A special section in honor of John Giorno

John Giorno in front of his Poem Paintings at the Bunker, 222 Bowery, New York City, 2012. Photo by Peter Ross. All images courtesy of the John Giorno Collection, John Giorno Archives, Studio Rondinone, New York City, unless otherwise noted.
John Giorno, Poet
by Chris Kraus and Rebecca Waldron

John Giorno’s influence as a cultural impresario, philanthropist, activist, hero, and éminence grise stretches so widely and across so many generations that one can almost forget that he is primarily a poet. His work is a shining example of how, at their best, poems can act as a form of public address. Giorno recalls hearing that a young man in San Francisco was about to attempt suicide, but changed his mind when he overheard Giorno’s poem “Suicide Sutra” on the radio.

Eileen Myles once remarked, “What is so great—I’ll even say holy—about reading a poem for the first time in front of people is that you’re sharing what you felt in the moment of composition, when you were allowing something.” Giorno’s poems allow everything: desire, jealousy, loneliness, boredom, hatred, contempt. The raw emotions are extremely appealing to younger people, and Giorno himself has hardly mellowed with age. “Huge hugs to the friends who betrayed me, / every friend became an enemy, / sooner or later, / big kisses to my loves that failed,” he writes on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in “THANX 4 NOTHING.” The bad blood in Giorno’s work is tempered by a Buddhist worldview that accepts every emotion as part of a cyclical movement toward clarity, which, like all else, will turn to dust.

Giorno’s activities over nearly six decades have been so exhaustive and diverse that he’s become a person much larger than any one medium or artistic lineage—which could be why his notoriety hasn’t kept pace with the expansiveness of his work. This isn’t to say that he is unknown. Giorno has been a highly respected creative force since the 1960s, when he cavorted with the likes of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and William S. Burroughs—some of whom were his lovers, and all of whom played important roles in the development of his work. Giorno saw that their strategies of collage and appropriation could be transposed to the composition of poems.

Published the same year as Frank O’Hara’s Lunch Poems (1964)—a time when the poet’s “I” ruled—Giorno’s The American Book of the Dead was audaciously composed from found material. Prefiguring works by contemporary poets like Kenneth Goldsmith and Vanessa Place, Giorno’s Book of the Dead spun poems from fragments of the Declaration of Independence, rock and roll lyrics, and tabloid news. And yet the work invokes pathos: Giorno’s recital of appropriated text springs from an emotional core, presenting small urban scenes of absurdity, disappointment, and injustice in counterpoint to the Declaration’s grand ideals.

Three years later, Giorno worked with the inventor of the synthesizer Bob Moog to create ESPE (Electronic Sensory Poetry Environments), where he electronically twisted and looped his own voice while reciting his poems. Freeing writing from the page, Giorno allowed his audiences to step into the physical space of his poems and strongly influenced technopunk music pioneers like the bands Suicide and Throbbing Gristle. Yet it’s not Giorno’s use of technology that makes his work memorable, but the sound and texture of his voice. The artist Penny Arcade saw him perform at the Poetry Project in 1969, and said, “I was never the same.” I heard him present his poem “Grasping at Emptiness” at 1978’s Nova Convention, which he organized with Sylvère Lotringer, and I hear his voice still: sinewy, whiny and bold; assertive and longing, but poised.

By 1972, Giorno had devised what would become an important part of his signature style: including the echo loop of his voice in the poem as it appears on the page. The vast body of work he created in the 1970s, collected in Cancer in My Left Ball (1973), Subduing Demons in America (1974), and Shit Piss Blood Pus and Brains (1977), indelibly crystallizes that era. Composed as a series of echoes, the poems capture the claustrophobia in anyone’s head as they walk the streets of New York. Whether he’s reflecting on the news, relationships, isolation, depression, addiction, or sex, Giorno affixes language to the swirling, reverberating fragments in the human mind: “like when you’re sitting / in a telephone booth / just after we’ve hung up, / completely / boring / completely boring / and completely / sad / and completely sad” (from “Eating the Sky”).

His Buddhist practice became key, his poems an attempt to burn through the ego and arrive at a point where the existence of others becomes as real as the self. His work is full of these less-than-glorious moments that are really just ordinary. He never plays them as coyly abject self-aggrandizement. They describe any life at that particular time.

Giorno’s poetics are marked by generosity and hospitality. That spirit isn’t confined to his poems. For decades, his poetry, his social work as the founder of the AIDS Treatment Project, and his activities as a music producer have been virtually inseparable. His groundbreaking Dial-A-Poem project, begun in 1968, is known for the participation of luminaries like Burroughs, Patti Smith, and John Ashbery, but the project presented dozens of lesser-known writers like Susie Timmons, Greg Masters, Rochelle Kraut, and Steve Levine. The various poetry worlds are notorious for their exclusionary hierarchies and cliques, but Giorno’s strategy has always been to widen the circle, turning his competitors and imitators into collaborators. As Eleanor Antin once said, “All good artists are poets.” Giorno is such an extraordinary artist that his poetic achievements have yet to be fully appreciated, but it’s time for the world to catch up.
John Giorno
by Verne Dawson

When I asked my friend John Giorno to sit for a portrait in 2003, his answer was yes. Situated in a comfortable old wicker chair with a purple and green floral cushion, he was looking out a glass door onto a small apple orchard. It was summer. Two hours passed. Five years passed. It was autumn. Asked if he was tired, if he needed a break, the answer was no, he was fine, and happy to sit longer. After five hours it was I who said that we should quit for the day and join the others for dinner. We resumed the next day. And again two weeks later. Never a complaint, not a single sigh from the model. John has a lot of room in his head to wander. Ten years later, I’m painting his portrait on the same canvas. One might say of John that it is his repose and never his pose that makes him the ideal model. Oh, and the fact that he will return after two years and sit again so I can make an adjustment to an eyebrow or his jaw line. He has been paler, tanner, younger, older, on a background of blue sky, then an ochre wall, with plants, without plants, with plants again, and so on. Could I possibly be finished? No, not at all. This spring, I went to visit John at 222 Bowery where he has lived and worked since 1965. We talked like we've talked so many times over the past twenty years—except this time, our conversation was recorded.

VERNE DAWSON I’ve been reading your new poem.

JOHN GIORNO “Wish-Fulfilling Jewels & the Poet.”

VD It’s really beautiful. It’s strange for me to read it because I’m used to hearing you perform your poems.

