

## **The Baseball Issue: Opening Day 2018**

Featuring

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Robert Hershon  
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and Anne K. Yoder and Rebecca Elliott of Meeking Press



## Frank Messina Playing for the Mets Jersey City, N.J.

I grew up in a Yankee town. A small town, but a Yankee town. Long before baseball players lived in mansions, they lived in smaller things called “homes”. Not far from my family’s home; down Blanche Avenue, across the railroad tracks, past John’s Pizzeria— not far from where I first kissed the tough but cute red-head Roxanne Stoeckler, lived Catfish Hunter. Across from Hunter lived Gene Michael. A Yankee. In fact, Norwood was the home to several Yankee players; Thurmon Munson, Ron Guidry, Don Gullet to name a few. Every shop in town had pictures of the Yankees. You couldn’t get away from it. In short, it was Mets fan hell.

However, this was August, 1978, and if I remember correctly, it was a hot, humid, sticky summer day. Andy Widholm and I were bored as any other ten year-olds in the neighborhood. But Andy was a schoolteacher’s worst nightmare, and when we got together, we were a pair of sugar-induced demons; high on sucrose, glucose, concentrated corn syrup, and red food dye #3.

As Andy and I sat on the curb, munching our Pop Rocks and counting how many spider eggs we found in our Bubble Yum, a blue Chevy Nova rumbled down Carter Street; Catfish Hunter. The car pulled into the driveway and Catfish got out with another buddy of his; Graig Nettles. Yankees. They were returning from a day game against the Kansas City Royals.

Seeing them wasn’t unusual, since Catfish lived two doors down from Andy. But, somehow I knew this day would be different; and different it was. Catfish picked up a ball from his front porch and threw it over to Andy. “Here’s your ball, kid.” Andy turned to me – and through his devilish, dirty-blond hair and menacing grin, he said, “Let’s go!” I grabbed the bat leaning against his mom’s Delta 88 and darted for the street.

We marked out the bases; the manhole cover was home plate, the sewer grate: first base; the horseshoe-shaped pothole: second; and the black patch of tar against the curb was third. Andy spit on the ground, “And that’s pitcher’s mound!”

We began throwing warm-up tosses as Catfish and Nettles looked on from the porch, guzzling beers and uttering small talk. After a couple of tosses, Andy yelled over, “Hey Catfish, what are you looking at? You’re pitching! Nettles, you’re playing outfield! This is the World Series— game seven, bottom of the ninth, tie game 3-3 at Shea. Me and Frankie are the Mets and we’re gonna kick your Yankee butts in!”

Catfish and Nettles took to the street. Andy was up first. He was a feisty kid; one who didn’t like being placated either. “Pitch me something real, Catfish,” Andy yelled. Nettles, beer in one hand, shouted from his spot as the designated outfielder for our impromptu World Series game on Carter Street, “Up and in, Fish. Don’t let the kid make me run!”

After settling in, Andy cracked a 2-1 change-up over Nettles head, past Mr. Rainie’s Pinto and deep into Mrs. Lutzo’s tomato plants. By the time Nettles dug through the vines and relayed the throw back to Catfish Hunter, Andy had made it safely to third base. Andy was beaming, Mrs. Lutzo was screaming, and I was up next.

“C’mon Frankie, you could do it,” Andy hollered. My hands began to sweat. Catfish pitched a fastball just outside the home plate manhole cover. I could tell it wasn’t going to be a dead give-away. Andy and I were going to have to earn this win or lose everything.

The count was one ball, one squished tomato under Nettle’s foot, and one cute redhead peering from the outfield bleacher-box windows of “Carter Street Stadium.”

“This is it,” I thought. “I’m gonna do it.” As I pushed the strands of hair from my face, Nettles moved closer to the third base bag, hoping to get a tag on Andy should I pop the ball up.

Full count, bottom of the ninth inning, game seven of the World Series, the go-ahead run at third base and it’s all up to me and my filthy, pop-rock, sugar-glazed hands and “Grand Way special” sneakered feet.

I took a deep breath and settled in, focusing only on hitting the ball. Andy’s hollering faded into the background. For a moment, it was just me and Catfish. And I was going to do it for my team, the Mets.

Hunter served a belt-high fast ball over the plate and I swung. All I remember is Andy jumping for joy as the ball lined past a diving Graig Nettles allowing Andy to score the winning run.

We had won the World Series!

Andy and I hugged each other, jumping up and down, hollering so loud the neighbors came out to see what in hell was going on. Andy pumped his fists high in the air as we did imitation mock laughs of Winnie Barbarino and Arnold Horshack. Nettles and Catfish picked up their beers, smiled, then one of them said, “Kids, go home and eat now. Good game. You deserve it.”

Later that evening, walking home, heading down Carter Street, around Broadway, cutting through the railroad tracks, I heard a familiar voice coming from the friendly, yellow-lit porch door of Roxanne’s house. “Hey Frankie,” she said, running over to me. “Congratulations. You won!” Then, she planted a kiss on my cheek. Before I could blush, she ran back inside. The door closed and I continued on my way; the hero, the slugger, the dreamer, the newly indoctrinated, die-hard baseball fanatic. Just a kid, but one who just tasted the quiet glory of being a Mets fan.



### Little League-The Golds

Andy Widholm: middle row, first on right (only kid without a baseball cap). Frank Messina: bottom row, second from right



### Ed Charles

I had the honor of meeting Ed Charles in 2015 at a reading he was giving at Bergino Baseball Clubhouse. We were introduced by our mutual friend, Perry Lee Barber - one of the few female umpires in professional baseball. Ed shared a poem in which he tells the story of when he was a kid and chased the Dodger train as it left the Daytona train depot with his hero Jackie Robinson on board. Once the train was out of view, 12-year-old Ed placed his ear against the rails so he could feel the vibration; one last connection to this man who’d change his life forever. When Perry told Ed I was a poet, he pulled me closer and said, “Come here, Frank.” Then he removed the giant 1969 World Series ring off his finger, handed it to me and said, “Go ahead and put it on.” We became friends and corresponded on several occasions—discussing poetry and baseball. He often made me laugh til tears came down my face. He called me one afternoon after the Mets were swept by the Nationals. “They called me up, Frank,” he said. “I’ll be platooning for the Mets at first, second, third base, shortstop, right, left, and center field.” “What about catcher,” I asked. “Nah,” he joked. “They gave that position to a much younger player...Jerry Grote.”

Perry Lee Barber photo

Mrs. Brickman’s class, 1973.  
Frank Messina: top row, 3rd from right



### Mrs. Brickman

First memory:  
kindergarten, Mrs. Brickman,  
show-and-tell, Tommie Agee baseball card

Holding it up, like a medallion  
kids smiling, Agee smiling,  
my moment in the spotlight

Later caught chewing gum,  
Mrs. Brickman grabs collar,  
shoves me into corner

Facing wall, alone, trembling  
hands in pockets, searching for Tommie Agee,  
my friend in the baseball card

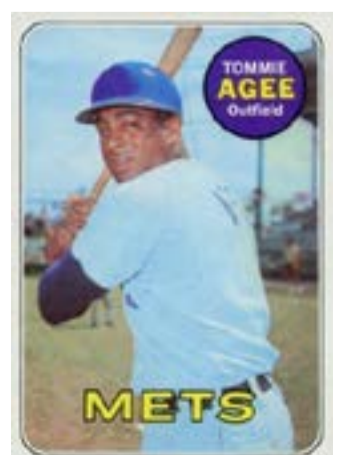
Mrs. Brickman grabs collar, twists,  
“Is this what you’re looking for?”  
holds up the card, a medallion

She rips it in half, again and again,  
then throws the pieces at  
me

First memory, kindergarten

Tears and Tommie Agee

Mrs. Brickman  
Mrs. Brickman  
Mrs. Brickman





**J. Bradley**  
Orlando, Fl.

## Honus

I take the watch off, place it next to the stack of unopened boxes of Cracker Jack. The latest issue of Beckett should come today.

