

Quantum Poetics: Tripping Farther Down the Rabbit Hole

*In commemoration of Christian Bök's reading in Boulder on October 16, 2009
& The Butthole Surfers/Melvins show in San Diego on October 17, 2009*

AMY CATANZANO

A Prefatory Statement

Head look about the free like a dumb hombre on wheel/I might take the tee-mind over/lord in seal/I done keep to whole wide lookin'/A gapin' have to free minds mover/Maybe me and the queen can give a side odor/lord it away, well!/Oh little wish it away/I got time to wish away/Little wish it away/She don't hail...

—Melvins, "Queen"

Translated by Jeremy Lampo

I'd rather be a sailor than a fighter/I'd like to sail a ship into the sun/If you want to know the truth/You gotta dig up Johnny Booth/And I hate cough syrup don't you?/I know that your mother is a martyr/I've heard she's got connections with the mob/If you wanna learn to fight/You've gotta drink up all the light/And I hate cough syrup don't you?/I'd rather be a matchstick than a lighter/I like to see the wood curl up and burn/If you wanna touch the sky/You must be prepared to die/And I hate cough syrup don't you?

—The Butthole Surfers, "Cough Syrup"

As uroborus laboratories, Emersonian magic chambers, and Borgesian aesthetic events, poems seem to have the ability to describe, document, and invent the unknown geometry of the multiverse proposed by current theoretical physics. Upon meeting Christian Bök before his poetry reading in Boulder, Colorado, I mentioned that his Xenotext Experiment—in which he is encoding a poem into a live bacterium to create a cultural archive that might outlive humans—inspires me to imagine encoding a poem into a photon that could be shot through the Large Hadron Collider particle accelerator at CERN, an experiment that could, in my dreams, result in environmentally sustainable big bangs and black holes that emulate the most glorious of poetic principles—counter logics, invisible scales, mutational tactics. I knew that Bök is working with a MacArthur Fellow specializing in biocomplexity and informatics at the University of Calgary to help him in his poetry-bacterium synthesis. *What resources!* I oohed and awed. *A fleet of scientists!* I embellished, considering the possibilities of collaborating with a particle physicist to make my own scenario feasible. *Do you know how you will you encode the poem into the photon?* Christian asked me. I replied, *Well, how are you encoding the poem into the bacterium? Are you creating a cipher of some kind?* And he began explaining that yes, he's creating a cipher, and just when he got to the part about protein synthesis—*poems and protein synthesis!*—we were interrupted. No matter, I shrugged, because the transformational aspect of the encounter was in seeing that in order to develop and expose the literary dimensions of science, and, in turn, the scientific dimensions of literature, as Bök is also doing, and others, too, one must become the scientist, one must become the cipher.

Bök's oulipian and conceptual sound experiments, with all their cross-wiring alien tech & reflexive virtuoso & pataphysical self-discipline & hypnotic modems, imagine the poetic project as a vast laboratory, one that invents rather than merely applies linguistic and scientific methods—and by vast, I mean in space and time, as is evidenced by his Xenotext's reach into the mutable borders of both. In the frontmatter of *Universe or Multiverse* (ed. Bernard Carr, 2007), it is noted that primitive humans were aware of scales from miles (10^{-2} cm) to mountains (10^{-5} cm), eighteenth-century humans were aware of scales from bacteria (10^{-5} cm) to the solar system (10^{-17} cm), and twentieth-century humans were aware of scales from atomic nuclei (10^{-3} cm) to distant galaxies (10^{-27} cm). After experiencing Bök's moving, incantatory reading—*the tears!*—and thinking about my husband at another uncanny performance of verbal and rhythmic extra dimensions—*The Butthole Surfers/Melvins* show the following night in San Diego—I keep asking: What new scales do our poems propose?

GIBBYTRONIX

It takes at least two drummers
to pull the moon
from the sky
abducting a princess requires
protein synthesis
bullhorn *voyelles*
performed on canoes traveling
ubu's nowhere echoes
wolfram horned enemy
I like my puppetry
wet and on the *farscape*-side

RAKETEBEEBEE: AN ESSAY

Desiring the score to *Valuvëula* invites a certain commitment to “refreshment” and “loneliness” (M.C. Escher via Christian Bök). If we accept the animal lysergic and pirate the musique so the widescreen is seen, in lineament order to the end of no space, it becomes clear that a line the idea of a line its two-headed core is not always a straight curve. Like rejecting the shortest path between points, I follow. Sirens sofaraway. Every edge incrementally. So that later the last astronaut re-enters the body, creates a clearing by skywriting the tongue as a half-shell. Yet parallel lines emit more than these mirrors. They hear-now, they living wonder. They curve toward the vibrating heart of the alveolar trill. The hollow of arching waves meant to I free you. What else is speaking, blind-eye seeing, between the diamond and its cutter?

THE FOG MACHINE

as often as novas eviscerate hate
violets radio love