

Missed Communication: Three New Anthologies

on *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century*, Allegrezza & Bianchi, eds (Cracked Slab, 2007); *Lyric Postmodernisms*, Reginald Shepherd, ed. (Counterpath Press, 2008); & *TriQuarterly* #128, the “Ultra-Talk” issue, Hamby & Kirby, eds.

by Michael Theune

In “The Flexible Lyric” (from *The Flexible Lyric*; Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1999), Ellen Bryant Voigt makes a “long aside” in order “to admit unseemly optimism regarding the American poetry wars,” writing:

Now that democratization is so thoroughly accomplished, poets are freed from the shadow of a single overwhelming figure, and freed as well from a dominant aesthetic, from the hegemony of theorists (for whom actual poets are mainly irrelevant), from the old hierarchy of publishers (while most of the large ones have abandoned poetry altogether, small presses print more volumes of poetry than ever before), and from the tyranny of reviewers (most newspapers and journals no longer review poetry at all, unless it’s in translation). The general population prefers television to literature, and any idealism about increasing poetry’s esteem in the culture faded with the last earnest, futile antiwar readings that preceded Kent State and the bombing of Cambodia. With so little remuneration from poetry (and it was ever thus), and more American poets than ever before (for which Poets-in-the-Schools and MFA programs continue to be chastised), one might say that poets have nothing to lose and everything at stake—a wonderfully inchoate leisure in which to figure out what, with free verse, we were freed FOR.

Voigt certainly is right to point out some signs of increased democratization in contemporary poetry, and, in fact, it is relatively easy, now, over a decade after the first publication of her

essay, to see what seem like even more signs of this democratization. For example, there are instances of a melding of the American poetry war's two sides, a more mainstream traditional/formal/lyric aesthetic married to a more experimental/avant-garde aesthetic, that creates what has come to be called a "middle space" poetics, and there is, in fact, a great deal of aesthetic overlap—for instance, a number of slam poets, including Jeffrey McDaniel, Jennifer Knox, and Megan Volpert, are publishing outside of typical slam venues. But there also are trends running counter to this democratization. Not all poet-critics are in agreement with Voigt, or doing the work she hopes will be taken up. In fact, some seem invested in maintaining distinctions similar to those featured in the American poetry wars—even though they show that they know better.

One such critic is Stephen Burt. With the publication of essays such as "The Elliptical Poets" (*American Letters & Commentary* 11) and "Close Calls with Nonsense: How To Read, and Perhaps Enjoy, Very New Poetry" (*The Believer*, April 2004), Burt has become well-known as the champion of the kind of difficult poetry specific to our day. Less well-known, however, is the extent to which Burt is dubious of the value of what he champions. Toward the end of "Close Calls with Nonsense," in a section of the essay called "What I Miss in What I Like," Burt reveals that he misses in the difficult poetry he champions the wit and argument that he finds more readily in other kinds of poetry. This concession becomes even more powerful when, in the essay's final paragraph, Burt, quoting science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon, states that "90 percent of anything is no good," adding, "contemporary poetry is not, and never has been, an exception." With this profound admission, Burt reveals the secondary, if not completely threadbare, nature of the distinction his essay encourages and depends on. Suddenly, much more vital than the distinction between different kinds of poems (difficult or accessible) is the distinction between poems of different quality (good or "no good"). Burt would have better, that is, more fully and more accurately, served his readers by showing them what difficult poems are good, and just how one can tell.

Another such critic is Ron Silliman. Silliman maintains the now (in)famous distinction between post-avant poetry (the difficult, experimental work he favors) and School of Quietude poetry (more accessible work he generally dislikes). However, like Burt, Silliman does not like a great deal of post-avant poetry he is thought to champion. In his August 27, 2003 blog post, Silliman notes that if he were to perform a close reading on “post-avant poetry in general” he would likely “find 95 percent of it wanting.” His rationale, however, for championing this kind of poetry is that this percentage is a bit better than School of Quietude poetry, about which Silliman notes that, when he applies the same kind of close reading, he finds “something much closer to 99 percent (or higher—the “five nines” theory of 99.999 does indeed beckon) equally lacking.” For Silliman, these slightly different percentages amount to a big difference; he states, “. . . [I]f I stack the two traditions against one another, five percent of one totally overwhelms the one percent (or less) of the other, which will tell you about my aesthetic choices, including, for example, why I make them.”

But, of course, this rationale does not really explain anything—especially why Silliman would champion anything that he in fact likes so little of. Silliman’s percentages seem much more a rationale for giving up the overly simple distinction between Post-Avant and School of Quietude in favor of thinking much more clearly about what makes good poems, perhaps even allowing oneself to consider, as poet-critic Dan Schneider has (at cosmoetica.com), whether seemingly different good poems have more in common than good and bad versions of the same kind of poem. That is, might, and *shouldn't*, the (so far) foregrounded distinctions of kind be trumped by the (supposedly backgrounded) distinctions of quality? Such clearly necessary and potentially revelatory inquiry, one which might begin to tell us what our freedom is for, is never pursued—in part because the outmoded conversation about ossified poetic kinds continues and so occludes it.

The fact that such taxonomies of kind, and of kinds not all that different from those engaged in the American poetry wars, still exist even when their proponents know and show them to

be outmoded suggests that such taxonomies in fact have much to offer. They certainly make for easier theorizing, argumentation, and writing. Their easy brand names and labels are appealing, certainly, but more deeply, they allow (with the aid of some carefully placed concessions and caveats that help to make the taxonomies seem respectable) for all of the pitfalls and uncertainties, and the plain old painstaking work, of evaluating particular poems to be bypassed in favor of the much easier task of sketching out some groups of poets to pitch into an either-or argument in which the opposition is portrayed as a straw man, a weak version of its own stance, to reveal that, surprise, one's own position is the better.