The grocer stretched the bill taut, held it to the light. Lincoln's wide forehead distracted him long enough for me to make it back. The headlines say we are all still here; I must remember to bring the right version of currency next time.



**Robert Farrell**  
The Bronx

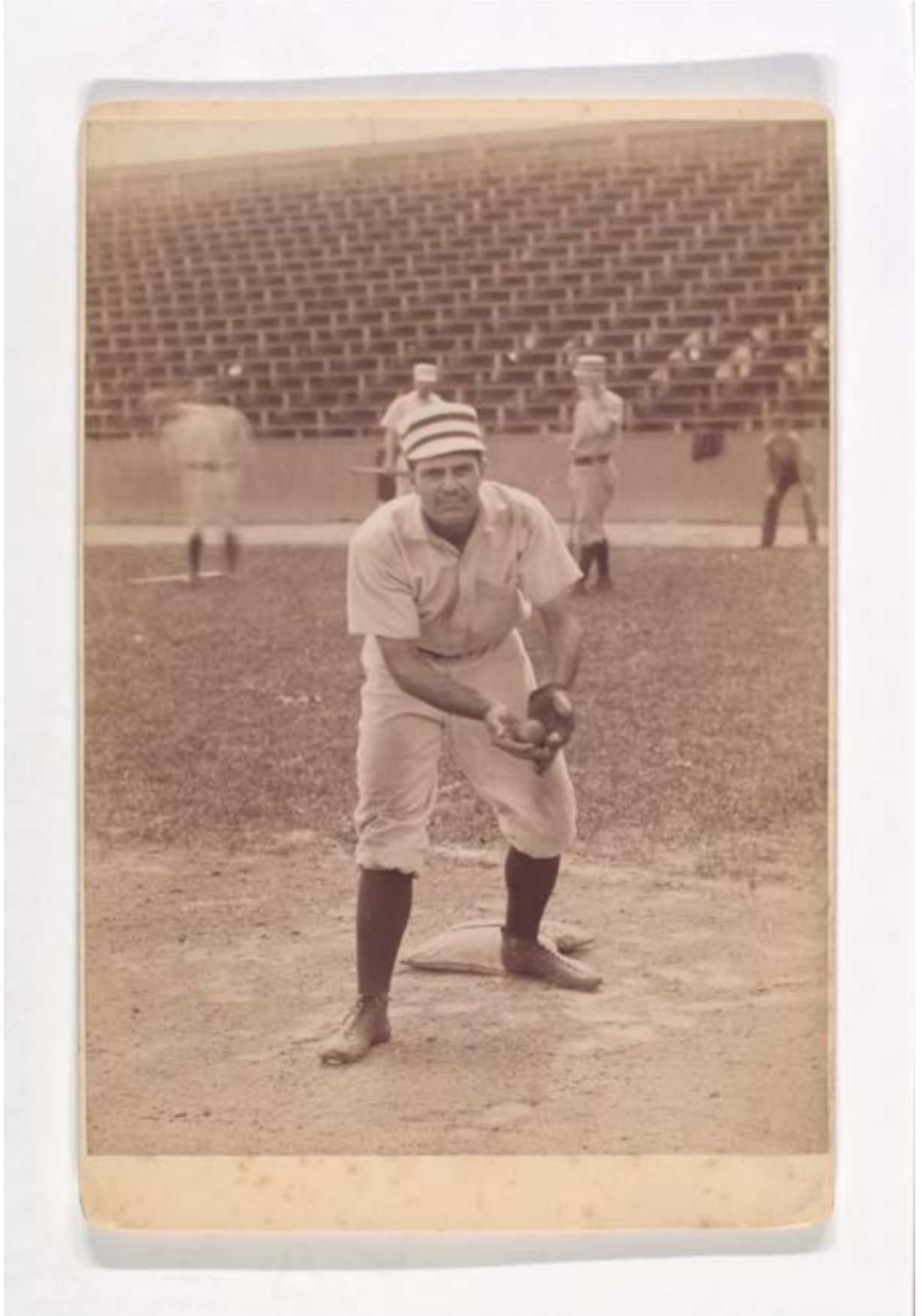
## Ernie Banks

After the fire, was found, deep in a wall (hidden how? placed there by a Second City transplant? a vengeful plasterer who loved the Cubs in '58, who immured it there as a curse upon the House of Ruth, which no longer stands where once it stood just a few blocks away, the Yankees having built a more advantageous home across the street?) a baseball card, an Ernie Banks, charred and a bit water damaged. Or perhaps, in the upstairs apartment, it slipped behind a radiator, fallen from a boy's shrine to a rival slugger, a secret tribute to a man humbler than most, certainly no Sultan of Swat, not one wont to call his shot as the Babe did in '32, but one eternally surprised whenever the ball would leave his bat and then the park?

Dear Ernie  
Banks, you did not live to see the day the Cubbies made the six mile ride from Grant Park to Wrigley Field, the Chicago River dyed blue. Mr. Cub, you died the year before, and what was lost that day? Mr. Sunshine, whose name evoked a hope in dark times, solicited from all dreams not of winning but of having won the right to play another day, whose name called forth a love for all loveable losers, the faith of those whose faith is unconditional, not tied to flags or titles, but a gift most understood by children, even in the Bronx, where teams are ranked by dynasty, for children best can see themselves in underdogs, and know that champions are not the ones who win but those who take the field again to strive regardless of their chances, who grab a hold upon our dreams and look for what may never arrive, for convictions not mere victories, for strange things we can't imagine, whose absences renew our friendships even in defeat, and things more impossible, like justice and loyalty, things that prompt us to get down to work, that prevent us from conforming to the present age and its glorification of winners, from being comfortable (which you never were once you left the Monarchs), from being taken in by worldly success, from forming plans that can be executed, from acceding to Sabermetrics and the marketplace, to ROI and the calculations required to strengthen the crown's defense, which is no gift and so by slow degrees or fast turns us into what we most despise having mastered the logic of our masters leaving us to ask just what we'd sell or sacrifice for a trip down Hero's Canyon. A marriage perhaps? Our souls' own safety? Ask Theo Epstein who's brought two teams now to the summit of the series, has answered Boston's and Chicago's prayers. Or has he? Dear Ernie Banks, you were married several times and died a pauper having bequeathed what little you had left to your nurse, the consequence of senility or an act of generosity, we do not know, without expectation of reward.



Unidentified baseball player in catching form. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, A.G. Spalding Collection.



Unidentified baseball player in catching form. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, A.G. Spalding Collection.



## Robert Hershon

Boerum Hill, Brooklyn

### Perennials or In the Flower of Youth

In the contest between Casey Stengel and the forsythia – bursting into gold against the splintered gray fence – the forsythia soon retreats to the camouflage of green leaves but Casey Stengel promises:

In every game you see, you’ll see something you never saw before. Casey wins. The forsythia uproots itself and slouches back to China. Sir William Forsyth drowns himself in the Serpentine. But Casey promises his players: Next year, some of you have got a chance to be a year older.

## Sandra Marchetti

Lisle, Ill.

### Elysian Park

for the 2016 National League Championship



The Santa Anas catch me backward in a jet stream. A boy cartwheels through the crosswalk, another plays sax in the street’s theme. Aligned for a parade, our team drops into Dodger Stadium. We look up to see if the spirits wore cleats for the late fall scene.

AM

It doesn’t have to be a ballgame for me to feel included, calmed to hear a voice other than my own. I walk through the house, turn them all on, and say hello.



Polo Grounds, 1905, "World's Championship Series, Second game of series, played at the Polo Grounds, New York City, Athletics in the field, Chief Bender pitching. The New York Public Library Digital Collections.