JG This one I haven’t performed yet. It’s a fable-style poem. I started writing those around the year 2000. In those days, I liked taking long train rides in Europe, first class, smoking joints in the toilet—between Paris, Zürich, Amsterdam, wherever. I really wished that I could write a fable and that longing lingered for days and weeks. Then, all of a sudden, I had written my first fable. Seventeen years later, I’ve done seven of them. And every time I write one, I say, “This is my last fable.” (laughter) You know, I’m a poet.

VD It brings a lot of different cultures and even fable traditions into its own fable-ness, doesn’t it?

JG I never went back to investigate the fable. Whatever I learned sixty or seventy years ago is what I know. I was enchanted by fables in my early teens, by the Grimm tales and all those. I’m not writing traditional fables, they just come nonverbally through my mind, and that’s how I get there.

VD The poem is about reincarnation in some measure, right?

JG Well no, not at all. Being a Tibetan Buddhist meditator for fifty years, the practice has transformed my mind, but the idea of that poem arose from being fascinated by old jewels. The thought that jewels have these lifetimes, involving the people who owned them, and that a person's karma remains in the jewel, made me want to write about them. I’ve been going to Italy for more than sixty years. In southern Italy—my family is from Basilicata and Puglia—I got the idea for the poem. My father’s side of the family can be traced back to eleventh-century Norman barons. Rosanna, a researcher, traced my ancestry in the thirteenth century to an ancient great-grandfather, whose brother was a priest. I went to his church, a Romanist church. I stood where the priest stood and did my meditation practice. It was probably a catastrophe being a priest in 1280, 1290, or 1310—the chaos of medieval times and all the suffering of the people. I’m a performer, so I felt an affinity to his role. I was shown the priest’s thirteenth-century manuscripts, and I touched his signature. I asked researchers what he would have worn? Did he wear brown monk’s clothes? I was told, “Not at all.” All of that was part of the genesis of my poem and the priest’s bejeweled clothing—

VD Castoffs from the aristocracy—

JG The researcher described it as a competitive ritual—the noblewomen fought with each other over who would give the best clothes and jewels to the priests. Noblewomen’s clothes and priest vestments were quite similar. The jewels were sewn onto the priest’s bib. In medieval Roman Catholicism, these spectacular extravagances were similar to those of a rock star. They gave people joy. There were pageants, reenactments, early plays, and all these things in the church. Having the ability to mount a rock concert was key to the church’s success. So my ancestor had to participate in this, and that’s why the garments were so extravagant. Why am I saying this?

VD I was asking about reincarnation—in this case, it’s a thirteenth-century priest.

JG Well, it’s in my roots. There are memories in the DNA. I come from a family with priests in every generation.
Because the eldest son inherited everything, and the other sons—if they didn’t marry an heiress—had to become priests because they didn’t inherit anything. I’m sure some of them were good priests who were meditators, like me. So in the poem, I made this ancient uncle of mine into a serious meditator.

VD And the specific histories that you recount of these jewels—are they fabricated?

JG Yeah, they are fabricated. I invented the “diamond with the king inside,” but it could be the Hope Diamond in the Smithsonian. The ancient Buddhist Queen and the Blood of the Virgin Ruby are all real. I’m paraphrasing.

VD When you look at the world or at history, what is divine or divinity? To you, I mean.

JG Divine implies God, and as a Buddhist, I believe God is man-made. All of us have invented God. Trying to explain a primordial state, the empty true nature of mind, men invented God in their own image. So the divine takes on characteristics that are a mix between men’s cultural identity and certain aspects in spiritual realization that are recognized, like bliss and clarity. These then get interpreted in different ways, many quite distorted by each religion.

VD Did you go to mass on Sundays when you were growing up?

JG No, not at all. My father was born in 1901 and my mother in 1910, and in the ‘40s and ‘50s, they were the type of Italian Americans who only went to church on Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas.

VD You were never an altar boy?

JG No. My mother was a fashion designer, and I had a nanny who took care of me when my mother worked. The nanny was Irish Catholic and she made me kneel down in the morning and say, “Our father who art in heaven . . . ” I hated doing that, so finally I got up enough nerve to tell my parents, “She makes me say these prayers, and I don’t want to say them.” My father said, “Well we didn’t ask you to say them. We’ll tell her to not make you do that.” And that was it. Later, when they got to their seventies and eighties, my parents went on to become Roman Catholics.

VD So if you’d been an altar boy, even briefly, your story could have been very different.

JG It’s not a correct thing to say, but I’ve always known I was gay.

VD Why is that not correct?

JG I often thought to myself that I wanted to make it with the handsome priest, knowing that I was gay, even at twelve, but not quite knowing what sex was. If I had
made it with a priest, I hope I would not think it sexual abuse now, because I wanted it.

VD Oh gosh. I don’t know. I didn’t grow up in a religious household either, but if there was anything to go to, it would have been a pretty austere Protestant function.

JG The Protestant rituals are as nonspiritual as the Roman Catholics’. Born servants, all these restrictions and the don’t-dos.

VD Brilliant people still turned to Catholicism. I’m thinking of writers like Graham Greene or Walker Percy.

JG T. S. Eliot.

VD Yeah.

JG Well they were in need of making something spiritual happen in their life, so that’s the invention they chose. I think they were more comfortable with the Roman Catholic Church, which was more political than the Church of England. They joined a powerful political organization.

VD I remember that recently we talked about early influences and how Eliot was important to you.

JG He was really important to me because I wasn’t exposed to poetry until I was thirteen years old. I went to a great high school in Brooklyn where they taught *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*. Both are such great poems and they were enormous influences on me. I went to James Madison High School from 1950 to ’54. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Supreme Court justice, graduated from there in 1949, the year before I entered. She had the same brilliant English teachers who changed my life—Deborah Tannenbaum and Philip Rodman. Senator Bernie Sanders, the presidential candidate, entered James Madison High School in 1956. I can see how Bernie Sanders’s mind was formed, as mine was, by those teachers. By the time I graduated I had learned everything about literature from the beginning up until that moment, which was before the Beats, before William Burroughs.

VD Eliot brings such a contemporary view of the world. It must have been unusual to encounter that at the time.

JG I went on to become a Buddhist, and Prufrock seemed like a Buddhist. Eliot was handing out a basic Buddhist poem, you know. Or *The Waste Land*—

VD When I worked at a library in Alabama as a teenager, they would discard LPs when they got scratches on them, and I got Eliot’s *Four Quartets* that I’d play on my turntable back home. It was one of my favorite things of all time. I never thought of it in a Buddhist context. Interesting.