No matter their use-value for the critic, such specious distinction-making needs to be recognized and questioned—especially as such specious distinctions, and the ossified thinking behind them, are proliferating, and getting codified in recent publications, including the three new collections of contemporary American poetry under review here. Each one of these publications takes up a particular aesthetic; the special, “Ultra-Talk” issue of *TriQuarterly*, new, accessible poetry, and the two anthologies, *Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries* and *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century*, the challenging Post-Avant. However, each of these collections is fraught with problems at this conceptual, critical, editorial level, the level which, following Randall Jarrell's insight that “[a]nthologies are, ideally, a species of criticism,” I will focus on this review. Upon examination, it becomes clear that, like Burt's and Silliman's, their gatherings by kind are largely specious, that, regardless of their editorial statements, each in fact includes many kinds of poems, even often including kinds of poems they claim to oppose. Additionally, there is a range of quality in these poems, and the distinctions of kind and quality never simply jibe. And so, instead of being successful arguments and brilliant showcases for the kinds of aesthetics they tout (and sequester, perhaps quarantine), these collections actually could/should be arguments for greater poetic inclusivity. Ultimately, the three collections seem to have been created more through critical inertia than with any sort of real critical com-

mand. At their least problematic, these collections are carelessly crafted, using their tired aesthetic kinds as a marketing ploy but not really carefully representing and espousing those aesthetics. At their most problematic, their misrepresentations skew the picture of contemporary American poetry, reinforcing outmoded and uncreative distinctions, and actually putting up further barriers to thinking seriously, or at least consistently, about the ends of free verse.

Ultra-Talk

The least problematic of these collections is the “Ultra-Talk” issue of *TriQuarterly* (*Ultra-Talk*), which, by virtue of its status as a journal issue, must work with material submitted for its publication, unlike the anthologies, the editors of which, one assumes, have greater control over the material from which they can select. (Or, to employ Burt’s number system, a journal’s 10% of good work is not nearly as bad as 10% of good work in an anthology, which should be able to collect a much higher percentage of good work.) *Ultra-Talk* gathers poems from over 60 poets, including Albert Goldbarth, Billy Collins, Tony Hoagland, Bob Hicok, Rodney Jones, Kim Addonizio, Stephen Dobyns, Mark Halliday, and Denise Duhamel. “Ultra-Talk” poems, according to the issue’s introduction, “Pleasure First,” written by the issue’s editors, Barbara Hamby and David Kirby, are poems that provide pleasure. The first sentence of “Pleasure First” states, “Grown-up readers apply the same test to literature that kindergartners do, says Auden; the only question worth asking of a poem or story or play is, do I like it?” According to the introduction, the manner by which ultra-talk poems provide pleasure has been established over the past few years in a series of essays. Mark Halliday originally used the phrase “ultra-talk” to describe poems (by David Kirby) that weave together, as the introduction states, “detailed anecdotes, bits of pop culture past and present, and references to books read.” A few years after Halliday, David Graham used the phrase to describe a slightly larger group of poets writing poems that were “garrulous to an extreme, quite often self-reflexive, determinedly associative, and frequently humorous.” Slightly abridged, the four flexible traits

of the ultra-talk poem, according to Hamby and Kirby, are:

1. A poem features the voice of the speaker but other voices as well, at least by implication...
2. A poem will focus on the present moment but also convey an awareness of a larger world of time and space...
3. A poem that deals in comedy will acknowledge tragedy. And the other way around...
4. A poem that works on stage will work on the page as well...

Many of poems in *Ultra-Talk* have these traits. The poems generally are the product of distinct voices, talking about, and typically finding, some insight into or humor (be it light, dark, or wry) in contemporary life. These poems, for example, ponder how it is that the humor in *Jackass* works, or how the power dynamics in a relationship can be shifted by agreeing to watch *Sin City* with one's husband, or by taking a picture with your cell phone of the man who is flashing you. Often, these poems are structured around talk; they talk about talk. One poem, "What Do I Recommend?," is built around giving a recommendation at a restaurant; another, "In Camp, After Praising—Too Exactly—His Beloved, the Ass Man Is Rescued by a Falling Star," describes how talk can too readily create images we might not want others to have a hold of. And sometimes, the poems are so talky as to be, essentially, litanies, as is the case with Gabriel Gudding's "[Athnam Nagaram Katam]," a tragicomic translation of the truths of change and decay as contained in the *Dhammapada* ("Because basically we are bathwater in a bag...And because we are here in this realm of bladders: with our dental problems, under this stupid hair, our toes jammed in little turbans of fungus..."), and Natasha Rocas's "The Pillowbook of Natasha Roka," a prettier list of imagistic memories and ideas.

While because their titles and opening lines do a good job of situating the reader these poems, generally, feel accessible, the vast majority of the poems are really powered by the logic of the poetic turn, and a reader must be prepared to engage with a poem that will swerve and leap. In fact, many of *Ultra Talk's* poems are structured as a list with a twist. Phyllis Moore's

“Why I Hate Martin Frobisher” gives an extensive list of nearly thirty reasons for this hatred (“...Because he leaves wet towels on the bedspread / Because all mothers, waitresses, and bank ladies love him on the spot...Because he’s always wrong and I’m the first to say sorry / Because he tries to placate me”) until the final reason turns into the poem’s final surprising declaration: “Because he’s got a heart the size of a chipped acorn, the brains / of a squirrel, he’s a jerk, / a little girl’s blouse, / a felon, but straight-seamed, / a cream-faced, two-penny / scoundrel and a kitten kicker, / a real badass and / I want him back, oh yeah.” Dean Young’s “Articles of Faith” consists of a list of beliefs that moves generally from the truly superficial (“I used to like Nicole Kidman / now I like Kirsten Dunst.”) to the playful (“Grown men should not wear shorts in airports / unless they’re baggage handlers...Most heavy metal music is anger over repressed homoerotic urges / is the sort of idea that got me beat up in high school.”) to, through a gradual stripping away of the comedic, the serious: “The early explorers were extremely agitated men, anti-social, violent, prone to drink. / Demons walk the earth. / Says so on a tee shirt. / We are born defenseless. / It’s a miracle.” Even Gudding’s litany achieves a kind of resolution, to offer, finally, stillness, permission “...to sit to the end of this sorrow.” The list with a twist a formula is not unique to *Ultra-Talk*; rather, it is employed in a great deal of great poetry. In fact, much of the sonnet tradition could be thought to run on this kind of structuring, exemplified, perhaps, in George Herbert’s “Prayer.”

