

Sogang University

Dan Disney

accelerations & inertias

Abstract:

Undertaking processes akin to what Marjorie Perloff terms ‘*réécriture*’ (*unoriginal genius*, 2010), each of these so-called ‘villaknelles’ attempts response to what is now commonly characterised as an Anthropogenic era. By purposefully appropriating (that is, disassembling, misreading, and reconstituting) textual materials from such diverse sources as Marxian theories, Cultural Studies commentaries, and a range of creative producers’ self-proclamations on their processes, the assemblages in this suite attempt to mobilize anxieties responding to, as Forrest Gander would have it, ‘industrialization and human population pressures [...] setting into motion dire consequences’. In his paper, ‘The future of the past’ (2011), Gander speculates how experimental literacies (poetic, environmental, ethical) may be acquired through so-called intersubjective stances seeking to actively subvert and resituate dialectical systems of perception. Using the villanelle form to merely repeat and echo (albeit imperfectly) lines and their images is presented here as a kind of non-dialectical knelling; these ‘anthroposcenes’ (as it were) probe questions of authenticity, culture and art, and persist with showing “pictures of ourselves looking at pictures, asking *really, we look like this?*”

Biographical note:

Dan Disney is currently based in Seoul, where he teaches with Sogang University’s English Literature program. His critical writing, ficto-criticism, co-translations, and book reviews appear in journals across the world; collections of poetry include *and then when the* (John Leonard Press, 2011), *Mannequin’s Guide to Utopias* (flying island books, 2013), *Report from a border* (light-trap press, 2016), and *either, Orpheus* (UWA Publishing, 2016). He is the editor of *Beyond Babel: Exploring Second-language Creative Writing* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2014), and co-editor of *Writing to the Wire* (UWA Publishing, forthcoming). His poetry has most recently been awarded the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize and the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize. He enjoys yoga, running, wandering/travelling, and collects broadsides (avidly) and old typewriters (occasionally).

Keywords:

Villanelle – Conceptualism – Poetry – Anthropocene

‘there are intentions here, in fact we determine everything’, the hunter-gatherers
are knocking at each other’s heads (again) like Edwardian actors in a universe
tangled with omen; there’s little else to say

about these pictures of ourselves looking at pictures, asking *really, we look like this?*
wearing names of forefathers passed from neverness, ‘there are
intentions, in fact we determine everything here’, our mad elders blink

like pimps and freaks dining on the cracked nuts of superstition, carrying
knives under armpits, an expeditionary force crossing forbidden
to the outskirts of, yes, next paradise; there’s little else to say

about the fragmented men there who’ll roam a maze of streets
dictating self-obliterations, a sideshow even trees have stopped watching
‘there are intentions here, in fact we determine everything’

they’ve assured one another, sombre as bookburning and their dark birds
crossing fogs that droop around high-rise apartment blocks pulsating the

genera

of melodrama; there’s little else to say

about the distinct feeling that our pictures are an oracle
perfecting memories inside gadgets fixed to appendages (there’s intention
of course), actors each nodding like freshly printed demigods, smiling
‘we’ll determine everything’; there’s little else to say

(Jorge Luis Borges)

there is a smaller me inside desire, calling
‘watch the sleep of birds, formal as a sculpture’s encounter
with disorder’ ... I am here and this is a glass of milk
and in one’s own home, discussions
ramble the hours, masterpieces of animal continuity, those rare phonologies
of desire, where a smaller me is calling ‘pro-
found objects require thorough handling
and the interactions of flesh + ecstasy fly us to the brilliant nowheres of I
am here’ and this is a glass of milk
musical as sunlight, black telephones ringing
through fields, lonely as a minotaur’s social calendar
inside desire there is a smaller me, calling ‘re-
gard the scream of neighboring principles manufacturing beauty’, where
sentimental techniques of climax recapitulate (heroically)
I am here and this is
a glass of milk built structurally into the shifting architecture of breakfast’s frame
autobiographically naked and
inside desire, there is a smaller me calling ‘I am here and this is
my glass of milk’

(after Tomaz Šalamun’s ‘History’)
‘Lecture on Something’ (John Cage)
vs ‘Lecture on Nothing’ (John Cage)

what are the limits of capital, are there any?’