## Martin Kleinman

Location

### The Big Game

Mustache rubbed up the Clincher, looked over at first base, and fired the ball home. Joel hit it right on the button and the ball screamed back to the mound with such velocity that it hit Mustache right smack in the forehead before he could raise a glove in self-defense. Myron’s big lead allowed him to scoot all the way around to third base, with Joel easily making it to second base before the pitcher was able to compose himself, find the ball, and check the runner at third.

An angry knot formed on Mustache’s brow. He turned to Joel, who idly kicked second base, and pointed his gloved hand. “You’re a dead man,” he said. “You watch. See what happens. Just watch.”

In the on-deck circle, Dad took his last practice swings. He threw aside one practice bat, and then a second, and gingerly stepped to the batter’s box. Second and third, nobody out.

Mustache turned to his outfield, raised his hands over his head and waved them back. “Keep going, keep going,” he said as his teammates jogged backwards to the outfield perimeter. “This guy can hit.”

Stevie and I looked at each other, shook our heads and sighed.

“What’s the matter?” asked Butchy.

“I’m afraid,” said Stevie, his head down. “I think I’m gonna puke. I can’t look.”

“Me neither,” I said. In fact, I had never fainted, but the way I felt at that moment, lightheaded and unable to focus, I figured that this MUST be the way you feel right before you faint.

Stevie held his eyes with both hands, peeping through his fingers, like he did watching Vincent Price’s “The Tinger” at the RKO Fordham. I looked over at Dad. He tapped his sneakers with the barrel of his bat, loosened the clods of dirt, and took a few easy practice swings. I looked over at Mustache. His face had transformed into the essence of mean. He turned to his infielders and grimly nodded. The fielders returned to their normal positions; the shift was off.

“C’mon Bobby baby, c’mon, you can do it,” Uncle Max screamed at the top of his lungs. As the entire Rotstein’s contingency picked up Max’s chant, Dad tightened his grip on the bat and readied for a blazing fastball from Mustache. Mustache peered at his catcher, began his now-familiar windmill windup, and let the ball fly.

Only, instead of the usual heat, Mustache used the same fastball motion but uncorked a floater that seemed to take forever to reach the plate. In his anticipation, Dad swung far too early, and wildly, nearly corkscrewing himself into the Swan’s batter’s box.

The torque of the swing caused him to shout out in pain.

“Dammit!” he screamed, as his brother Max did earlier in the game. “Dammit to hell,” he shouted. He dropped his bat and clutched his back.

Mom bolted from her aluminum folding chair and ran to her husband. “Honey, your back? Is it your back?” she cried.

Dad looked at her and cringed.

“I’m OK,” he said, still rubbing his lower back, backing away from the batter’s box. “I’ll be fine.”

Mom picked up his bat and handed it to him. He swung it gingerly as the Swan’s team began to razz him.

“C’mon, play ball,” Seymour screamed from right field.

“Cut the crap already,” Mustache said. “Batter up!”

Dad slowly bent backwards and side to side, testing his back. Mustache turned to look at his infielders while, on base, Myron and Joel started to chatter as they took aggressive leads.

“You got him, baby,” Myron said.

“C’mon, baby, c’mon, Bobby boy, you can do this,” Joel said.

Dad stepped back into the batter’s box, as Mustache rubbed up the ball, figuring – as we all did – that Dad’s bad back was no match for his heat-seeking missile of a fastball. Mustache gripped the ball and went into his motion. His fielders inched forward on the balls of their feet.



## Mary Reilly

Location TK

### 'Baseball is a time-space continuum.'

November/ 5/ 2007 b/w 404/628am

As we approach the penultimate season and infinity (Up there to the right. Across from the mall. And stuff), Please remember that a Contract is a Contract.

An agreement, an agreement.

A contractual agreement.

Just so that we are on the same page, THIS

Is a photograph of it:

Not much left of what wasn't much anyway, But homes.

The home of my father was there, and my father was angry

In a sad way, when he told me about it.

He served that announcer at Wednesday's back in the Sixties

Before the Disco or other Slicks.

No, my father did not go to Woodstock-

He worked.

+

When he said that, when he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, The Bronx is Burning", And the camera panned out so that the viewers in the suburbs could see the fires Burning and the 'savagery', my father thought about

his home, his neighborhood, where he lived

on Andrews Avenue near Fordham Road.

And I feel that he must have felt the way a person should feel when their home, their neighborhood where their neighbors live, is beaten and raped. And then the rapist takes a photo.

And shows it to his fraternity brothers, and says "one more dead hooker."

+

Luckily, we are approaching infinity, and that was a long time ago.

I'm apologizing right now for the turbulence. We are short of staff.

All of the people who set good examples quit. Apparently, Cadillac pays better.

And I do blame them. I blame them. I blame You. You fucking hippies. I blame you for galvanizing the youth. Getting them out of the suburbs, creating options outside of the Nuclear.

Crying for the Kennedy's and King.

All so that you could sell us Cadillacs?

You are wicked Bob Dylan and every other one of you fucks. You told us that we could change the world and that you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And you are a poet.

And now you tell us to buy Cadillacs?

+

I don't understand.

Does a wrong become a right when it

+becomes convenient?.

And

Is that how you atone?

. For every dream that you sell to someone who believes

somewherenooneelse does

even though you know, it is a nightmare,

You must say 5 hail marys and have lunch with Mick Jagger.

+

It is exciting when two points in time meet.

2012 marks the end of the Mayan Calendar.

It is also the year that the many born of few

returning from Worlds of Wars II,

Shall be cast into the burning lake

that offers no social security.

And no one may retire from eternity.

+

+

But we are dealing with infinity, which is far more pleasant than eternity.

Our tangent is approaching the continuum.

+

and from the hospital's window, I saw it. Play-by-play on the phone with my dad. We were the team of that century. and it did not matter that I am a Mets fan.

"Baseball is a time-space continuum." November/ 5/ 2007 b/w 404/628am

+

As we approach the penultimate season and infinity- up there to the right across from the mall and stuff- please remember that a contract is a contract- an agreement, an agreement- a contractual agreement.

Just so that we're on the same page, this

is a photograph of it:

Not much left of what wasn't much anyway. But homes, the home of my father was there.

I remember him angry in a sad way when he told me about it.

He served that announcer at Wednesday's back in the sixties before the disco or other slicks-

No, my father did not go to Woodstock-

He worked.

+

A city in fear. A team in Turmoil. Win or lose, 1977 was one year New York City would never forget.

When he said that, when he said,

"Ladies and Gentlemen, The Bronx is Burning,"  
and the cameras panned out,



Basil King art



## Basil King

Park Slope, Brooklyn

### The Manager

In 1983, I painted a baseball manager with his back to us.

He's looking at an empty field. He'd grown up in a small town and knows nothing about farming. Baseball had brought him to the big city. As a pitcher he'd played for fifteen years on four different teams. He'd been a good pitcher, everyone respected him. Baseball was all he knew. He depended on it. When he stopped pitching he was hired as a pitching coach and three years later he became the team's manager. All he wants is two more years, then he'll retire. He isn't sure what he's going to do after that. But he knows he won't be playing catch with his grandchildren. He'll have to turn his back on the game.

There's a horizon line with an ambiguous colored sky coming as an afterthought as afterthoughts do. After the rainbow had finished telling him nothing is what he thought it was, the manager's hands go into his back pockets. He's lost a lot of games, and he doesn't want to lose any more. He wants his team to play without error. He hopes that his team will tower over the city that he loves.

From "The Twin Towers" in *Learning to Draw / A History*



## Elisavietta Ritchie

Broomes Island, Md.

### I've Never Written a Baseball Poem

For Reuben Jackson, who has

OCTOBER 21, 1985

I didn't even make the seventh grade girls'

third team substitute. Still can't throw straight.

Last Easter, scrub game with the kids,

I hit a foul right through

Captain Kelly's French doors,

had to pay...

Still, these sultry country nights

when I watch the dark ballet

of players sliding into base,

I shout `` Safe! He's safe!