In a self-reflexively funny, large-scale turn, “Recycled Air” (subtitled “Essay on Poetics”) is included as the collection’s final poem. About the kinds of poems in *Ultra-Talk*, “Recycled Air” both comments on the turning in these kinds of poems, noting how the poems “swerve,” and itself turns, maneuvering from initial stanzas about the general type of poem ultra-talk poems are and a roll call of its key practitioners (which interestingly includes John Ashbery “when he isn’t being entirely vaporous”) to the way this kind of poem works by telling “a gosh-darn good yarn” and then incorporating strategic allusions and then considering “the classbound assumptions of such *poesis* in the

twilight / of the implosion of late capitalism...,” to the poem’s final major turn, a consideration of who the reader of “Recycled Air” is that manages to circle back to the name-dropping in the poem’s beginning, referencing Frank O’Hara, “...the one who in point of fact invented / insouciance in a Soho bar in 1949 and then left it / (generous man!) lying about for just anyone to use...”

Certainly, *Ultra-Talk* is insouciant, but it is often poignant, as well. There is at least one strain of poetry in *Ultra-Talk* that is worth specific mention. Poems including Campbell McGrath’s “Justice,” Carl Dennis’s “Unsent Letter from the Owner of Fifty-One Summer Street,” Gregory Djanikian’s “Talking to Myself in the Shower,” Steve Scafidis’s “After a Photo of the Author in a National Magazine,” Nin Andrews’s “Depression,” and David Graham’s “Opening Credits” are what might be called poems of modern consciousness, poems that try to capture and convey the (often low) content and the (paradoxically, very involved) movements of modern thinking. For example, Mark Halliday begins his poem “Muck-Clump” with a trifle: the poem’s speaker is corrected by his wife regarding the correct amount of cereal to pour for their daughter. The rest of the poem consists of the speaker’s thoughts about what he will say to his wife, and how he will say it, when his daughter leaves leftover cereal in the bowl, planning how to say “Do you think Devon got enough cereal?” “with measured irony / that would sting slightly but also come across as witty...,” and then what to do when he realizes that Devon, in fact, ate all of her cereal, deciding, in the end, “to rise above the entire episode, to be large-minded, / to wash a few dishes nonchalantly and read the newspaper / and make an insightful remark about something in the news,” and rationalizing this choice by noting that “[a]wareness of a larger world, after all, is / a central part of being mature.” These poems are really very new confessional poems, confessing the intricate narratives and plots we imagine all the time, admitting in perverse detail the ways the mind moves, with its jealousies, impudence, malice, revealing the stupid workings in our crowded brains. Such poems belong to a tradition that includes Baudelaire’s “One O’Clock in the

Morning,” in which he confesses all the small slights and wrongs he perpetrated during the day. They reveal the ways that Blake’s psychological “Poison Tree,” planted by a simple slight, takes root in a brain, and then grows to diabolical (and, at a safe distance, laughable) proportions.

For all its humor and comedy (no matter how serious) *Ultra-Talk* is oppositional. “Pleasure First” in fact is a defense of ultra-talk poetry, providing precedents and forebears (among them: Swift, Byron, Koch, O’Hara, dithyrambic poets of all sorts, Shakespeare, Blake, Whitman, Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Tracie Morris, and the Nuyorican poets) to legitimate the aesthetic. Its oppositional stance becomes especially clear when the opposition is named. Quoting David Graham, “Pleasure First” states that ultra-talk poetry is conceived of as “‘a welcome alternative’ to ‘much current poetry that is over-solemn, willfully opaque, or radically atomized in thought or typography.’” And, while referencing prior collections of poems that anticipated *Ultra-Talk* (including Steve Kowitz’s *The Maverick Poets*, the section on the “Kitchen-Sink Poets” in Nancy Pearl’s *Book Lust*, and Charles Harper Webb’s *Stand Up Poetry*) some hints of some of the oppositional stances of those works are revealed—“Pleasure First” quotes Kowitz’s introduction to his anthology which states that he is bringing together “poets writing ‘an heroic and colloquial poetry: large-spirited, socially-engaged, heart-centered, and defiantly wacky,’ work not ‘tepid, mannered and opaque’....” *Ultra-Talk* is designed to oppose, and so implicitly stand up to, such other kinds of poems.

But, while one expects a certain amount of diversity in such a collection, there are significant, and problematic, oppositions within *Ultra-Talk* itself. There are oppositions in kinds. As opposed to the generally rangy poems, there are (perhaps mannered) short lyrics by Gerald Stern. As opposed to the clear narratives and turns of so many of the poems, there are the dense, perhaps even “opaque,” lyrics of Catherine Bowman, Caroline Knox, and Danielle Pafunda. As opposed to some poems that have ingenious turns, there are others that have very predictable or weak turns, or no turn at all.

As this final opposition of kind indicates, there also are

oppositions of quality. There are excellent poems here, and there are very bad ones—and sometimes these are by the same poet. Denise Duhamel’s “Lucky Me” is a 4-page confessional poem that goes nowhere; however, her “October 1973” is much more typically accomplished for Duhamel. Steve Fellner’s “I Am Known as Walt Whitman” is problematic, with lines like “...O, my dumb, dead boyfriend, / you are my expired muse. Because I know you gave so kindly to strangers, I imagine / your hole as raw as the material for this poem,” but his “Russia is big and so is China,” a list poem that riffs off of a statement that President Bush was overheard saying, using it as the basis for a *reductio ad absurdum* (“Monopoly is fun and so is strip poker...The news is strange and so is my hairdresser...Armageddon is a bummer and so is Picasso”) is delightful. Additionally, some of the poems (such as Pafunda’s) that are not really representative of the “Ultra-Talk” type are quite good.

While such variety is not quite so problematic for the journal issue *Ultra-Talk* as it is for the two anthologies under review here, the extra degree of difficulty in creating a consistent journal does not excuse the editors—they could have done better. Hamby and Kirby, for example, could have been more exacting in who and what kinds of poems they approached for contributions. Why these poems by these poets and not others? Why not take, say, just Duhamel’s stronger poem, and then solicit other poems from other poets, including, say, Kent Johnson, a poet rarely thought of as being in “ultra-talk” circles, but whose work in his amazing book of anti-war poems, *Lyric Poetry after Auschwitz*, and whose recent epigrams, filled with gossip about contemporary American poets, are the epitome of talky poems? Why Steve Fellner’s “I Am Known as Walt Whitman” and not a poem by former slam poet Jennifer Knox? Why poems that don’t fit the anthology’s stated aesthetic and not a poem that fits the aesthetic by a poet one would not automatically associate with this aesthetic? (Charles Bernstein comes to mind, a Language poet who, though, specializes in humorous, satirical send-ups of—supposedly—plain speech. Talk about talk!)