JG The poetry at that time was W. H. Auden, Eliot, and Pound. I was fourteen or something when my English teacher, Deborah Tannenbaum, said, “Dylan Thomas is performing this coming Saturday, and you should all go there.” I went by myself to the YMCA where Dylan Thomas performed with six actors.

VD It was a play he was performing?

JG Well no, it was a long poem called *Unter dem Milchwald* (Under Milk Wood). It was these six famous actors and him in the center. It was packed. I had reserved a seat in the front row, and there’s Thomas, pouring sweat and spitting as he spoke. Being fourteen, I couldn’t believe this was poetry. He returned for a performance the next year and I went back, and then I went a third time, and then he died. A couple of years later I’m in Columbia College and on Broadway there’s a production of *Unter dem Milchwald*. Seeing Dylan Thomas perform did profoundly and nonverbally change my life.

VD I saw the movie.

JG Yeah, then the movie came out, and I bought that record and played it endlessly.
VD I didn’t know you had seen Dylan Thomas!

JG There was a big gap between when I first saw him and when I was forced to become a performer, through circumstance—I was a poet and I had to perform. I started with shaky legs and it took a few years to figure out what I was doing. Dylan Thomas had gone off my radar. My understanding of deep breath—I came upon it by myself and worked on it by myself. I didn’t realize that what he did was the same thing. Anyway, I figured out a method of using my breath and flow of air in the higher, middle, and lower parts of the chest and stomach. I suppose if you’re an opera singer or any kind of singer, you are taught how to use your inner breath. I wasn’t. So I had to discover it myself.

VD That’s Richard Burton reading Dylan Thomas in Under Milk Wood, right?

JG Yeah. It’s a completely different thing.

So being a poet is one trail to becoming a performer. It’s nice when your books get published, but at a venue you have an audience. And it goes on from there to the recordings to YouTube.

VD Compared to the past, we have such an incredible amount of recording technology now.

JG Another part of my story of becoming a performer goes back to when I was nine years old. World War II had just ended. I had a tumor between my optic nerve and my brain. So in 1945, they had figured out a way to cut the bone, go in and remove the tumor, and put the bone back. That saved my eye. Otherwise they would have had to cut my eye out to get to the tumor. I would have had to have a glass eye. It was an experimental operation they had developed during the war. The surgery was a big risk, but it was a great success and a breakthrough for my doctor, Algernon Reese. So at the American Medical Association convention the next year, he presented me. There was a press conference, and they told me that there would be a lot of people snapping pictures. They took me into this room, and, you know, it was like Rita Hayworth’s Hollywood, those big black cameras with flashbulbs, a hundred of them, and they suddenly were all popping. And I said to myself, “This is like being a movie star.” It lasted only one minute, I think, but that was a great moment in my life.

VD Your first day of superstardom. I thought it came somewhat later. (laughter)

JG I know. The reason I brought that up is, a year later, a lawyer friend was visiting my family. I was mostly in my bedroom, drawing, making collages, pasting things into scrapbooks. I had been bed-bound or room-bound in the months following the operation. So this lawyer says to my father, “I see John’s in his bedroom all the time. He has to get out of the house.” But I couldn’t play sports because of the operation.

VD “He’s going to be a priest if you don’t get him outside!” generating heat. You move air up and down inside your central channel. In the meditation you use that energy for training the mind. I adapted it to my performances.

The rule I came upon fifty years ago with the Poetry Systems LPs was that only a poet can read his or her own work. Because the magic in the person’s breath is inherent in the sound of the words somehow. Actors can’t do it, no matter how good they are. It’s just an actor reading a poem. From Richard Burton down to the worst, it never works.

VD It’s a much more traditional way to be a poet—

JG Yeah, I had to develop skills. In the 1940s, there was no such thing as a poetry reading.

VD Poetry was just something typed on paper.

JG In the ’50s, when he began, Allen Ginsberg was not the greatest performer. But he became a great performer. So Dylan Thomas was my only point of reference until Allen Ginsberg and the Beats. But we come from a long tradition of American performers who would tour the country and wow the people. For me, it’s just amazing that there was no tape recorder and all of that is lost. Mark Twain being a fabulous performer is sort of a myth.

VD I mean Homer was probably pretty good, too. (laughter)

JG Slam poetry basically introduced the idea of performing mixed with rock energy.

VD But there still seems to be a clear split between the high-academic poetry world and the popular or slam poetry or rock and roll poetry world. I asked you once, how was it that you got through the ’60s without ever learning to play guitar?

JG I could have, yeah. But I claimed the piano. I just made a decision that I would perform, but not be a musician. I didn’t have expertise as a singer. I wanted to use my voice the way a poet would think of using it and I developed down that path. Much later, I did a meditation called Tummo, which means “generation of heat.” In paintings you often see a yogi in the snow sweating,
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JG The lawyer said, “I see he’s interested in art.” And I overheard him telling my father to send me to art school. So two weeks later, my father suggests that I go to Pratt Institute, and I start going to a Saturday program for young people. I was only ten and a half, and everybody else was twelve or fourteen or seventeen. I went there for three years and studied drawing and painting until I started high school. But all the things that I do now as an artist are somehow rooted in those years at Pratt.

VD And when did you start to write poetry?

JG Around the same time. I wrote my first poem as a homework assignment. The year 1950 was like the Stone Age, before television, before everything. I felt that poetry was sacred and it wasn’t something that you could do yourself. But one day my teacher said to the class, “Go home and write a poem,” I was shocked. I could go home and write a poem? I liked doing this. I’m going to write some more. So that was my change in high school from sort of being an artist to being a poet. At my school, there was this group of older students who were very intellectual and ran a literary magazine, the Madisonian. I immediately gravitated toward them. So that’s how I got started.

VD You’re not John Milton.

JG Yeah. Not to digress, but it wasn’t like now where everybody’s taught to be creative from one and a half years old. So I handed in my poem and, after a few days, the teacher said, “I’ve read all of your poems, and these are the three I like best.” She read the first one, the second one, and mine was the third. I said to myself, “I liked doing this. I’m going to write some more.” So that was my change in high school from sort of being an artist to being a poet. At my school, there was this group of older students who were very intellectual and ran a literary magazine, the Madisonian. I immediately gravitated toward them. So that’s how I got started.

VD What did you do after you graduated from Columbia University?

JG I went to a place called the Iowa City Writers’ Workshop, run by Paul Engle. That was in ’58. Now there are so many great poetry institutions and programs, but back then, Iowa was really the only one in the country. And it was quite prestigious. So I went out there and hated it. It was modernist poetry, and I was still figuring out what I was going to do as a poet. I only lasted there six months. Maybe nine.