He's home!" and so am I.

*The Christian Science Monitor* © 1985;

*Fan* 1993; *Diamond Are A Girl's Best Friend*, editor

Elinor Nauen, Faber & Faber, 1994; *The Arc of the Storm*, Signal Books, 1998;

set to music by composer Jackson Berkey.



Leo Gehrig, George Herman [Babe] Ruth, and Tony Lazzeri, 1927. The New York Public Library Digital Collections. Underwood & Underwood.

## Elinor Nauen The East Village **Away Game**



the Lisbon of Henry the Navigator  
cobblestones, tiles with the colors of isolation,  
baleful pigs on a truck

romantic Lisbon on the Atlantic  
where endeth land and where beginneth ...  
but

no one to talk to  
blisters (why these shoes?)  
alone, travel's effort not adventure

hotel TV: smarmy British game show  
Bogart flick with Portuguese subtitles  
& suddenly

baseball heaves into sight  
so unexpected it takes a beat  
to recognize Pirates & Mets

I hold my breath  
top of the first.    ecstasy:  
two hours to lie around

Lisbon far off  
Zane Smith sets the Mets down on 3 pitches  
wait!                    I get it:

three shown pitches  
the inning has more  
(of course).

top of the second:  
fly out, ground out, fly out, Mets gone.  
the same each inning:

Portuguese TV shows only the pitch that "matters"  
game cut adrift  
more foreign than the black widows of Portugal

outside dark men  
hurry home to garlic soup  
how to dream of a New World

of baseball and brigands and staying away  
a pitch or 2 from Frank Viola  
& that's the third

the game skips isolate to the ninth in 20 minutes  
the Pirates have six hits but I'm granted  
only the outs.            the moment of the out.

where's the baserunning, spitting, conference on the mound?  
who's catching this near-baseball but a blue American?  
I grab the next flight out of Lisbon

even in November the baseball's better at home  
I could never be an exile  
being bored only pleases at the ballpark

the slow sailing patches  
the circumnavigations  
as essential as the finds

what is baseball  
but the time it takes  
to drag & slide through a game

as much live your life in two hours  
of highlights.            the likeness  
to a human world back home



Baseball King art

## Lauren Russell

Pittsburgh

### **Jesse 'Mountain' Hubbard:**

Man, I beat those guys so bad it was pitiful!  
The team that wanted me was the Tigers.  
They didn't sign me because Ty Cobb was there,  
and he didn't like colored no kind of way.

The team that wanted me bad was the Tigers.  
If Cobb saw us coming, he sat out the game.  
He didn't like colored no kind of way.  
He'd grip the ball tight and bug his eyes.

If Cobb saw us coming, he sat out the game.  
They used to accuse me of cheating, of cutting  
the ball. He'd grip the ball tight and bug  
his eyes. Well, I had something I could cut it with.

They used to accuse me of cheating, of cutting the ball.  
If they threw drop balls in front of the plate, I'd kill  
them. Well I had something I could cut it with.  
All I did was pull up my pants like this.

If they threw drop balls in front of the plate,  
I'd kill them. Now that's part of the history  
of the Negro race. All I did was pull up my pants like this.  
When I got warmed up real good, I cut loose on them.

Now that's part of the history of the Negro race.  
They didn't sign me because Ty Cobb was there.  
When I got warmed up real good, I cut loose  
on them. Man, I beat those guys so bad it was pitiful!

from *Descent*

# The Chapbook Heals/The Chapbook as Meditation: Soham Patel in conversation with Suman Chhabra, author of Demons Off, and Anne K. Yoder and Rebecca Elliott of Meekling Press

On Thurs., March 14, 2018 Woodland Pattern Book Center hosted the third of five events in the Kundiman Midwest Chapbook Reading Series. Suman Chhabra read her chapbook *Demons Off* from Meekling Press. Lo Kwa Meien will visit on April 14 to read us *Two Tales* from Bloom Books. Noel Pabillo Mariano will finish the series with a reading of *Dispatches from the Mushroom Kingdom* forthcoming from Hyacinth Girl Press sometime this May. The AV Club at Woodland Pattern managed to livestream Suman's reading for folks to witness from afar. Before & after the reading, there was more wine and this time tea and cookies all with an Arthur Russell soundtrack.

One wonderous thing about a chapbook is how we can read it through in one sitting. Sometimes they don't have page numbers to guide the reading - we just read in them. We can sit down for half an hour, encounter the entire chapbook with little distraction. A chapbook can become meditative that way. *Demons Off* invites a meditation, it grounds us as we read it and turns us again and again.

Quoting Czesław Miłosz's poem "Ars Poetica?," poet and translator Peter Burzynski reminds that "one use of poetry is reminding us how hard it is to remain one person...for poetry is written rarely and reluctantly under unbearable pressure and only with the hope that good, not evil spirits, use us as their instrument" Peter introduced *Demons Off* as a chapbook that engages with loss and grieving, and asks readers to join a post-trauma space as it explores the boundaries between meditation and hallucination. He says the work "is populated with shape-shifting demons that both guide and elude reader and speaker." These guided shifts turn the unbearable into something like a dream, something healing.

Here is an interview with Suman Chhabra, author of *Demons Off*, and Anne K. Yoder and Rebecca Elliott of Meekling Press."

**Our first book was Patty Yumi Cottrell's *The Jury of Sudden Hands*. It was printed on cards using a miniature letterpress Rebecca acquired, and included woodcut prints from a drawing Patty made.**

**Soham Patel: When, where, and how did Meekling Press begin? Are there definable qualities that you look for in the work you publish? Is there something that, to your mind, unifies Meekling publications aesthetically or otherwise?**

Rebecca Elliott: Meekling Press started in 2012, Rebecca's last year in the M.F.A program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Anne's first. Anne was involved with some of the facets of production, ie book making, at that time. Our first book was Patty Yumi Cottrell's *The Jury of Sudden Hands*. It was printed on cards using a miniature letterpress Rebecca acquired, and included woodcut prints from a drawing Patty made. A few years later we had the opportunity to acquire a full-size nineteenth-century platen press, which is now at the center of our operations. Most of our books include a component made on letterpress, whether it's the cover or artwork or insert, and all of our books are handmade, with the exception of our most recent publication, *The Meekling Review*.

From the beginning, the publications came out of a desire to play with the interaction of form & content: a book printed on cards that could be arranged in any order; a long, tumbling poem bound in an accordion form that reached all the way across the floor; a dream printed on vellum paper, fading in and out as you turn the pages. We like work that creeps around the borders of genre, things that might be a story or an essay or a poem or a drawing or a book or a sculpture, or all of these things at once, who knows?

**Patel: Can you all tell me something about how *Demons Off* was made / printed / distributed? How were layout and design choices made?**

Elliott: *Demons Off* was part of a series of seven chapbooks we did called "Chill Horizons," so some of the design choices were made to unify the whole series. We kept the layout pretty simple, just trying to keep as close to Suman's original manuscript as possible. The covers were printed on our antique letterpress using metal type for the titles and triangles cut out of linoleum, which were arranged in different patterns for the seven different chapbooks in the series. The books were hand-bound with the help of our friends. The first 50 copies of *Demons Off* also included a centerfold print of a painting by the wonderful painter, Rachael M. Gonzalez (<http://rmgonzalez.com/>). We thought Rachael's paintings would pair well with Suman's essay, and they worked together to come up with the concept for the image. (The first picture on this page: <http://rmgonzalez.com/work#/bookwork/>)

As far as distribution: we offered a subscription for the Chill Horizons series, where we sent one chapbook each month and the books were also available individually. At this point, we've sold out of the complete sets, but we still have some copies of *Demons Off* available on our website and at some bookstores.