ask gentlemen transporting veneers of culture in large sheets on prime movers
stockholders pointing Tasers at non-yielding personae

while tax collectors wave at drivers transforming vitality into wages,
stomachs humming gastronomic anthems toward next stop, where slaves
slicked with tuckshop grease are not-asking, ‘what

are the limits of capital, are there any’, piping product down tubes
into output moulds and onto trays for mum-and-dad investors (square-eyeing
rapture
and live-firing conversation in hungry packets of data

blank as sarcophagi), their screens noting reports bearing burdens
of further unbearability, the market’s slide crossing a threshold of McTables,
‘if any, what are the limits of capital?’

the day real, homogenous as sickbay and all the androids vacuuming
the wear-and-tear of highway motels where the worn-and-torn go to quickly
play the games that yield an hour’s entertainment

and while junior execs meet in alleyways to snort for next ideas
fetishists sing the same creed and tie difficult knots around one another, ‘what
would
be the limits, are there many?’ they’re asking, subjunctive and
undressing the new next yield of non-persons

‘Cultural Pedigree’ (Pierre Bourdieu)
vs ‘Income and Output’ (Thomas Piketty)

I spent the first years of my life in a valley

sitting in woods muttering the occult business of little folktales;
madness sometimes works

amid the machines, kept running elegiacally by large sets of hands
sweeping populations of crow from each momentary wholeness

I spent the first years of my life in a valley

enchanted by the noise of complex human emotion: it was

big trouble in tweed jackets, the very wide landscapes of modern man
and this is why madness sometimes works

(a tradition with its own lost imps/holograms)

in a wilderness of anthropological models inside the encyclopedias of kids

I spent the first years of my life in a valley

conscious as animals inside hotelroom dreams, with

TV screens jamming on runaway wars crackling away; maybe this
is why madness sometimes works

a flash of ancient feeling telepathed from unseen, watching minds

(there's an indefinite number of possibilities if

you concentrate like a good bird), so: you spend the first years of your
life in a valley

where madness sometimes works

(Ted Hughes)

I don't think there can be generalizations at all
amid the existence of villains looking wonderful in blunt, patrician ways
we swarm, a system of spasms, and finally *we are*

nowhere with our skin on, populating divine garrets, hospitals, our
personalities moral in dull brick institutions < > status pure there
can be no generalizations

inside each new odyssey of bad coffee: we are diffident, hysterical
as weather's next question, a flat presence
around little portraits of ourselves clutching accoutrements and

finally *we are nearly harmless*, Mephistopheleans inside radio
murmuring in morphine clouds of 'I don't think so' and ... *there!* I don't think
there can be generalizations at all

among tyrants riding up front newly-exploding places
practicing 'I'll have, I'll have' avenues professionally heavy, swarming
with There! There! and finally *we are*

a frisson of hello raging aloud
waving theatrically at the terminus of each hell, our mouths smiling how
there can be no generalizations
finally (I think), swarming, *we are nowhere* at all?

(John Berryman)

Research Statement

Research Background

accelerations & inertias derives from a larger work-in-progress, and responds to a range of key theoretical positions: in particular, after Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'On the contribution of poetry to the search for truth' (1986), the poems here are less involved in processes of *Einhausung* ('making ourselves at home') and instead seek to 'mirror a nearness to the world'.

Research Contribution

These citational texts are as if anarchic archives; through heuristic processes of misreading and misquoting a range of textual materials, each 'villanknelle' seeks to not only achieve those unities of the traditional villanelle form (etymol. 'rustic song'), but to also question the lyric mode of apostrophe, which is characterized in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (4th edn.) as a 'poetic address, especially to unhearing entities, whether these be abstractions, inanimate entities, animals, infants, or absent or dead people'.

Research Significance

This research demonstrates how experimental creative processes can produce stylistically novel outcomes. The value of the research is suggested by the following indicators: individual works from the larger manuscript from which these texts derive are published extensively in journals both in Australia and abroad; poems from the manuscript have been awarded the Vincent Buckley Prize (2014) and the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize (2015); the project has received a grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council; the manuscript is to be published as a collection by UWAP (2016).