VD And then you came back to New York?

JG Came back to New York.

VD When and how did you meet Robert Rauschenberg?

JG I came to this loft here on the third floor, when I returned from Morocco in ’66. I knew Bob from the art scene in the early ’60s. Lucinda Childs and Jill Johnston were good friends of mine in those years. So when I got back from Morocco, I saw them right away. And they said, “Bob is working on this thing and he needs help. They’re asking for volunteers and you should go.” Then I’d see them a week later and they would say, “John, Robert Rauschenberg needs help and you should go.” The third time, I said, “Oh, well I will go. If you keep saying it.” So I went and volunteered and got involved with EAT, Experiments in Art and Technology. And we became friends. It was really formative because the year before I had started making sound poetry, a concept introduced to me by Brion Gysin.

VD You were in Morocco with Brion Gysin.

JG Yeah. Brion was one of the founders of sound poetry, poesie sonore, with Bernard Heidsieck. The idea was to create sound compositions using whatever technology was available. In 1960, Brion had been to the BBC studios, which had an electronics lab. He suggested that I do a collaboration with him. I was this young poet, not anywhere an equal, and I was shocked, but we did it. I had just finished a poem called “Subway.” So we went down into the subway and recorded subway sounds and made them into my first sound poem—“Subway Sound.” Then that got presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris in the Biennale of ’65, and I said, “I want to do more of that.” So I started working with whatever technology was around. The year 1965 was a very exciting time in New York City. Steve Reich, Max Neuhaus, and Phil Glass were making these sound loops with their instruments.

VD And reel recorders?

JG Yeah. I thought, I can do that using words rather than musical sounds. So suddenly I’m in EAT with Bob and I get introduced to Bob Moog who invented the Moog synthesizer. Soon I started recording using the audio technology with sound engineer Bob Bielecki. I worked for fifteen years making sound compositions in every possible conception I could think of, and then abandoned the idea. Sound poetry never became a real art form or one that mattered in America. So I stopped. I had done everything I wanted.

VD Did they get radio play? I mean, Citizen Kafka on WBAI would be on from midnight to five in the morning or so, just playing the most amazing, unusual, obscure things.

JG Well, no. When I started releasing the Giorno Poetry Systems LPs, it was these that were played on WBAI. Because they included everything, from William Burroughs to Allen Ginsberg to Sonic Youth to all the poets who were doing performances. The LP records were part of a whole method of presenting poetry to a public in a way that was successful.
When did you find yourself first getting involved in technology? Would that be with film? And when did you meet Andy Warhol?

In ’62. We became friends in ’63. It was a teeny scene—the pop artists and twenty abstract painters and that was the art scene. It was a time in New York City when there were hundreds of small movie houses that were left over from the 1930s, small theaters on the Lower East Side. They only played on the weekends—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—and were vacant the rest of the week. Jonas Mekas figured this out and would rent them for almost nothing. And that’s where he created the underground cinema that I went to before I met Andy and later went to with Andy. We went as many nights a week as we could.

And what would you see there?

Jonas would show Flaming Creatures, and Scorpio Rising by Kenneth Anger. Flaming Creatures would always be shown before something new. I must have seen it twenty times.

And would he show Robert Breer? What about Hans Richter movies and early Constructivist cinema?

Yeah, all of them. It was like going to school and learning. That’s what Andy did in that year or two that we all went. He learned how to be a filmmaker by just sitting there. What follows is that Andy decides to make a movie and buys a camera. It’s like April of ’63. So he shoots the first thing with Robin and me on a mushroom. The secret is that Andy had used a camera all his life; that was just the first time he had used a movie camera.

And is that what led you into technology, too?

Well no, Andy was six or seven years older than me and he was a little bit lame. So he gets this Bolex and comes to my loft and shoots Sleep. You had to rewind the camera every twenty seconds to do a three-minute roll, so we filmed it over ten days or so. Then he started sending the rolls out to be developed. When he got one back, we looked at this three-minute footage and every twenty seconds the camera was jerking on the stand. So the footage was useless. Finally someone told Andy that Bolex has a gadget that you plug into the wall and it rewinds the film, so you don’t have to rewind it. We had to start filming again. It was one continuous shot for three minutes, but when you put them together, it’s a different cut. Andy tried endlessly to splice them together.

So the interrupted making of Sleep was not a lark. He wanted to make a very long movie of you sleeping, as seamless as possible.
Still of Giorno in Andy Warhol’s *Sleep*, 1963, 16 mm film, black and white, silent, 5 hours and 21 minutes.

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And equally from the hands and feet and bodies of all those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas at all those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and their Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten quarters of the universe of the ten quarters of the universe of the ten quarters of the universe that went forth that went forth of glorious brightness that converged upon the crown of the Lord Buddha of the Lord Buddha of the Lord Buddha that rested upon the crowns that rested upon the crowns that rested upon the crowns of each Buddha and Bodhisattva of each Buddha and Bodhisattva of each Buddha and Bodhisattva assembled here assembled here assembled here.

From his hands and feet and body From his hands and feet and body radiated radiated supernal beams of light supernal beams of light that rested that rested upon the crowns that rested upon the crowns that rested upon the crowns of each Buddha and Bodhisattva of each Buddha and Bodhisattva of each Buddha and Bodhisattva assembled here assembled here assembled here.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas Rainbow, 1973, silkscreen on paper, 29 x 24 inches.
the same time, Jean de Loisy, a good friend of mine in Paris, knew about this archive and was wondering how it could be shown at the Centre Pompidou or the Palais de Tokyo. And then, suddenly, Ugo got together with Jean de Loisy, and they started talking about doing an exhibition of the archive. We hired two archivists, and I brought these boxes to New York City, twenty at a time, from Long Island. And they scanned 15,000 pieces—photographs, book covers, event fliers, posters, LP covers, letters from the 1950s to now. Each thing was taken out and put into an individual acetate folder. That took four years. That’s the basis of the archive part of the show. The other parts of the show include the Giorno Poetry Systems and the LPs—you saw that installation with the album covers on those bean bags and iPads to be accessed in the gallery by people. Also my paintings, and works by others about me.

VD And the most monumental work in the show is the film that Ugo made with you that’s based on your poem “THANX 4 NOTHING,” which is autobiographical, right?