Of course, the editors are free to accept whatever work from whomever they choose, but then it is not so clear that that

work will make the clear statement they also hope, and indeed claim, it will. While, overall, a good collection, as the work of criticism its introduction clearly wants it to be, *Ultra-Talk* is problematic in at least three ways. First, it confuses people who might be interested, or even want to take sides, in the aesthetic debate it delinates. Second, it does its own cause a disservice by not always showing nearly as precisely as it should its own aesthetic in the best way that it can. Third, it aids its opposition by providing it the easy target of inconsistent and sometimes low standards—and as a result, other kinds of poetry that situate itself against poetry like that found in *Ultra-Talk* do not have to try so hard to do better than this.

Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries

One such opposing poetry can be found in Reginald Shepherd's *Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries*. *Lyric Postmodernisms* brings together work by twenty-three different poets, including Forrest Gander, Brenda Hillman, Timothy Liu, Bin Ramke, Donald Revell, Susan Stewart, Cole Swensen, Rosemarie Waldrop, and Marjorie Welish. Shepherd gives the rationale (or, rather, the first few of many rationales) for this collection in the first sentence of his introduction: "This anthology brings together the work of twenty-three highly accomplished poets of diverse geographical, ethnic, gender, and aesthetic backgrounds whose work combines lyricism and avant-garde experimentation in a new synthesis I call, after Wittgenstein, lyrical investigations." The central issue in this statement is the issue of the new synthesis of the lyrical and the experimental, an idea referred to numerous times in the introduction. According to Shepherd's introduction, "These poets [included in the anthology] discover, create, and explore new territories in the intersections between lyric enchantment and experimental interrogation. They innovate and recreate while still drawing on and incorporating the lyric past and present. Their critical art is also a celebration of the riches of the lyric tradition." And, indeed, this issue frames the whole introduction, which concludes, "These lyric postmod-

ernists bring together Duncan and Berryman, Zukofsky and Bishop, Spicer and Auden, in a new poetic synthesis, one that has been very influential on newer generations of poets.”

The synthesis of the lyric and the experimental is one that Shepherd has been exploring for some time. Shepherd begins the introduction to his previous anthology, *The Iowa Anthology of New American Poetries* (2004), by stating, “This anthology collects the work of twenty-four poets whose work crosses, ignores, or transcends the variously demarcated line between traditional lyric and avant-garde practice. Their work combines lyric allure and experimental interrogation toward the production of a new synthesis that I call, after Wittgenstein, lyrical investigations.” Additionally, this middle space has been the subject of a number of blog entries, both at his own site (reginaldshepherd.blogspot.com) and at Harriet, the blog of the Poetry Foundation. In fact, in a posting from February 6, 2008, at Harriet, Shepherd, citing poet-critic Joan Houlihan, somewhat playfully refers to the work that he collects in *Lyrical Postmodernisms* and in *The Iowa Anthology*, work that gets labeled at times as “post-avant,” “middle-space,” or “elliptical,” as simply “that kind of poetry.”

According to Shepherd, one of the great values of this kind of work is its critique of overly-simple binaries. In his essay “One State of the Art” (*Pleiades* 27.1 (2007): 2-10), Shepherd formulates again and again the binary of a poetic mainstream (which, Shepherd states, has been associated with “sincerity” and “subjectivity”) and avant-garde experimentalism (associated with “artifice” and “objectivity”). While Shepherd, referring to Silliman’s use of the phrase “School of Quietude,” recognizes that the maintenance of this distinction is now “more ritualized than ever,” Shepherd himself contributes to this maintenance by passing his own large-scale aesthetic judgments on the two schools. According to Shepherd, “Much of the work of the self-identified avant-garde feels like aimless doodling—there is little sense of urgency or necessity...[but] [o]n the other hand, much mainstream American poetry (and there is indeed a mainstream, broad, sluggish, and muddy) seems never to have heard of Modernism (or even, in too many cases, of Keats), retailing

equally aimless examples of therapeutic self-exploration or convenient epiphanies..." Such charges, of course, are not new—they are the charges that the two camps make against each other. Now, though, Shepherd is using a similar tactic—which he at one point calls (when other people use it) "unnuanced either/or thinking," and at another point refers to as mere "territorialization and fence-building"—against the two camps to differentiate the middle space aesthetic he champions.

In order for him to make his own stance substantial, Shepherd must show that his method of distinction-making is more legitimate, more right and correct, than the distinction between mainstream and avant-garde. He must show that his own aesthetic in fact is superior to the other aesthetics. And to do this, he must answer the question: how is it that his middle space somehow emerges as something valuable when it is the synthesis of aimlessness? That is, what makes the poems of his middle space so good, or at least more than an amalgamation of different kinds of aimlessness, something capable of eliciting in readers something more than what Shepherd, citing Joshua Corey, in "One State of the Art" calls the "corrosive postmodern 'Whatever'"?

Shepherd never satisfactorily answers this question, either in "One State of the Art" or in the introduction to *Lyric Postmodernisms*, although there is something like an attempt in the introduction. Expressing a sentiment similar to Ellen Bryant Voigt's, Shepherd notes that "[o]urs is a decentered contemporary American literary and artistic world in which there is no agreement even on what practitioners of ostensibly the same art form are doing or trying to do, let alone on those efforts' means or aims or how they could be evaluated." And, again like Voigt, Shepherd feels fairly positive about this state of affairs, recognizing it as "...a space of opportunity and possibility." According to Shepherd, "...[W]e are living not just in a time of uncertainty and suspicion..., but in an unusually open period of poetic exploration and discovery, very much including rediscovery." What this exploration has allowed for, according to Shepherd, is the exploration of the broken lyric and all the fragmentary techniques of postmodernism; his middle space poems

proceed by “breakage” in such a way as to exclude the possibility (still dreamt of by the Modernists) of achieving “a new and more true synthesis.” This, however, is not enough for Shepherd’s poetics of the middle space. In the next paragraph, Shepherd states that the poets of the middle space also are interested in “connections and relationships,” in showing that the brokenness is “but the beginning, one that can be turned toward possibility...”

