium of layered, luminal language. Twose's work has no narrative. It is not concerned with self expression or psychological investigation. Whilst the text, laid out in its semi-regular units in a pseudo-schema, seems to invite linearity, and sequential processing, this is not what the experience of reading *Top Ten Tyres* feels like. There is no single route or arc, no message in block capitals. Reading this book is not about connecting A to B to C, but appreciating that A, B and C exist simultaneously. This is an open, porous work. One feels that Twose would have no problem with multiple readings and would indeed welcome them as evidence of success. Twose's detonated, tessellated text foregrounds the materiality of

language and makes it physical.

Top Ten Tyres is a book of great technical facility and does what only the best work does: it offers us a different way of seeing. I, for one, will never look at an aubergine or Paris Hilton's eyelashes in the same way again. Gareth Twose takes poetry and retreads, remoulds and, if the situation demands, completely replaces it at the roadside. And you won't even need to claim on your insurance.

Instar Zero & Team You

by Mike Wallace-Hadrill (Critical Documents, 2011 and ©_©, 2012)

Reviewed by Mia Prefab-Chanson

Under inspection are two of the most recent pamphlets by the quietly prolific Mr. Wallace-Hadrill, an elusive sort believed to be holed up in one of the more lugubrious corners of Cambridge; his words have, at any rate, been cranked through the presses there. The wrappings on these are bright: one sports puffins, although those hoping for odes to seabirds – a hope from which the present reader, lately thrilling to the salty strains of Masefield, was not, admittedly, immune – will be disappointed. Disappointment, however, is as appropriate a mindset in which to approach this material as any. Far removed from the half-dreams of revolution that might animate some of his more sanguine comrades, Wallace-Hadrill writes to us from a landscape in which every act has become a struggle against 'click binge lethargy.'

To begin with the epigraphs, we are confronted with some bracingly belligerent dredgings from the well of popular song, always a dependable source of iron for anaemic versifiers. *Instar Zero* leads with an anonymous Italian boast that 'Blood' is 'my speciality,' a claim traceable, after fruitless searching in Dante, to the rapper Frankie HI-NRG MC, whose hits do not seem to have troubled these shores. *Team You* opts for a line from Bruce Loose, of San Francisco sludge progenitors Flipper: 'Ever look at a flower and hate it?' The punk's swagger, mired in dysphoria. From here, of course, things blur. *Instar* is a pointedly scattered text, although the same irregular pattern of lineation – like a serialist tone row, not immediately detectable – is repeated four times. It is, in part, some species of love lyric: the opening lines find a 'Lovesick squib' intoning 'break my heart so I can grow a new one,' and the final page reaches for traditionally romantic rapture: 'her smile could & did shake stars.' This is less the backbone of the poem, however, than the exoskeleton it is trying to shed (an 'instar' being a developmental stage in the life of an arthropod).

What's on the inside is harder to discern: slime, perhaps, or 'cataracts of luminous dreck,' whether puked up or smeared across the computer screen. Romance is undercut by

biology – may in fact be nothing more than a 'bio-hoax,' 'mere neural leakage' – and the beloved object's innards are exposed: 'I fell in love with her lymphatic system'; 'inside her bright viscera / am some puffins' (yes, the puffins do eventually make an appearance, albeit lathered in stomach acid). Technology is a malign presence, as are inanimate objects: 'lungs heavy with spyware / the stairs eats the stairs.' There are other voices: some sort of off-stage chorus of truthers repeatedly reminds us that '(IT WAS A SETUP),' and 'simon' (of 'Simon says' fame) makes several hectoring interjections. Trying to go through this stuff like a haruspex, though, will only leave one, as the text reminds us, 'wrestling for a competent paraphrase,' a hopeless task. Infected with a light nausea, we are left contemplating, in one of the more starkly jaded lines, 'the firmament: one vast mediocrity.'