JG Oh yeah, I wrote it on my seventieth birthday. Ugo always wanted to make a film. And he hadn’t figured it out, and eventually he decided that he would film me performing the poem. So we did this elaborate shoot in Paris for several days, doing it over and over. It had over a hundred different takes.

VD Of reading the poem in its entirety?

JG Yeah, in its entirety. Ugo got the two best cameramen in Paris. They each shot from different angles, the back and the side, or the front and the side, far away, medium, close, detail. It was 111 takes and the editing process went on for two or three years.

VD It was shot on video?

JG Yeah. It turned out to be one of my best works and it happened thanks to Ugo. The installation was an absolute masterpiece, regardless of my poem and my performance. It was our work coming together.

VD Congratulations on being a newlywed.

JG Ugo and I’ve been together nineteen years, and six weeks ago we were married in New York City down at City Hall, and you were our best man and Laura our best woman.

VD We did our best.

I’m curious, when you reach the point where you’re ready to perform a poem onstage, what has happened between finishing writing and actually performing it? Is there a lot of working out phrases or body gestures?

JG No body gestures, but preparing the performance takes a lot of time.

VD Have you memorized the poem by the time you finish writing it?

JG More or less. I sort of rehearse it as I’m writing it, to see what the sound is, particularly how the phrases relate to each other when spoken. I do that in front of the computer or just sitting in a chair. And then three quarters of the way through composing the poem, I start taking it more seriously, where I actually read or concentrate as if I’m performing. When the poem is completely finished, then I go into a real rehearsal mode. Once the poem’s done, it doesn’t get changed, or occasionally one word might get changed.

I hate rehearsing, but I just force myself to do it every day. And then I get to feel comfortable with it. The first performance usually isn’t in a very important venue because I’m still a little insecure doing it for the first time in front of a large audience. And then I just keep doing it, and a year later, it gets really good.

VD It’s always great to see a poet reciting without a script.

JG The poem I wrote before “THANX 4 NOTHING” was “GOD IS MAN MADE.” Then the Charlie Hebdo shooting happened in 2014, and I said to myself, “How could I have written this poem?” Your mind gets poisoned by the catastrophic event and filled with negative thoughts. But I had written the poem before the shooting, so I just finished it. I began performing it very insecurely in a few places, and it became a perfectly accomplished performance. I didn’t perform at the opening of the exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, but it was arranged that I would go back to Paris six weeks later to perform. The attack at the Bataclan on November 17th happened the night before I departed for Paris. How could I not go? So I arrived on Sunday, when the city was in lockdown. And then I performed on Wednesday, the first day people came out of their houses. There were thousands of people at the Palais de Tokyo, and I did my forty-minute set, but relatively early in it I did “GOD IS MAN MADE,” and the audience was crying and weeping, screaming and cheering. Miraculously, the poem seemed to reflect their mind. It was one of the great moments in my life as poet and artist.
GOD IS MAN MADE

Yes, there is a god
and it is man-made,
there is a god, and it is made by man,
all the gods are made
by you and me,
we create the gods and they look like us.

Yes, there was a moment
recognizing intuitively
the empty true nature of mind,
beyond concepts and inconceivable,
and then we began thinking about it
thinking about it
thinking about it,
made it into ideas,
made it concepts,
made it into religions
invented all the self-serving religions,
and then we said some words,
and said it is the word of god,
words from god,
and everybody believed it
wanted to believe it,
we created god and he looks like us.

Yes, there is no hell,
there are no hell worlds of devils and demons,
other than the hell inside my mind
the hell inside my mind,
the hell inside your mind,
the hell you and I create around us
the hell we create around us
the hell we create around us,
and take with us into death.

Yes, there is no heaven
there are no heaven worlds
other than the joy of you,
heaven is living in your eyes
living in your eyes
living in your eyes,
seeing everybody in the world as gods and goddesses,
every wretched, grasping, ugly person
is a deity
swimming in light.

Yes, gods helping and making happy
helping and making happy,
demons hurting and harming
is your own mind
seeing itself.

Yes, at the moment of death
at the instant of awareness,
the gods are gone,
if you go looking for heaven
you are in trouble,
the gods vanish
within the unborn empty nature of mind,
you are liberated through
your own self-luminous awareness,
your own self-luminous awareness
will always be with you.

Yes, I will always be
with you
I will always
be with you
I will always be with you
I will always be with you
I will always be with you.

Yes, everything is delusion, including the most sacred,
everything is delusion, including the most profound
wisdom,
everything is delusion, including the highest most
precious teachings
which lead to the realization that everything is delusion,
the play of emptiness
awareness
and bliss,
finding it
through yourself
finding it through yourself
finding it through yourself
finding it through yourself
finding it through yourself
self-luminous
awareness
ceaselessly coming.

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On the cover and opposite: From Sam Contis’s first book, Deep Springs (MACK, 2017). These photographs center on Deep Springs College, a small, all-male liberal arts school in a remote desert valley east of the Sierra Nevada. Combining archival images made by the college’s first students a century ago with new pictures, Contis explores the construction of myth, place, and masculine identity in the enduring imagery of the American West.

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A SPECIAL POETRY SECTION IN HONOR OF JOHN GIORNO
My name is Donus Pane et Vinum. I was born in 1250 in Barletta, Apulia. My older brother Gualtarius Pane et Vinum is the ancient great-grandfather of poet John Giorno through his grandmother Maria Panevino, his father’s mother. I was a monk in retreat for many years, and now a priest for forty years in the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore.

After seminary in the cathedral school, I became a novice and a priest, and did long retreats seeking the true nature of Jesus Christ. The Bishop of Barletta gave permission because I come from a rich and noble Norman family. For thirteen years, I was in solitary, strict retreat in the hermitage cave hut on the mountain above the monastery of Saint Francis near Andria. My family sent food supplies and the local people offered firewood on the ledge below the door. I was very happy, simple and humble, reading and being alone, spending quality time with my mind, and through continuous prayer and meditation, aspiring to the realization of the Holy Trinity, the ecstasy of the magical display of God, attaining the true nature of mind, great clarity and great bliss.

On a beautiful day in April 1283 the Bishop came to visit, and said, “It is time for you to rejoin the world, the Cardinal and the lords of Barletta inform you that you are elected priest of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore.” My old friend the priest Bertryamus had recently died. After the shock of the announcement, I had a deep sinking feeling, a huge depression, and saw through intuition the worst would happen. “Oh no!” but said “Yes,” and hoped for the best.