**Patel: Suman, can you talk about writing *Demons Off*? How was it conceptualized / composed / edited?**

Suman Chhabra: The chapbook is part of a longer, ongoing work that focuses on an individual's grief after trauma. The work links grief to rakshasas, demons that shift their shape, as grief is not easily identified or eradicated. It continues to evolve and surprises one in the ways it manifests. The work gives equal weight to the various effects of grief, those expected and ask existential questions, and those seemingly unrelated, but affect everyday life. States of being: waking, dreams, and meditation are considered when questioning how to deal with, and potentially transcend, loss.

*Demons Off* is a lyric essay written in sections. Though it is arranged on pages and bound in a book, it is not a linear work. A reader can choose to read the chapbook in any order and that will be one version of the story. Writing in this way was necessary for me-to express the multifaceted effects of trauma, to erode the construct of time, and to amplify a reader's individual experience of the text.



Who's who, in order. Thanks.

Suman Chhabra is a multigenre writer and cellist. She holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an MFA in Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Chhabra is the author of *Demons Off*, a chapbook through Meekling Press. She is a Kundiman Fellow and her work has been supported by Vermont Studio Center, Ragdale, Red Hen Press (forthcoming in the *Anthology of Contemporary Indian Writing*), Poemeleon, Hair Club, TAYO, and Homonym. Chhabra teaches courses in Reading and Writing at SAIC.

Rebecca Elliott is a writer and artist working primarily in printmaking and book arts. Her work explores the edge between science and metaphor, the place where human need for understanding meets the unknowable universe and the imagination takes over. She received an MFA in Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012, and co-founded the literary and book-arts collective Meekling Press.

Soham Patel is the author of four chapbooks, most recently *New Weather Drafts* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2016) and in *airplane and other poems* (oxeye press, 2018). Her first full-length collection of poetry, *to afar from afar*, is now available from Writ Large Press.

Anne K. Yoder's writing has appeared in *Fence*, *Bomb*, and *Tin House*, among other publications, and is forthcoming in *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing*. She is a staff writer for *The Millions* and a member of Meekling Press, a collective micropress based in Chicago. Currently she is working on a novel about coming of age in a techno-pharmaceutical society.

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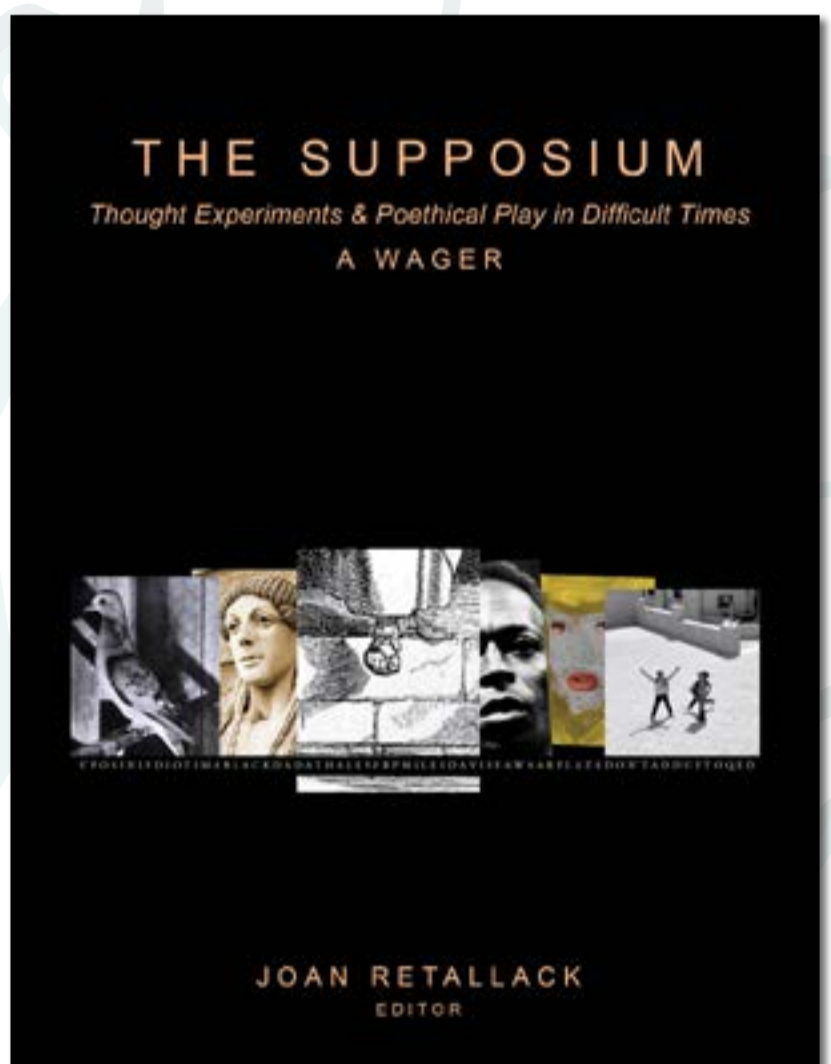
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# Editorial : Radical Open Access and the Future of Libraries In the Face of Enforced Scarcity, A Case for Open Access: Taking Distribution Into Our Own Hands



BY LYNNE DESILVA-JOHNSON

Maybe it's because I've kept a steady diet of dystopian fiction since I was very young, but when friends were gleefully downloading music and video in large quantities before the advent of legal alternatives I was warning them of the potential of a future gulag – a speculative future where these seemingly banal infringements, ignored in the fine print, became the basis of imprisonment, heavy fines, and forced labor.

Sure, I have an active imagination, but it's also not too far fetched: a federal jury in Minneapolis rules that Jammie Thomas-Rasset, 32, was responsible for \$80,000 in damages for each of 24 songs, a total pay out of \$1.92 million to the record companies from which she "willfully stole" profits; Joel Tenenbaum, a Boston University graduate student facing up to \$4.5 million got a more sympathetic jury, asking only \$22,500 for each of 30 songs, or \$675,000 in total.

If you're missing the link to libraries, bear with me—what we're talking about here is a larger conversation in which the conventions and rules of capital property ownership (and, in turn, distribution, ie, "sharing") interface with our daily lives. What the above demonstrates, as well, is how this (il)legality both changes drastically—and ramps up in risk—with the scalar shifts in standard interpersonal practices offered by technological advancement.

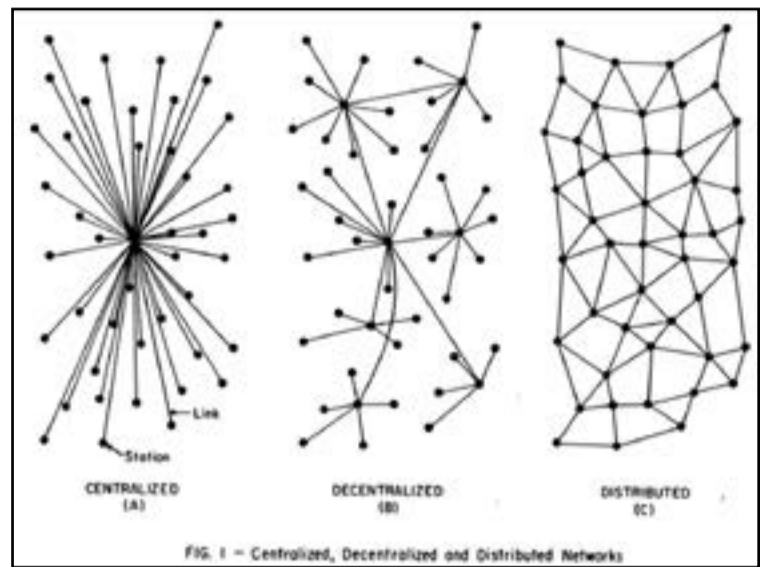
In these legal cases, and others like them, the establishment flexes its muscles—reminding you that by willfully ignoring the fine print you understood what you were getting into, despite the fact that your instinct (adapted and scaled from similar interpersonal practices) leads you to feel this is a natural, safe, acceptable behavior.