Team You has a more immediately visible form, its blocky eight-line stanzas laid out one to a landscape page (a format similar to Wallace-Hadrill's previous ©_© title, *Nettle Range Bladefear*, and also, of course, to late Prynne). It is written for the most part in full sentences, although their cumulative significance is, if anything, considerably more evasive than *Instar Zero*. There is a narrative of sorts, set up in the opening lines:

> **SO** the spit lips tongue gums dispatched sonic warning
> of raw mucosa in action, a map swam forward to meet it,
> where it split to a fix and a ban the map split too, down now
> to rest on each side in signal lock.

The starting point is a fleshy oral phenomenology, but the events folding out of it resist clear interpretation. The 'sonic warning' would appear to result from some chewing or sucking motion, but it could also be speech. Who or what is being warned? What is the 'map' (a paper map, a bitmap, a game map, a Google map, a neural map, a genetic map?), how does it swim (in saliva?), and why does it split? (is a poem a sort of map for getting lost by?) The pamphlet's cover is adorned with a bright pink and green exotic fruit – a pitaya, as it turns out – and one initial reading of the poem's opening is as an oblique autobiographical account of this fruit being eaten. The second stanza contains several lines to encourage such an interpretation: 'my pitaya / flames withered to paperwork'; 'To my / greyscale juice core did I shake.' Images of the fruit's curiously grey, frogspawn-like flesh grace the endpapers.

The pitaya thread can't be sustained for very long, though. If a protagonist emerges, it is perhaps the colour yellow, engaged in some sort of struggle with red and green ('you will finally learn when / will you that red and green are just shades of yellow'). Yellow occurs exactly between red and green in the visible spectrum of light: to those with red-green colour blindness (a group, incidentally, that includes cats, dogs, and most other non-human mammals), much of the world appears yellowish. Perhaps the yellow in this poem emerges

from colour-blind vision (the first stanza mentions an 'aberrant occidental retina'), or a traffic light ('Traffic lights / still sing translucent through skin'), but it ends by presenting itself as a superior dialectical synthesis of the two opposing colours: 'Mere civilians such as yourself / wouldn't know anyhow, would never dare to dream / of a way between stupid red man and stupid green / man.' After all, the vocabulary of colour is itself a form of 'splitting,' coarsely and clumsily marking off regions of a continuous electromagnetic spectrum.

Such musings may be beside the point. *Team You* is a febrile, even 'psychedelic' text, punctured with moments of anguish ('I am an abject failure at everything I try'). It must be consumed impressionistically. On this note, I will round off the review with a brief rumination on the function of obscurity in contemporary verse. According to one idealist line of thought, running from the French Symbolists through much of modernism generally, techniques of syntactic fragmentation and semantic opacity were a means of transcending debased everyday language in the hope of arriving at some higher (or deeper) realm of knowledge, retrievable only by strenuous exegetical exertion. A version of this belief has persisted to the present day, particularly among devotees of the aesthetic theory of Adorno, but it is arguably a diminished current. The alternative, often dismissed as 'postmodern' (the even sillier 'post-avant' has lately caught on in America) is to accept the *aesthetic* value of modernist techniques, while abandoning claims to a privileged 'truth content' emerging from them. To advocates of the former position, the latter can seem contemptibly deflationary, since it reduces poetry, epistemologically speaking, to the status of any other entertainment.

Here we can turn to Bentham's old utilitarian line: 'Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin [we might substitute Angry Birds, or Skyrim] is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.' If we concede this point – and I'm afraid I can think of no really convincing reasons not to – then it still leaves us with the question of the aesthetic case for an obscurity stripped of occult significance. One could mumble something about negative capability, or the desire for some non-pharmaceutically induced derangement of the senses, or the quasi-religious search for consolation in a world of unending sorrow, or the audiovisual attraction of flailing word-chains unleashed from quotidian usage. These psychological sensations are presumably similar whether or not one believes that the poem has access to the Beyond, or the Real, or the contradictions of Capital, although such beliefs may impart an added frisson that eludes sceptics. I have no idea quite where Wallace-Hadrill stands on these questions, and it makes little difference to an appreciation of his work, which I recommend for perusal by all curious parties.