In May 1283, I went to live in the Cathedral Palace of the Romanesque church built in 1215 by the Duke of Monfreddo, who returned from the Fourth Crusade with a great fortune obtained through the looting of Constantinople, and built the church as an offering to absolve his sins.

Mass and the rituals of the Church are elaborate theatrical performances designed to enthrall the suffering people with grand pageants, reenactments of biblical stories, extravaganzas which draw people to the Church, excite fervent devotion, and bring money and create power.

The Basilica is packed with people, the noble lords and ladies sit in the front, the merchants and traders in the middle, the poor crowded in the back, and the monks and nuns in the upper cloisters, I offer the Holy Mass with great compassion and pure intentions to help the suffering people. My brother Gualtarius very much appreciates the prestige and money that comes to our family, this is not my intention, I have come reluctantly from prayer and retreat.

I am a priest, and wear plain clothes, the alb, a brown tunic reaching the feet tied with a rope around the waist. When I offer the Holy Mass, I wear ecclesiastic vestments reflecting the glory and splendor of God. A long white tunic tied with a cloth belt. The outer garment, a chasuble, is extremely elaborate, a sleeveless long bib to the ankles made of silk brocade of flowers and geometric designs woven with gold thread. The front and back are sewn with jewels rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds and many pearls. Around the neck is a long narrow strip of brocade encrusted with jewels called a stole. All these treasures were given as offerings to the Church and the Cross.
Priests' vestments are very similar to women's clothes.
The dresses of rich, noble women are made of brocades from China,
sewn with jewels looted in the Holy Land,
The noble ladies give their clothes to the priests, as offerings to the Church and the Cross.
They compete giving their best clothes to the Holy Fathers,
A rivalry with each other offering their most splendid gowns
to receive blessings and forgiveness for their sins.
We are second sons from noble families, who inherited nothing,
and adapt their dresses into our vestments, which are quite similar.
We are 13th-century cross-dressing priests, drag queens.
We are dressed by the grace and generosity of the noble ladies.

I perform the Holy Mass,
visualizing and chanting the prayers,
offering the Holy Eucharist,
the body and blood of Jesus Christ,
generating great compassion,
the ecstasy of the Holy Trinity,
beyond all concepts.
The power of mind radiates from the heart center,
light rays containing electrically charged particles
make a display of the colors of the spectrum,
which most people cannot see due to the cloudy sky in their mind,
invisible blessings to each person receiving Mass.
I became aware of something peculiar happening with the jewels sewn in my alb.
The jewels shine more brilliantly,
vividly sparkle,
radiate joyously,
and are seemingly empowered.
People came to me in the confession booth,
asking to be forgiven for the bad things they did.
They said they prayed during Mass, and made wishes,
and their wishes came true.
The wish came true
the wish came true
the wish came true.
It became apparent something else was happening.
Magically, the jewels seemed inherently powerful,
and in an unholy connection to my mind.
It was not from the goodness and grace of God.

The jewels were given over many years
to the Church and the Cross
by pilgrims returning from the Holy Land and Jerusalem.
In the four Crusades, the nobles fighting in the wars with the Muslims in Aleppo, Antioch and Egypt, looted many precious jewels, and with merchant magnates, who were pilgrims, came home to Barletta, and offered the jewels to the Basilica for the glory of Christ and the Cross. Pearls came from the Arabian Sea, rubies were from Burma, diamonds from India, and emeralds from Ceylon.
The Muslim maharajas in India robbed and sacked each other's cities, and the jewels gradually moved west with the traders on their way to European kings.
Some jewels contained magical powers, wish-fulfilling compassion and curses implanted or embedded in each by people throughout the jewel’s extraordinary history.

Everybody thinks I am the vehicle of God granting their wishes; but Is it the miraculous powers of God chance or circumstance, or the work of demonic forces? Empty empty, great clarity of mind in meditation activates the wish-fulfilling powers in the jewels.
When I put on the robes and go to Mass, I am facing a nightmare, I can see the thoughts on their minds, what each is wishing and how it is fulfilled, a motion picture of the present and future played on a split screen in my mind.
The poor wanting food and help for their misery, the sick wanting to be saved, the rich wanting more money.
Sapphires are good for anger, rubies are good for sex, opals for a woman wanting a baby, diamonds are for ignorance and power, emeralds are for a woman wishing her husband dead. Family clans' self-consuming revenge proliferating murder. An angry man wants his enemy tortured. The Duke prays for a great victory in battle,
and ten days later, five thousand people are killed in Benevento.
I see their wishes, see how each is fulfilled and the suffering caused by each wish. It is a horror show.
Has God abandoned me? Am I a devil causing mindless suffering?

I had a dream just before dawn on November 1st, 1285.
A big ruby is among the jewels sewn on my brocade chasuble, the outer garment.
The blood-red cabochon ruby was looted during the conquest of the Kingdom of Kalinga by King Ashoka in 261 BC.
The ruby was stolen from the forehead of the polished black stone statue of the goddess Kali, and the temple destroyed, and 300,000 people of Kalinga killed.
Ashoka gave the ruby to his wife Queen Deva, who had become a great Buddhist meditation practitioner.
From the joy arising from her profound accomplishment, and deep compassion for the largest number of people ever killed in a war, the queen hid inside the ruby a secret essence prayer.
Anyone suffering, who prays for help, their pain is made painless.
Pain is made painless, made to seem like bathing in warm summer rain.
The secret prayer of the ancient queen, suffering is made painless by the empty nature of suffering.

At the end of the Ashokan dynasty, the ruby passed for a thousand years through marriage, ransom, and the bounty of war, through the Muslim conquest to Mughal princes and Persian warriors.
The red ruby was in Aleppo in the late 11th century, where in the battle against Bashir Attar, the first victory for the Crusaders in 1096, two years before the liberation of Jerusalem, the ruby, other jewels and gold were seized as loot by the army of Prince Bohemond and the southern Italian Norman barons.
The ruby was taken to Barletta in Apulia by the De Leo family, cousins of the Panevino, and given to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore.
The ruby is called “the blood of the Virgin blood of the Virgin blood of the Virgin.”

I woke from the dream sweating in a state of shock and foreboding.
The secret in the ruby is the wish-fulfilling prayer.
The other jewels have similar stories. Each has a history, secret aspirations and wishes stored inside, inhabited by curses, echoes, residues of the glory, greed, and the beauty of each owner, which are empowered or activated by the power of mind.
It is overwhelmingly joyous and depressing.
I began to dread wearing the robes and felt negative and reluctant before each Mass. My mind was jeopardy, it was very confusing.