Especially if you have used and loved cassettes you remember the ease and constancy of making mixtapes, creating copies of albums for friends, etc. The advent of CD's made this a little harder (and made more visible the illegality of the practice), but it was always, still, common practice.

What happened when Napster, Limewire, etc. entered the field was the scalar shift away from local interpersonal practices that I mentioned above – the shift from locally circulating privately owned files to doing so with anyone to whom the internet could connect you.

This is something that was already happening with other peer-to-peer file sharing servers like IRC, Hotline, and Usenet, which you're probably not familiar with unless you're a certain type of geek. The difference with Napster and Limewire was the prominence of music files in particular, accessibility and an intentionally user friendly interface. What was also new was an industry specific, clear and present 'risk' for big companies.

The heady early internet, a refuge for geeks, was already offering this sort of scaled intelligence, but it wasn't making the kind of waves that music file sharing offered the general public, nor doing so in a way that was as easily recognizable as a threat. The Temporary Autonomous Zone that Hakim Bey recognized in the internet of the 1990s was characterized by coded access, usable and navigable only by a self-selecting few, versed in the tech languages necessary to interact there.



The link to libraries—and to any of the intellectual "property" housed there is thus: how does the capital state understand (and litigate) the distribution of resources familiar to any library user? And, critically, how does (or should) this change with the advent of new technology, allowing point-to-point distribution of these materials, accessible non-locally on the user end? And, furthermore: what political and economic structures are reinforced by the control of intellectual materials?

But first, let's take a minute to talk about the history of libraries.

One tends, in the U.S., to think of public library access to books and periodicals as a norm, but we are actually quite spoiled by this bounty: historically libraries were not for the "public" in the way we understand now – famed ancient libraries like that in Alexandria functioned primarily as an outward facing show of imperial strength through archival collections (not dissimilar to a museum), though they were also used by scholars of the time; early shared holdings in Rome were for wealthy patrons of the baths; and other various private and institutional libraries remained accessible to only a select (read: privileged) few for centuries.

With the advent of the printing press, circulating libraries run by publishers and booksellers (accessible to the public for a fee) became common in the 18th century. But it wasn't until 19th century Britain, with increasing social and cultural upheaval around education for the masses, that truly public libraries similar to the ones we are familiar with today became common.

Of course, the printing press also made possible widespread underground distribution of materials and resources – with radical or banned books and periodicals (ones that wouldn't have been available in libraries or at booksellers) finding their ways into hands

and across borders along personal networks...the analog precursor, if you will, to peer-to-peer.

The lesson here, of course, is that intellectual materials have always been closely guarded—primarily available to an elite, privileged, and already powerful few. Hopefully it's not news to you, either, that fascist and other punishing regimes have always (and continue to) strictly control access to intellectual resources of all media types (and, ergo, now, to the internet).

So what now?

Now we see in the United States and other countries moving towards a xenophobic, anti-intellectual, neo-fascist capitalism a dangerous retreat away from funding public libraries, public scholarship, and the arts, teachers and classrooms scraping by for materials, students saddled with crippling debt, and so on and so forth. The FY2019 budget proposal here in the U.S. again proposed the permanent elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, as well as the elimination of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (and with it virtually all federal library funding).

Librarians and archivists are fighting the tide—building collections and programs, seeking private and public funds from constituents, but the combination of lack of funding and the precarious financial situation of so much of the public portends a dire situation.

Enter peer-to-peer, radical open access theory: what if, instead of having to rely on institutions, we made not only possible, but legal the distribution of resources to each other through digitally linked international networks and servers? Is the potential of an autonomous zone still possible today?

Well—yes, and no. And the sticking point is copyright: when cultural producers affix a strict, normative copyright clause to their materials, the popular assumption is that they (we) are "protecting ourselves." However, what we're also protecting is a capital, ownership-oriented model of intellectual property, which goes against any form of sharing or distribution, regardless of financial ability or intent to profit.

Similarly to the history of sharing music (and the litigation of doing so "illegally" along technologically facilitated, large scale, peer-to-peer networks), the sharing of the types of materials that are the traditional purview of libraries – books, periodicals, and now the digital manifestations of these (as well as images, maps, film, and other archives) – is an area seeing increased vigilance.

You'll notice, too, that the big ticket cases here are not "author scammed out of sales dividends by a teacher copying and distributing copies of their memoir to their students," but rather those like the arrest and prosecution of Aaron Swartz, who in 2011 used his MIT account to download academic journals systematically from the JSTOR database. Swartz was facing up to 35 years in prison and a maximum penalty of \$1 million dollars when he hanged himself in his Brooklyn apartment while under federal indictment.

Surely, there's complexities and places where – especially in the visual and performing arts – copyright can be litigated as a protective shield for the creator. But, in its current blanket form, what it protects is ultimately a capitalist definition of property ownership, against which the public library could in a sense already be considered anathema, a persistent loophole.

Swartz and others who were central in the development and establishment of the Creative Commons (and its varying, highly specific, degrees of licensing) were looking for alternatives to the traditional copyright / capitalist model, which at the same time facilitated and made legal the sharing of resources for personal use.

What I'm asking here is ultimately a question about what form the "library" can and should take, in a networked society wherein intellectual resources are still, too often, only accessible to a privileged few.

Here in the US, it's of course terrible that funding for the most robust public libraries in cities like New York is now under siege, but funding for libraries in rural and/or poor urban centers has always been sporadic and limited. Both here and beyond our borders, resources are complicated and meagre in countless places due to myriad reasons beyond funding: control by fascist regimes, religious oppression, war-destroyed cultural holdings, etc. Public school and university libraries are subject, too, to budget cuts, leaving young people and scholars with vastly unequal resources to learn and study.

Aaron Swartz and other peer-to-peer hacktivists have been motivated by making horizontal and truly public access to library resources that remained behind paywalls, and/or accessible only to a privileged few. With the freeing of JSTOR and other academic journals, independent scholars not tied to an institution providing them access are able to remain part of a scholarly community – restricted access reasserts the power of the institution, even as more and more scholars are unable to find jobs in academia.

Precairy of labor combined with shorter library hours means that even those seeking resources through public libraries are often unable to work around the limitations. Digital resources of public libraries are growing, but are limited in scale and accessibility.

The question to ask yourself is this:

If you feel comfortable with someone being able to take your book out of a library, or getting a copy of your article in a classroom, can you feel comfortable with a copy of that same book or article being legally available, outside of institutional holdings, to a true \*public,\* not only the limited, privileged "publics" that have access to the institutions most likely to have these materials readily available?

Ultimately, to be a true advocate of libraries, in our current technological landscape, is to be a landscape of Radical Open Access resources: readily available, accessible materials for reading, use, research, and study to anyone with an internet connection. And / or, beyond the internet connection, to move beyond strict copyright conventions to a space where copying and distribution of even physical materials for use by communities and individuals without funds and without internet access is not illegal.

As technology has enabled us to create wide, geographically expansive networks of connections, so too has it shifted the landscape of the "interpersonal," so that the very "natural" human acts of sharing a book with a friend or trading cassettes starts to blur with the traditional role of the library; we, and our shared resources, start to challenge institutions in what we can offer each other. This disruption is dangerous, of course, but essential.

So: how can cultural producers, publishers, organizations, scholars, authors, etc do to begin to stay this tide? Well, first, we can make any resources we produce readily and directly available, being sure to use creative commons licensing.

At The Operating System, I made the decision from our first publications to use the strictest of the CC licenses, Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) – "allowing others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially." We are a member of the international Radical Open Access Alliance, [<http://radicalooa.disruptivemedia.org.uk>], an organization promoting "a progressive vision for open publishing in the humanities and social sciences", offering "a radical 'alternative' to the conservative versions of open access that are currently being put forward by commercially-oriented presses, funders and policy makers."