Though perhaps seemingly substantive, this description of the middle space is unhelpful. Many poems are in some way broken (90%, according to Burt; 95-99.999%, according to Silliman), and one assumes that all poems could be said to have some interest in connection—the words that constitute them are gathered under particular titles, for instance. There is no way to tell from Shepherd’s description of what poems should be included or excluded from his anthology. As one might predict, the result is more of a mess than a synthesis.

As in “Ultra-Talk,” there is a great range of poetic kinds and quality in *Lyric Postmodernisms*. Certainly, there are some lyrical investigations in this collection, including Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge’s multi-sectioned “Fog,” a kind of cubist investigation of fog, one that melds into its inquiry issues of perception and memory. Much more often, however, the poems tend to fall into one of two categories. On the one hand, some poems are mere broken lyrics with insignificant connection. For example, Martha Ronk’s “Elgin Marbles,” a short poem of 16 lines, moves from a consideration of the sculptures (“...they / insist on warmth...they ask all of us to come touch them , / pull off their marble clothes”) to a memory of a girl who sat like a statue to both attract and repel others (she “knew how to come on, / disdained anyone who’d lay a finger on her”) only to end with what seems a clear instance of a therapeutic gesture, a convenient (if somewhat obscure) epiphany: “This time / in the vast hallway when the guard’s back / was turned, I put my hand on the shoulder / of someone whose name is not known for sure.” The response to such a trumped-up but ultimately inconsequential poem can only be “Whatever.”

On the other hand, other poems are lyrics with connections

so clearly made one cannot call the poem broken at all—they're simply well-crafted lyrics. Forest Gander's "Anniversary" is a sexy love poem, its naturalist's surrealism ("Not to be known always by my wounds, / I buried melancholy's larvae // And cleaved the air behind you. / Myself I gathered // Like the middle dusk / To the black tulips of your nipples...") fitting the poem's passionate subject and preparing the way for the beautiful arrival at poem's end: "The rawness of the looking. // The quiver." Donald Revell's "Wartime" is a gorgeous poem, but, moving from a delicious, meditative despair ("Our lives seldom advance. And the beautiful / is a principle either too large / or too small to contain so much loose / and indispensable striving. / That is why I think of music...") to a direct address to the beloved that tries to find some comfort in a world in which it is "so hard to believe that things / are not the hallucinations of bad history," it has much more to do with Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" than it has to do with *Philosophical Investigations*.

Additionally, it turns out that this collection of "that kind of poetry" contains a number of examples of what seems a different kind of poetry, namely ultra-talk poems, talky lists with twists. Some of these seem successful. Peter Gizzi's "In Defense of Nothing" is a lovely orchestration of laconic beliefs, or guesses ("I guess those trailers lined up in the lot off the highway will do. I guess that crooked eucalyptus tree also..."), that then strikes an insight ("The present is always coming up to us, surrounding us"), only to then rev up to the point of merely persisting in its list-making: "It's hard to imagine atoms, hard to imagine hydrogen & oxygen binding, it'll have to do. / This sky with its macular clouds also and that electric tower to the left, one line broken free." For me, this poem courts a response of "Whatever," but also wonderfully keeps such a response at bay. But other poems of the same kind are much more problematic. Claudia Keelan's "Sun Going Down" has a striking and promising opening; the thrilling first line, "The occasions wouldn't stop occasioning—," opens onto a list of pleasant occasions, "Occasions for happiness—...Occasions for dreaming—" only to then turn to the consideration of darker occasions, "Occasions for murder, daily, / The nation's transparent

plans / Occasioning the bodies...Occasion for nightmares not remembered.” However, the poem’s final turn into an occasion for figuring resistance seems merely petulant and trite: “Occasion for hatred / For the men / At the Pistol Range, / For the flags smothering their trucks... / Occasion for dreaming / Of burning down the Pistol Range, / Of destroying the bulldozers / And cement trucks paving the Mojave; / Of gathering the flags and sewing them / Each to each into a shroud / For a country going down / In the aftermath light of its occasion.” Kathleen Fraser’s “You can hear her breathing in the photograph” opens with two terrible, clichéd metaphors: a misshapen piece of jigsaw puzzle represents a person who doesn’t fit into their family and “the snapping back of a stretched rubber band to its inherent ovoid design” (!) represents that person’s ultimate compliance with the demands of the group, and the poem then, wisely, but ultimately still unsuccessfully, violently turns from its own opening into a messy ekphrastic exploration of a photograph of Bernini’s statue of Apollo and Daphne.

Because Shepherd’s anthology does not evince a sense that it was created from the pursuit of the finest poems, or even, really, a particular kind of poem, one is forced to look elsewhere for its coherence, and it seems that what largely holds this anthology together is the poets included. Though Shepherd says that with this anthology he hopes “to reveal a new constellation of contemporary American poetry,” this cluster of 23 poets might seem like a looser constellation only due to a few strategic omissions. Simply add a few poets, such as Jorie Graham and C.D. Wright (to name just two of the names of middle space poets listed on Shepherd’s blog but, for some reason, not included in this anthology), and the constellation congeals into a recognizable shape. Even including many of the newer names (such as Peter Gizzi, Elizabeth Willis, and Martha Ronk—who has some poems in the anthology and in her larger body of work that are much better than “Elgin Marbles”), there are numerous tight institutional affiliations among many of these poets—they have long been affiliated with middle-space aesthetics; they work with each other (at Iowa, Brown, Denver, and

Utah); they award each other prizes; they blurb each other's books (a few have even blurbed Shepherd's books); a few of them are married to each other. Forsaking his own insight in "One State of the Art" that "[w]hat gets lost in all this territorialization and fence-building is *poetry*, and more specifically, actual *poems*, as readerly experiences and aesthetic artifacts," Shepherd has created an anthology that seems less a new configuration of poets guided by closely considering their poems and more a repetitious extension of a group of poets that ritualistically counts on no one too carefully considering the poems.

Shepherd's focus on the poet is clearest in his inclusion of artist's statements by the poets. Though in his introduction Shepherd notes that he has included aesthetic statements from the contributors to provide "invaluable" assistance "in situating and providing a point of entry for complex poetry that is sometimes seen as 'difficult' or challenging," such statements actually have a very different effect than this. Because, knowledgeable of the anthology's focus, the contributors all tend to compose statements that (innocently, if somewhat misleadingly) support their inclusion in the anthology, the statements tend to reinforce the anthology's stated aesthetics. However, it turns out that such statements generally are much less necessary than Shepherd believes. Had Shepherd himself more carefully considered the work that he was selecting for his anthology, he might have seen that a better, and in fact a newer, more radical and revelatory selection was possible. He could have created a truly boundary-breaking anthology, one that reveals that the language-lyric middle often is not an aesthetic that a poet always either does or does not participate in but rather more often seems to be an aesthetic available to the poet, available, though not always selected, for consideration and use.