On December 21st, 1285, I had another dream in the hour before dawn. Above the ruby on the brocade square is a big diamond surrounded by a circle of pearls. The diamond, plump and of flawless clarity, had belonged to an ancient Tibetan king who called it the Primordial Buddha Diamond. The king loved the diamond, wore it in a necklace resting on his heart, shining brilliantly illuminating the world. The king was very attached to the diamond, was obsessed with it, and when he died, he could not leave the diamond. His consciousness or soul refused to go on. His soul became a tiny spirit inhabiting the stone, staying in his secret home inside the diamond. The king was very proud of himself, like a cat hiding under a bed, but having interrupted the natural flow he could easily be irritated and made angry. He just craved being in the diamond. During Mass with the noisy crowds, the king wakes up and loves their appreciation of his glorious radiance. Through my mind he can see the minds of the people, and is fascinated, and plays with their wishes and desires.
Sometimes I hear him laughing naughtily.
I awoke from the dream in feverish sweat, horror struck.
The secret in the diamond was grasping and ignorance.
I had great compassion for the suffering king.
After an enormous amount of prayer and a difficult exorcism, his consciousness was liberated into the heaven pure land of our lord God.
Occasionally, he comes back secretly to visit, and that’s OK.
The poor thing is a hungry ghost, His resonance remains in the jewel.

The dread of wearing the vestments got worse, depression before every Mass.
Of course, the profound blessings of Eucharist, the union of mind with God, the chanting, the movement of the breath, the internal winds and creation of heat, makes me high, and feel really good.
People pray to me to intercede with God to grant their wishes, wanting something and getting it wanting something and getting it.
They got whatever they wanted, and learned what they wished for they got.
This deeply disturbed my mind.
Pandering to people’s worst, greed, jealousy and revenge, passions and stupidity for the greater glory of God.
I preached the gospels, which seemed appreciated but their minds were blinded by their grasping.
It was very depressing very depressing very depressing.
The curse of the wish-fulfilling jewels the curse of the wish-fulfilling jewels the curse of the wish-fulfilling jewels, had nothing to do with God had nothing to do with God, was the cause of their suffering, making themselves into the devil and life into hell.
I am a complete failure
I am a complete failure
I am just a devil making more devils.

I tried not wearing the vestments, putting on new simpler robes of white silk brocade, saying the weight was too heavy and I am old and a bit disabled.
Everybody requested, begged, complained, demanded of the bishop to intercede, which made things worse.
If the bishop finds out, I am in big trouble.
It is heresy, burned tied to the stake.
Am I dancing with demons?
Dancing with demons
dancing with demons
with great compassion
great compassion
helping everybody.

I had a third dream on the night of March 21st, 1287, Holy Thursday, just before dawn.
Saint Francis appeared sitting in the chair next to my bed.
He was really good-looking, with a glowing aura, smiling at whatever he saw, and giving a high-pitched giggle when he liked something.
I kneeled in front of him and leaned forward bowing my head to receive his blessings.
I started crying hysterically, weeping big fat tears, collapsed crying in his lap, and cried and cried and cried.
Saint Francis put his hands on my shoulders lifted me up, hugged and kissed me on the lips.
Saint Francis said, “It’s OK, you’re just trying too hard!”
I stopped crying, realizing the empty nature suffering and the magical display of God.
“You help the poor and the rich by giving them what they want.”
What more can you ask!” said Saint Francis.
After a long moment of nonverbal explanation, and our minds rested free from all fabrications, beyond all concepts, thank God!

I had a final dream on the night of January 5th, 1320, two years before I died.
It was Twelfth Night, and the coming of the Three Wise Kings.
An hour before dawn, my dream was the sacred Holy Trinity appeared in the form of a turquoise female dog singing a song about the future.
My successors were well intentioned,
but not realized in the true nature of mind.
The bejeweled vestments were used as decoration,
And, hidden in the mundane, became powerless.

Many years later in the war
between the Spanish Aragonese and French Anjou,
Barletta was under siege and sacked.
The Church treasury looted,
the jewels stolen by the soldiers
and sold by the merchants,
got on a Hapsburg crown,
and now is in a museum in Vienna.
The Blood of the Virgin ruby
and now is in the Smithsonian in Washington.

The diamond with the king inside
was on the French crown of Louis XV,
It seemed the perfect solution,
blessed impermanence,

Donus Pane et Vinum, and I, John Giorno,
ancient blood and bone ancestors,
share and laugh about our DNA memories.
We have visited each other many times in recent
years,
in many places, Barletta, Florence, Naples, New York.
Donus is a saint, and can appear anywhere anytime,
and he told his story through my mind.

I am offering the Holy Mass
wearing the divine regalia.
The noble lords and ladies are splendidly
arrogant with devotion seated in front,
the merchants with big appetites
or lean with greed crowd the middle,
the hungry poor pushed against the rear wall on the
stone floor.

Many are sick,
all are suffering,
all are blinded by negativity, afflicting emotions,
and the difficulties of living.
Whatever they ask for they get,
are for a moment happy,
everything they ask for brings them more suffering,
the world just makes me laugh.

I stand facing two thousand people,
never knowing if I am able to bring up the energy to
do it again.
It takes a great effort, bordering on pain,
to do the liturgy of the Mass, prayers and meditation,
gloria, sanctus, benedictis, agnus dei.
Invisible light from the heart mind radiates out
bathing the people,
making them feel happy,
allowing themselves joy,
aspiration, understanding, and the completion
inherent in mind.
The electrically charged particles of light fill the jewels
empowering them, without discrimination,
to do what they love to do,
fulfill
wishes
fulfill wishes,
the world just makes me
laugh
the world just makes me laugh.
Lost Sleep

Time for the serious sad blue
not the pale gold or the putrid
blur, bickering lowly and bent.
Outside the street is a buckled ribbon.
Before terror comes patience I can’t convey.
We were a super hit.
We went ecstatic as we skipped to the downbeat.
We drew together while blaring our notions,
even as we stood around, we blared.
What drew us back was the promise of a livelihood.
This is throwing gasoline on brain development. I decree
that the front part of the contender
shall have a pickaxe with a pink tinge.
Seriously, we don’t want your marble bloodbaths.
The gross products have gone slack with their hubris.
We are out of step with hope that springs furtively, if at all.
Believe half of what we say.
We see frost on the cherries.
We see a rising tide that sinks boats.
We see conversations consisting of nothing but tears.
Our media partner is the harm show.
We are retiring our most popular characters because it is time for a talk.
The agency of relief is such bullshit.
Independent movements spark controversy.
Now I’m going to take a moment
to give you some information and tell you
everything you need to know. I’m going to give
you so much information
that you’re going to ask me to stop
giving you information.
Our doom is pitch perfect.
We sop dragons on screens.
We are invisible to 3rd party tracking for life.
We shall melt the phone lines and solder them with volt-carrying caulk.
We see the rough stuff and the turgid watts between the dots.
From my fear to yours.
This Is a Test