Returning to my earlier fears about the napster gulag, I want to stress that my reasoning for using the CC licenses is not far afield: though many of us do so daily, the fact is that reproducing and sharing copyrighted materials for the classroom or other use is illegal without express permission, and/or without each individual person using the materials having gotten access via an institution / library. For me, and the organization I run, the most important thing is access. I want the public – students, laborers, parents, refugees, nonprofits, afterschool programs, anyone – to be able to use and distribute anything we produce without threat.

We may rarely see courts and companies litigating these infractions, but it could happen at any time. And I refuse to reinforce those controls.

If the copyright conversation is making you rile, hitting you at a vulnerable place where you already feel taken advantage of, underpaid, and unprotected, I understand. However, two different issues are being conflated here, and the conflation of these issues has been essential to keeping us shackled to the ownership model, rejecting open sharing of intellectual resources amongst ourselves, for far too long, ultimately at greatest cost to no one but ourselves\*.

(Sidebar: of course, one always must be careful with a "we." Who is "ourselves" and how does can this, also a blanket, apply? Here I mean, broadly and imperfectly, a public; in keeping with the library conversation this is a large analogy asking what the same public that in theory has access to a public library can and should have access to virtually / digitally / remotely.)

I imagine that few readers of this (already a highly selective group, admittedly) would argue against public libraries, and ergo (if I've done a decent job of laying out this landscape) I hope most of you can now see the very practical, radical, anti-imperial, anti-colonial possibilities (and indeed, roots) of Open Access resources, distribution and more permissive licensing– understood, ultimately, as a reimagined, decentralized, horizontal "library," within which we are all stakeholders, producers and users alike.

In his groundbreaking, brain-hacking book, Sacred Economics, Charles Eisenstein reconsiders a scaling up of a Gift Economy, postulating the move away from a capitalist, private property model. He writes, "the desire to own, to control, is the desire of the self of separation, the self that seeks to manipulate others to its own advantage, to extract wealth from nature and people and all that is other," whereas, "the connected self grows rich by giving, by playing its role to the fullest in the nourishment of that which extends beyond itself."

These theories have widely gotten associated with wealthy entrepreneurs who have skillfully absorbed the radical infrastructures of the peer-to-peer economy, but to discredit the structural potentials or core theories because of the abuses of an already elite few (who are ultimately manipulating anti-capital tools in their own capital interests) is to throw the baby out with the bath water. As TJ Jarrett said on our recent panel on Poetics and Tech, "don't hate the machine – hate the person that made it." Meaning – don't dismiss the disruptive possibility of the new tech and the theories behind it because certain people (those who have the opposite end in mind) have abused them in a very public way.

When corporately owned media spins disruptive tech as the tools of an anti-public, elite few, and the response is to pan the tech itself, that response plays right into the hand of the imperial capital driven corporations that (in fact) have the most to lose.

To misunderstand radical open source, peer-to-peer, or gift economies as the purview of the wealthy or privileged could not be further from the truth – informal gift economies and creative collective solutions for collaborative resource use, sharing, and distribution have long been the lifeblood of local communities finding workarounds beyond and in direct opposition to the confines and limitations of the oppressor / legal system.

Yes: in an (at least, my) ideal world, libraries would be well funded and robust, with access to and for all, with equal resources regardless of income, location, disability, industry, or institutional ties. In that same world, creative producers wouldn't be so woefully precarious as to grasp at straws, keeping scarce the materials that are theirs / ours to share and benefit from as we see fit in some projected illusion of self-protection. And: any and all materials would be ours to share, not tied into a system bent on controlling our consciousness, awareness, communication, and access to each other and each other's resources.

For the time being, in whatever way we can upend the invented scarcity by creating and supporting models that promote sharing and access, we begin that work. One book at a time, one article at a time, one less prison sentence, one less fine.

Lynne DeSilva-Johnson is a queer interdisciplinary creator, scholar and performer. They are an Assistant Visiting Professor at Pratt Institute, as well as Founder and Managing Editor of The Operating System. Lynne's work addresses, in particular, the somatic impact of trauma on persons and systems, as well as the study of resilient, open source strategies for ecological and social change. Lynne is co-editor, with Jay Besemer, of the forthcoming anthology, "In Corpore Sano: Creative Practice and the Challenged Body." They are the author of Ground, Blood Atlas, and "In Memory of Feasible Grace," as well as two forthcoming titles, the chapbook "Sweet and Low," and the collaborative Body Oddy Oddy, with painter Georgia Elrod. Recent publication credits include Wave Composition, The Conversant, The Philadelphia Supplement, Gorgon Poetics, POSTblank, Vintage Magazine, Live Mag, Coldfront, the Brooklyn Poets Anthology, Resist Much/Obey Little: Poems for The Resistance, and YesPoetry. Performances and work have appeared widely, including recent features or projects at Artists Space, Bowery Arts and Science, The NYC Poetry Festival, Parkside Lounge, Carmine Street Metrics, Eyebeam, LaMaMa, Triangle Quarterly, Undercurrent Projects, Mellow Pages, The New York Public Library, Launchpad BK, Dixon Place, Poets Settlement, SOHO20 Gallery and many more. They are always still beginning.

# Patrick Neal

## Long Island City

<http://patrickneal-art.com/home.html>

### Bio

Patrick Neal is a curator, arts writer, and painter residing in Long Island City. He is the curator of Night Regulation: Storytelling in the Land of Text, Identity and Pictures, a show of text-based visual art currently on view at Radiator Gallery in LIC. In 2016, he organized Beautiful Object: Upsetting Still Life at Jeffrey Leder Gallery, LIC, a show of contemporary still life painting and sculpture. He served as curator of the Chocolate Factory's art gallery in LIC during the spring and fall seasons of 2007.

Neal is a contributing writer for Hyperallergic and has written mono-graphs on artists Franklin Evans, Zoe Pettijohn Schade, and recently Scott Schnepf for Tether arts journal. Neal's own painting and catalog essay accompanies the exhibition, The Nature Lab currently on view at LABspace in Hillsdale, N.Y., and he will have a solo show at the Oresman Gallery, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. in December 2018.



**Mauve glass with thisle**  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 24 inches  
2017



**Anthurium**  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 24 inches  
2017



**Grey and Mauve glass,**  
watercolor and magic marker on Aquaboard,  
36 x 24 inches,  
2018



**Purple hydrangeas**  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 30 inches  
2017



**Chrysanthemums (for HH)**  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 24 inches  
2017



**Snowy Owls with Alliums**  
Oil on canvas  
33 x 24 inches  
2017

# Serenade: A Song for Awakening

BY ALEX BENNETT



Brooke Ellsworth

**Serenade**

Octopus Books, 2017

Brooke Ellsworth's first collection *Serenade* (Octopus Books) is a haunting refrain, scattered with coywolves, funeral processions, and "the receipt I threw away from the Emergency Room / A kiss for luck!" It is a song where bots, hard-drives, and newsfeeds serve as the unrelenting signs of our times.

As there is "mud / that can't be learned," *Serenade's* chorus is restless, fending off simple definition. A vision of a song, a song of dissent, a song of screams and resurging rage.

The poems in the first section open with grounding images. Hear the introductory lines of "Life is Beautiful:" "I was drinking purple wine / in gridlock / on the George Washington when I got yr / email / Don't come back." Layered imagery pulls readers into the poem's soil: "I keep shouting down the train / when it rains / When it rains / the tunnels flood / and we romantics / multiply." With the ground established, Ellsworth chips away at it, unearthing layers of what was kept from sight.

Poems like "Furious Lengths," "Eraserhead," and "Deepwater Horizon" are punctuated with references to industrial disasters. The speaker opens "Furious Lengths" lamenting, "Toils as much as I can on all fours, low branches. I opened the hatch and thought, 'Oh, my God.'" Three lines later, the moving force deepens: "What of the shitwork that spills over our crude mattress."