This is readily apparent in the case of Brenda Hillman. "Thicket Group," the first poem by Hillman one encounters in *Lyric Postmodernisms*, seems to be squarely situated in post-avant aesthetics. Made up of five different sections, "Thicket Group" weaves together lyric bursts ("I had been a child being guessed at by onyx, fresh / from nothing. Dimension's pawn.") with self-reflexive speculation on the lyric undertaking ("Either tell the

story or don't. Narrative is such an either/or situation...You have changed the assignment to Swirl...") with the faintest traces of grounding in a particular occasion or narrative (a group of friends, "[s]uburban kids," smoking pot in a thicket, on the cusp of sexual initiation, "on the edge of change") so that the poem seems to be a combination of *ars poetica* and impressionistic recounting, a mixture of the lyrical and the language-oriented, brokenness and connection. Though such a reading can be worked out from the poem itself, it is, indeed, "difficult and 'challenging'" to figure out from reading just the poem, or even the poem accompanied by Hillman's author's statement. However, Shepherd could have been more helpful by including some of the poems from Hillman's *Loose Sugar* that appear around "Thicket Group," poems that, very clearly about initiation into sexuality, would most definitely situate and provide points of entry. For example, "The Spark," the first poem in *Loose Sugar* and the poem immediately preceding "Thicket Group," clearly (at a level of clarity on par with most of *Ultra-Talk's* poems) is about just such a process of individuation. After a brief, orienting introduction ("Once you were immortal in the flame. / You were not the fire / but you were in the fire;—...and when you became your life, / there were those who couldn't / those who tried to love you and failed / and some who had loved you in the beginning / with the first sexual energy of the world."), the poem largely turns into a poem made out of a list with a twist, becoming an effort to "remember those / who lit the abyss," that is, the "boys" who would become the speaker's partners in sexual experience, to end with a statement about the emergence of love from this process, the idea that "...all love is representative / of the beginning of time. When you are loved, / the darkness carries you. / When you are loved, you are golden—"

Had Shepherd really been interested in tearing down fences, he could have deliberately, systematically and clearly, included poems like "The Spark" alongside poems like "Thicket Group." In this way, he could have transformed the messiness of his selections (which already includes not only "that kind of poetry" but also this and this and this kind) into a statement, one

that reveals that the ways our poetic territories often are drawn up are wrong, that while there may be different kinds of poems, those different kinds of poems are not the property of any particular group, or even, often, poet—that is, those different aesthetics are not worth warring over. Rather, they represent aesthetic options, modes of writing available to each and every poet.

Shepherd could have been assisted with such an undertaking by taking seriously any one of the strands of thematic content that seem to feature in his anthology. For example, had he really been interested in presenting work very much like or influenced by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Shepherd could have felt encouraged to include more of the work featured in chapter six of Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1996), a chapter that includes not only a discussion of Rosemary Waldrop's *The Reproduction of Profiles*, selections of which appear in *Lyric Postmodernisms*, but also Ron Silliman's "Sunset Debris" and "The Chinese Notebook" (a poem which, according to Perloff, is "a sequence of 223 aphorisms, most of them on questions of language and poetics, that sometimes echo, sometimes gently spoof, the method of the *Philosophical Investigations*"), and Lyn Hejinian's "The Composition of the Cell," which, according to Perloff, employs a numbering system and short aphorisms to stylistically recall Wittgenstein's writing in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and pursue a number of Wittgensteinian themes. In this way, Shepherd could have broken down more walls, connecting Rosemarie Waldrop, a poet of the middle space (according to Shepherd, though Perloff tends to label her a Language poet) with two poets very closely connected to Language poetry, and one of whom, Silliman, is a theorist with whom Shepherd often disagrees. And one can imagine the roster of other very different poems and poets who might be joined due to their connection with Wittgenstein's work: Jorie Graham, certainly, but also H.L. Hix and John Koethe (a strong Quietude poet, but also the philosopher who authored a book called *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought*).

Additionally, if not immediately apparently, a closer focus on Wittgenstein might have allowed *Lyric Postmodernisms* to include one kind of poem that is almost completely absent from it: a witty poem. Though often very dry, Wittgenstein's philosophical aphorisms in fact often have comedic effect, working to set up the punch of an insight or a deeper question. In fact, as Jim Holt reports in *Stop Me If You've Heard This: A History and Philosophy of Jokes*, Wittgenstein once remarked that "a serious and good philosophical work could be written that would consist entirely of jokes." Endorsed by Wittgenstein, the inclusion of some humorous poems, and perhaps even poets, would really be to start to create a new constellation of poems and poets, a potentially more attractive constellation that includes not only serious, philosophical poems but also poems that feature plain old good humor, razor-sharp wit, and even biting satire, and poets, such as Dean Young, who, as of now, are figured among the Ultra-Talkers.

However, in part because Shepherd's anthology selections are otherwise so messy, the truly decisive lack of humor makes it a key (his previous anthology, *The Iowa Anthology of New American Poetries*, also lacked all humor), if unnamed, characteristic of the aesthetic he espouses. Though perhaps not really consciously central to the aesthetic he is trying to represent (for example, Shepherd never critiques humorous poetry in his critical writing), seriousness is important to him. One assumes that the reason for this is that Shepherd himself is a serious poet. And this is what really seems central to Shepherd's work as an anthologizer: he is trying to create a system from (or represent as systematic) what amounts to his own personal and sometimes idiosyncratic aesthetic proclivities and inclinations. This point becomes even clearer when one considers that although classical mythology is referenced in only one sentence of his anthology's introduction, it is Shepherd's pronounced attraction to classical mythology (featured in a good deal of his own poetry) and the classical world that is (much more than, say, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* or even a determined effort to accurately represent the middle space of poetry) the real focus of *Lyric Postmodernisms*, a book that is filled with