You might have forgotten something.
Perhaps you forgot something?
Life makes things impossible. Everything is unbearable.
It is good when things fail. Everything is working.
The day is bright and brooding. The day is angular and sharp.
The day is a shit show; it is harsh and irregular.
There must be something beautiful around here.
You can’t have beautiful things or you’ll ruin them.
People flip birds at you.
People ask you to deliver things
to their homes and then
they flip birds at you.
Birds flutter from their hands.
You follow the rules governing chaos.
You adhere to the rules governing civil behavior.
People follow rules all the time, but it doesn’t matter.
Someone has to follow the rules, but it doesn’t matter.
I can see everything that’s clear now. Everything is clear.
What I see is everything here, and it’s clear.
Your fingers are shriveled from soaking in the light.
Your fingers are shriveled. Your fingers are soaking in the light.
Can you see I’m waiting for you in a room?
I’m waiting for you in a room.
I assume you understand where I am.

Todd Colby is the author of six books of poetry, most recently Splash State (The Song Cave, 2014) and Flushing Meadows (Scary Topiary Press, 2012). He was the editor of the poetry anthology Heights of the Marvelous: A New York Anthology (St. Martin’s Press, 2000) and serves on the board of the Poetry Project. He was the lead singer for the band Drunken Boat.
I’m wearing a used fake Fur coat like a cartoon Ermine. I’ve belted It with genuine Snakeskin— Blond. I’ve eaten Three eggs With a fork, three Strips of grassfed Beef with my fingers. A cookie with my fingers. Didn’t pay for any of it. Couldn’t. Didn’t Clean the pan. Still hungry. Not hungry at all. Can’t tell. Had a little talk With my lover. Couldn’t be avoided. A few fat tears rolled Off me. I kind of don’t Want to come I said, or I can’t, I need To but I can’t Come right. Don’t want to. Also I can Tell you’ve lost Confidence when you Touch me, I said. Kind
Of not in my body
Right now, beside
Myself, maybe
Cause of finishing
This book and I’m
Haunted and sand
And infinity spread
Into my dreams
Emptiness throbbing
In me like an incarceration
Some trouble
I’ve seen
Desertification
Sand for the devil
I don’t know.
Incarceration should
Never ever be used
As a metaphor.
But then tell
Me what’s fucking
Caged inside here. Last
Night’s dream is still
Going. Seeing
God hasn’t saved me.
Wraiths of snow
Slavered over
The white highway.
We drove through gales
Blasting La Traviata
Wasting our brains dividing
The truth from kitsch
In the Lily Dale Bargain
Store, in the good
Bar just off Seneca land.

It was a whole day’s labor
Reading where Geronimo’s
Skull ended up and the lawsuit
That failed to move it.
Guess who owns the world.
I put away an hour
Reminding institutions to pay me
My income hasn’t been
Regular enough for that
Kind of friendship this year. All
The people I miss
While I’m wound
Up in this. Opened
A fresh can for the cat.
Now I’m a person
Who does that. Woke up
Still dreaming of like three
People’s Facebook feeds.
The world keeps forcing
Its way in. “The world”
Which fucking one.
You know the one.
And I was one
Of the lucky ones.

Books by Ariana Reines include Mercury, Coeur de Lion, and The Cow. Her Obie-winning play, Telephone, was produced in 2009 by the Foundry Theatre and will premiere in Norway in August 2017. Projects and performances include Pubic Space, with Oscar Tuazon, at Modern Art, London (2016) and Mortal Kombat, with Jim Fletcher, at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2014). Reines has translated, among other works, Tiqqun’s Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl (Semiotext(e), 2012).
ANDREW DURBIN

Untitled
(Saturn parallel Pluto)

“Saturn parallel Pluto
by declination
at the degree
of the WTC attacks.
Expect major world events.”

Read:
Indefinite pleasure
in the circulation of coin,
cauterized bliss ends in perpetual wound:
All the realm is yours.
Otherwise I stand alone,
glance at the mirror
and recognize myself in absolute pink
before dissolving
in the acid of my feelings.
Child of the odds,
given to principled failure,
I paint my eyes the black of fate,
ring my lips the red of lies.
Turn the dial to the right.
It moves me.
Turn the dial to the left.
It moves you.
Or the dial sticks and I instead face
myself in the winter sun,
reorganized in the day
of the unbuilt autostrada. I accept
the fierce light
that creeps upon my grave
in sundered rock
as it spits forth its blue flame,
convinced of
the hell that keeps me,
hung in the afterglow
of glow sticks leftover from last night’s anniversary party. I am
taken there, willingly. Few are.

Fewer still know
they’ve arrived before it’s
too late to resist. Lapidary customs,
a bank account at HSBC.
You are my HSBC,
I’m certain. You’ve said
enough to assuage
any residual doubt. With this
in mind I take that coin,
place it in your palm.
Do not shake your head.
Pluto rises at 6.
My Saturn returns sooner.
Untitled (in view)

For Masha

... 

In view 

of the city's 

resonant blue 

before rippling summer's 

inadequately romantic mood, 

he asks, “Do you 

really want to fuck?” As if. 

In a cash-green élan 

the Brooklyn rich 

cannot get rid of themselves, 

or their charter schools. 

For this, do not forgive them. 

You, on the other hand, 

are almost never yourself 

at such instances, photos 

of Swiss summer 

with Spanish celebs, 

captured in the maw 

of Love’s 

dog, 

hung on the 

jaw of 

“this fair outside, 

which our hearts 
do not move” (P. Sidney) 

and move you 

to whomever you 

seek to be moved to, 

all things trending toward 

the topic of my crush. 

I can’t get over it! 

By which I mean he who 
catches me unawares, in July's 
cruel whip. By which I mean 
he who catches me 
in “grim reality’s 
recurring bit,” or, 
as Adam Phillips writes 
in “On Frustration”: 

“How 
does anybody 
ever get any pleasure? 

Does anybody ever get 
any pleasure? 
And if they do, 
is it worth 
it?”