Eleven Days

by Rachel Warriner (Run Amok Press, 2011)

Reviewed by Richard Barrett

Communication via content; communication via form. Content I don't 'get' I often have the most fun with. For me, then, the poem becomes a site of almost unlimited possibility – my understanding can take me in this direction; it can take me in that direction; it can take me pretty much anywhere actually. Making a sense of form I find a process similarly rich with possibility. With *Eleven Days*, Rachel Warriner seems to want to reduce some of that ambiguity around interpretation of content. The book, we learn online, was 'written in the eleven days between the IMF arriving in Ireland and the bailout being signed.' So Warriner has narrowed what we can do with this poem. Here Warriner is very definitely saying something and she wants the reader to know that she is.

The book consists of eleven poems dated consecutively from 18.11.10 to 28.11.10. – the consistency of form allows the poems to be read as one if preferred; that form being left aligned; only a handful of words per line, usually no more than three. All of which lends an urgency to the work – these are not leisurely, meandering poems, no, they pass at speed, propelled forward by Warriner's impulse towards action, a blurry mixture of emotion, observation and interpretation, recollection and reflection.

There's some terrific stuff here. From the first poem 'knowing you were rotten / gives no comfort / to those / cut in quarters / with crusts off.' Here, it's 'cut' which is key and which is doing impressive work – simultaneously referring to the IMF imposed cuts and, also, taking the reader back to a memory of packed lunches put together by a parent, showing, in this case, Warriner's view that Ireland is being treated akin to a child by the IMF. From the end of this first poem 'mendacity swells / your jowls / and your aul palaver' – a great image and very pleasing half-rhyme. And so it goes on – lots and lots of reasons to be impressed by this book: 'slug / mucus gloops / from cheap suits' (yep!); 'no hope hipsters / in tea dresses / wax asymmetric / about nero burn' (yep, again!) and 'I'd cry for you / if the IMF hadn't seized / my tear ducts' (yep, a third time!). Really though, if not the examples just given then almost any number of others.

Amongst the justified anger the text displays towards the IMF and their bailout conditions there seems to me a second big emotion in this book – and that is disappointment. The book is disappointed with the Irish politicians; the Irish public and, perhaps most interestingly, with these lines:

halfmasked
drinkers crush
cans in
shows of
fury and small
children riot
over who holds the sign

In this description of impotent fury and petty squabbling the reader recognises a disappointment in the anti-IMF demonstrators. Which is interesting as it shows Warriner complicating her position. *Eleven Days* is not simply telling the reader "this is good"; "that is bad"; no, it's doing something more complicated and subversive than that – it's poetry that is treating us like adults and asking us to think for ourselves.

This is not a book solely about politics though. Throughout the eleven poems here there are numerous references to a relationship going on as well. This succeeds in adding another dimension to the book and, also, in the sense that this is not a relationship with the anti-IMF protests as a background but a relationship that is occurring alongside and simultaneous to the protests, emphasising that for *Eleven Days* protest is not separate from life (kind of like it might be for a 'Sunday protestor') but inextricably bound-up with it. (On this subject interestingly [or not] Jonny Liron and Verity Spott, addressing or responding to Sam Riviere in their recent Iodine Press chapbook *Dear Nothing and No One In It*, comment 'the word this year is austerity' – implying a distinction between people exploring this ground because it's 'hot!' and 'now!' and people with a longer established relationship with the political as subject matter of their work).

Not surprisingly the austerity policies of the current government and the events that led up to those policies such as the 2008 economic crisis seem to be either directly or indirectly shaping a lot of UK work that is emerging now (as poets worldwide will no doubt be similarly engaged with their domestic equivalent yet interconnected subjects). *Eleven Days* is one of the best books exploring these areas I've yet to read.

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