poems that contain classical allusions, including poems that employ as central tropes and/or subjects Socrates, Sappho, Eros, Echo, Narcissus, Eurydice, Lethe, the Elgin Marbles, the Graces, Sirens, and, extending just a bit what we might call classical, the Raft of the Medusa—which, astoundingly, is highly-specific topic is the focus of at least two poems! Of course, some amount of an editor will make its way into an anthology, but if one's task is to take part in a critical conversation in order to represent a specific kind of poetry, one has to be deliberate and accurate. With his anthologies, Shepherd has been neither of these. In fact, he is instead often misleading. In his mention of his interest in classical myth in one sentence of his introduction, Shepherd employs the classical as one of the ways the middle space makes a bridge between the traditional and the new, but this is misleading insofar as it is the case that all sorts of poets use classical allusion in their poetry, including plenty of poets who employ clear narratives, create lyric epiphanies, or who may have been included in *Ultra-Talk*. Classical mythology could have been used as a way to connect not just the traditional and the new but also (supposedly) very different kinds of poetry. Shepherd, however, turns this great potential on its head, and turns what could have been a great tool for creating unity (the disciplining function of selecting and sticking to a specific theme for an anthology, say, "Poems after Wittgenstein" or "Revisiting Myth") into another means to further differentiate the work in his anthology from what's around it, to take another step in solidifying a ritualistic either/or which in other contexts he so opposes.

The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century

Disappointingly, *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* makes a similar mistake. On the face of it, the ostensible focus of *The City Visible*, new poetry from Chicago, offers a terrific way to reveal the real diversity of poetry: Chicago—a city big and strong enough to support various kinds of poetry! In fact, one almost assumes that the act of linking poetry to, of grounding poetry in, a specific place is designed to invite such diversity, to encourage the revelation of, to use a

Wittgensteinian term, family resemblances among seemingly different work, traces of as-of-yet unacknowledged or unrecognized genetic and developmental links among various kinds of poetry. And Chicago, the home of the Poetry Foundation and *Poetry* magazine, the birthplace of the Slam Movement, and the residence of the School of the Art Institute and Columbia College Chicago, indeed, has a great diversity of poetry. The trouble with *The City Visible* is that it uses its grounding in geography not to connect various poetries but to shore up the city's reputation in just one of those kinds of poetry: the experimental, the difficult, the post-avant—much less “those many kinds” and much more “that kind of poetry.”

Though not apparent in the anthology's title, this focus is made clear in the critical prose that brackets the poetry in this volume. In his introduction, editor Raymond Bianchi pictures the influence that poets' work has on each other's as “a series of Venn diagrams touching all and influencing some.” However, this sphere of influence is very limited; Bianchi states, “The dialogue [among the poems and poets in the anthology] is between these poets who more or less care about the same things and whose work has influenced each others'.” After noting the “complete lack of Slam Poets and regional writers” in his anthology, though he notes that “these groups are strong in Chicago,” Bianchi (seemingly) clarifies: “In this volume you have a variety of poets writing on the edge—experimental, multilingual, internationally infused writing at the heart of the United States.” In his afterword, editor William Allegreeza, after an initial paragraph in which he acknowledges the “difficult task” that he and Bianchi faced in setting out to edit their anthology due to the fact that “Chicago has many different literary scenes, and [they] did not want to exclude any type of literary writing,” states that, in fact, “We do not make any claims at having crafted a comprehensive anthology of Chicago's poetry—the city is too diverse for that...” Allegreeza makes clear that his anthology collects work created during “a rebirth in experimental writing” in Chicago, and it is the recounting of the emergence of such experimental writing, which flowers around the millennium in the shape of poetry employing “postmodern

strategies,” which Paul Hoover takes up in his foreword to the anthology.

It may be tempting to think that this trouble might all be the matter merely of an inaccurate title. Certainly, had *The City Visible* been subtitled “New Post-Avant Chicago Poetry for the New Century” this would have cleared up much about the focus of the anthology, properly naming what in fact the anthology (largely) consists of: a range of quality of post-avant poetry. In *The City Visible*, one is introduced to a great deal of excellent post-avant work by over 50 different poets, including poets such as Srikanth Reddy, Jennifer Scappetone, Erica Bernheim, Arielle Greenberg, Robyn Schiff, Dan Beachy-Quick, and Robert Archambeau. Additionally, throughout, there are impressive single poems, including Larry Sawyer’s “Blunt Edge” and Jordan Stempleman’s “A Fable.”

However, the troubles with *The City Visible* go much deeper than just a carelessly worded title. Like the other two volumes examined here, it is a significantly much messier collection than it first appears. For example, it contains plenty of post-avant clunkers, plenty of work, especially a number of the shorter experimental lyrics, that is tepid, mannered, and opaque. Somewhat more importantly, though, is the fact that not all of its poems are post-avant. A portrait of a quiet scene (“The street quite still...Conversation on / the wires are quiet...even simple questions / go unanswered...”) that accumulates into imagistic insight (“Quiet’s like that. / Magnificent crystals // of ice spider / across the creaking panes.”), Michael O’Leary’s “The Chills” virtually is the definition of a School of Quietude poem. *The City Visible* even includes a few poems that seem much less like post-avant writing and much more like that aesthetic that the editors believe that they have excluded from their anthology: slam. Johanny Vázquez Paz’s “Our Revolution” could (I don’t know if she ever performs it competitively) work well as a slam poem. Like many slam poems, “Our Revolution” works in ultra-talk fashion, using accessible language organized in stanza paragraphs to deliver a list with a twist. Opening with a brief litany recounting the impossibility of new revolutions (“Since they don’t let us have a revolution...Since there are no

longer wars for noble causes”), the poem then turns to offer an alternative revolution (“...then, / let’s close the door and jump into bed / like friendly enemies.... I will be Bolívar / and you all of America completely surrendered to me, / and you will be Che and I Bolivia’s jungle healing your wounds...”) to then offer a final, synthesizing vision: “Since they don’t let us dream with Utopia, / then, / bury your sword in me so I will yell for the two of us: / Freedom!” Whatever one feels about the quality of such a poem, it clearly employs an ultra-talk aesthetic very popular in slam. And a number of other poems, including especially Jennifer Karmin’s “cultural imagination” (which consists of one bold run-on, beginning, “image visual language is not always linear how to interact with a place non place learning to see to look have nothing interact commodity exchange wanting to see to shoot the camera after being captured by native Americans some white people did not want to go back...”) and those poems that employ list/litany structures, including Peter O’Leary’s “To Epithymitikon (the soul’s desiring power)” and Roberto Harrison’s “Mandan,” though not written by slam poets, certainly have a slam feel. Though, according to Bianchi, Chicago, “a city linking South, East, and West that made the city what it is, the hub of America,” “has always been a locus of communication,” that communication is severely limited in *The City Visible*.

This is a shame because some poems would really begin to glow in the midst of such communication. One such poem is Nick Twemlow’s “Foreign Affairs.” “Foreign Affairs” mostly is a list of physical, bodily brutality (“Spear hand to the sternum. Cross shuto / to the ribs...Back knuckle to the groin’ll show ‘em...”) that occasionally opens out to larger geopolitical terrain (“You want to locate / the precise moment when a reverse punch / to the face might enfeeble / an army of shit-serious anarchists / hell-bent on keeping the withering sanctions / intact.... Repeat these secret strikes / like you’ve got privilege / coursing through your veins.... Six-year-old / kid smiles senile when uppercut / to the jaw blows his fecal / little village to pieces.”) that ends with the suggestion that all of this will become matter for eventual blowback: that little boy, that “little

shell shocked son of some gladly erased,” is “being taught spear hand / to the bladder,” is told to “[b]uckle up...” “Foreign Affairs” is an excellent, tough, contemporary poem, and one that seems both experimental and performative—it belongs in *The City Visible*, and it could rack up some good points in a slam. It has much to communicate to post-avant and slam, and perhaps, by extension, ultra-talk communities, including offering some evidence that, indeed, the great poems might just elude the grasp of easy distinction by aesthetic kind.

The shame of *The City Visible*'s lack of truly significant communication goes even deeper when one digs just a bit to discover some of the real reasons why such communication was not permitted: cronyism and reactionary disdain. The uneasy feelings one gets when reading this anthology, seeing how many of these poets have gone to or work at the same universities (and reading Allegreeza's admission that, when starting to explore Chicago poetry, his and Bianchi's first inclination was to search “among the various academic haunts of poetry...”), become justified after glancing at Bianchi's blog (irasciblepoet.blogspot.com). In the January 25, 2008 entry, discussing “Moribundity and Chicago Poesie,” Bianchi admits to such problematic cronyism. After stating that one of the problems with Chicago poetry is that “many of our poetic institutions are really vanity exercises for groups or individuals who use these venues to promote their own poetry or agendas,” Bianchi makes clear that the problem with such a practice is that it results in “a malformation of the poetry scene and a [sic] emphasis on ‘a scene’ and ‘friends’ and ‘groups.’” But this does not stop Bianchi from participating in such practices; Bianchi states, “Cracked Slab Books which I publish with William Allegreeza has been guilty of some of this ‘friendism’. The reality is that our anthology, *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* was limited to ‘experimental’ and ‘serious’ poets- we made a choice to publish our own kind.”

Though the reason given for the exclusion of slam poets (a central part of the “malformation” that *The City Visible* perpetrates and that Bianchi admits to) in his introduction is that slam poets have “a press infrastructure that supports their work,” the

reason that he gives in his blog, in the entry from May 17, 2007, called “The City Visible—Chicago Poetry for the New Century,” is much plainer and more direct; Bianchi states that, while poetry has been for him “a great gift from Chicago,” “[s]ome bad poetry has come out of Chicago for example the uninspired slam scene which is vapid and uninteresting...” Of course, such an overarching assessment seems terribly misinformed, reactionary, perhaps even fearful. In fact Chicago’s slam scene has been vibrant and tremendously productive for over two decades, and it has produced some excellent, even experimental, work by Chicago natives, including Regie Gibson, Alvin Lau, and sometime Chicago resident Buddy Wakefield. Indeed, if Bianchi feels that his own particular version of Chicago poetry is moribund, he has at his disposal one great way to address this: set it up next to, have it interact with, the great examples of slam (an aesthetic based on an ethic of interaction, of collegial combat).

Of course, such a move is challenging, and potentially dangerous—it might cause Bianchi to see that a good deal of the experimental work he and Allegreeza have included in their anthology is itself vapid and uninteresting. Regardless of the dangers, in an anthology the main concern of which seems to generally be to establish the bona fides of the post-avant writing in Chicago (or, rather, the general Chicago region—Bianchi notes in his introduction, that *The City Visible* includes work by people living in “Milwaukee, Madison, and a few other places”), such direct engagement should be encouraged. If post-avant poetry is so great, if it and not, say, slam is indeed the poetry of the new century, this should be displayed and engaged rather than hinted at in back channels while simultaneously being employed as a key organizing component for the whole anthology. Such deceptive methods, those generally employed by those with privilege coursing through their veins, have nothing to do with real communication, and really only pave the way for the next inevitable backlash.

In “One State of the Art,” Shepherd cites Allen Grossman’s four tasks that a poet must perform in order to be significant: “to point out what is significant in the world of common expe-

rience; to defeat given expectations with respect to how things are assembled (and poems themselves are very much in the category of ‘things’); to make clear how difficult it is to make meaning; and to make clear how interesting the world is.” Some of the work in each of these anthologies accomplishes these tasks. General aesthetic differences make little difference in this regard. However, recognizing this fact is vital—in this way, one might become open to new connections, new ideas and possibilities. Disappointingly, as largely carelessly crafted critical statements that cling to outmoded aesthetic distinctions, the collections under review here participate in occluding such recognition. They put up barriers to anything new and exciting to be gotten at. In and through their conceptual schemas and editorial decisions, no truly new constellations are formed, but rather, to borrow an image from the end of Mary Kinzie’s “The Rhapsodic Fallacy,” they behave more like dead stars, simply emptily orbiting each other.

This needs to be corrected. We need adventurous new anthologies that will, like the greatest of poems, “defeat given expectations with respect to how things are assembled.” Our editors as much as our poets should feel the pressure to Make It New! We need smarter and more creative anthologies to enable new juxtapositions, and even collisions, so that sparks, and perhaps even worlds, can form. And then, finally, we might have the constellation that we really need: one that truly helps us get our bearing. Only then will we start getting somewhere. Only then will our theoretical systems start to do what each great poem always does: provide us with a real sense of what our freedom, our going forth, is for.