Ellsworth's collection points to a climate of catastrophes and subsequent inaction. The pitch peaks in "Deepwater Horizon," where the critique is for all: "Nobody is ever totally out . . . Thinking about our political failure to respond / to the ecological crisis, there are cushions in the air / that I faced with my opening." The weight of these lines is sobering, and as we read in "Eros," "we are what we all abhor."

From section one into two, the stakes escalate: "Like you sit down / expecting to title the movement / Annihilation." The last poem in section two, "Good News," offers an expanded meditation from someone who respects being in society, acknowledging capacities to lie, do nothing, or perhaps do something. The speaker explains, "The activism that leaks from the screen / lights my cigarette / not in a generally famous way / but adjacent to my rage / Love my talent for being awful."

Engulfed in *Serenade's* second and third movements, we see Ellsworth's poetic wingspan on full display. From short-lined, rhythmic stanzas to the extended verse of her prose poems featuring Echo and Narcissus (the two lovingly rendered as teenagers sharing smokes), Ellsworth shifts between forms with ease and subtlety, carrying the chords of objection and grievance. "I am at the writing's limits, a dislocated anger."

Ellsworth's is a song of the "emptying sounds of paradise." With each section of *Serenade*, we "came up and we stumbled out of the river, silver with cold fog." A fog that we must wade through, wait through, until discharged from the loop of old songs that lull. In its powers of awakening, Ellsworth's *Serenade* reminds us that "pleasure is a thought on a cold beach," which is exactly what we've been needing for so long.

Alex Bennett received her M.F.A. from The New School in 2013, where she won the Paul Viola Poetry Prize. Her writing has appeared in *The Sosland Journal*, *The Best American Poetry Blog*, *The New School Writing Program Blog*, *Insights Magazine*, and elsewhere. She teaches at Parsons School of Design. Follow her at [https://twitter.com/alex\\_bennett7](https://twitter.com/alex_bennett7).

**From short-lined, rhythmic stanzas to the extended verse of her prose poems . . . Ellsworth shifts between forms with ease and subtlety, carrying the chords of objection and grievance.**

# Grievances: Roberto Montes Is Dismantling the Poetic Wheel

BY SEAN M. DAMLOS-MITCHELL



// My name is Roberto Montes / I am BACK," begins the first poem of Roberto Montes' chapbook *Grievances* (The Atlas Review, 2017), which poem also lends the chapbook its title. In an interview with Natalie Eilbert for *The Atlas Review*, Montes said this poem was "...created for a very specific audience. I was invited to a reading (which, in the end, never materialized) that I knew would be predominantly composed of the kind of audience ubiquitous in the NYC lit scene (straight, white, cis men). I was in a mood . . . My problem was that it seemed to me the larger poetry and literature community had developed, completely independent of intention, a mechanism that shielded those who would use their power—their name, their influence, their connections—to take advantage of others."

This interview took place just before *Grievances* was released last March. Since then, it seems the concerns of the poem have become in many ways the concerns of the nation. Decades of abuse, harassment, and violence are steadily being unearthed, and for the first time powerful men are being forced to face consequences for their actions. I am not trying to cast Montes as some great prognosticator, nor am I trying to assert that he is a journalist-poet on the lookout for the next breaking news item. Rather, he has an eye for seeing injustice where it is, even when it's hidden inside "progressive communities" like the poetry world, and he has the wisdom and fearlessness to confront it and call it what it is. The first two lines of "Grievances" in their sly self-reference and self-aggrandizement are destabilizing; they call into question what sort of power a name has and force us to ask ourselves what sort of power it should, in a better world, be allowed to have.

Whenever power is embedded in a person's reputation, whenever influence is associated with a person's name, a structural relationship is enforced that can encourage both abuse and a continual voluntary ignorance around this abuse. The first two lines of "Grievances" work simultaneously as an admission of relative powerlessness and an attempt to destabilize these structures of power.

How can one go on living in a world where so much is wrong, where even the arts aren't immune to corruption? "Isn't it unacceptable / In the current political climate / To be in love," the poet asks in "Memory is Not." Reading *Grievances*, one is confronted with a mind which is so hyperaware of all the wrongs of the world, of all the violence waged on the modern psyche and the modern body, of all the structural inequalities and societal pressures around us, that its only response is to go forward ceaselessly, for it is fully aware that to stop even for a moment its project of destabilization and re-centering would be to allow itself to be overtaken by the violent and senseless language of our modern world.

Surrounded by advertisements and barraged with emails and social media, it is impossible to avoid written language, much of which has no interest in our humanity. How can we protect our souls from that which has none? In "No Subject," Montes takes the shape of some of the language we encounter every day in advertising or in SPAM mail and, by recontextualizing it, reveals its inherent violence. "After a few, a few more / Get to know hunger in your area / You won't believe / What the platinum membership extends," it reads, and here he's shown it for what it is.

The chapbook's epigraph is taken from a Wikipedia entry; it reads: "An ant mill is an observed phenomenon in which a group of army ants, which are blind, are separated from the main foraging party, lose the pheromone track and begin to follow one another, forming a continuously rotating circle. The ants will eventually die of exhaustion." I'm not sure there could be a more perfect metaphor for Montes' fears about the poetry world and the work of poetry.

Poets, like members of any community, run the risk of becoming entrapped by insularity. The pure calling of poetry (or as close as one mortal can get to it) can be lost, and its loss can result in the poet caught up instead in the pursuit of the signifiers of success – the name, the reputation, the influence – admiring those that have such things, following them round and round in a circle, choosing to ignore injustice when it's expedient to do so, and afraid to break from the circular status quo that will eventually exhaust and do the poet in. Only by breaking from this wheel and wandering forward, blind but free, can the poet truly do the work that is needed. And that's precisely what is being done in *Grievances*.

Sean M. Damlos-Mitchell received an M.F.A. from The New School in poetry in 2013. He has previously published poems in *Whole Beast Rag*, *Poem Tiger*, *The Mackinac*, *Curlew Quarterly*, and *Hot Street*, and he is the author of *SINCERELY SPACEMAN*, a chapbook published by *The New Megaphone*. Sean grew up in California & Arizona and currently lives in Brooklyn and teaches English and history at a private school in Manhattan.

## Baseball Bios

**J. Bradley** ([www.jbradleywrites.com](http://www.jbradleywrites.com)) is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominated writer whose work has appeared in numerous literary journals including *decomp*, *Hobart*, and *Prairie Schooner*. He is the author of the flash fiction chapbook *No More Stories About The Moon* (Lucky Bastard Press); the novel *The Adventures of Jesus Christ, Boy Detective* (Pelekinesis), and the Yelp review prose poem collection *Pick How You Will Revise A Memory* (Robocup Press). **Robert Farrell** lives and works in the Bronx, and is the author of *Meditations on the Body* (Ghostbird Press). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Posit*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Poetry South*, *Underwater New York*, and elsewhere. Originally from Houston, he's a librarian at Lehman College, CUNY. **Robert Hershon's** (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-hershon>) 12th poetry collection, *Calls from the Outside World*, was published in 2006. His other titles include *The German Lunatic* and *Into a Punchline: Poems 1986-1996*. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The World*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Nation*, among many others, and has brought him two NEA fellowships and three from New York State. **Basil King** (<http://www.basilking.net>) is a painter/poet, born in England before WWII and living in Brooklyn since 1968. He attended Black Mountain College as a teenager and completed apprenticeship as an abstract expressionist in San Francisco and New York. For the past three decades he has taken his art "from the abstract to the figure, from the figure to the abstract." His books include *Mirage: a poem in 22 sections*, *Warp spasm*, *Identity*, *77 Beasts/ Basil King's Beastyriary*, *Talisman #36/37*, and *In the Field Where Daffodils Grow*, *Short Stories*. **Martin Kleinman** (<http://www.therealnewyorkers.com>) is the author of the short fiction collection, *Home Front*. He is a storyteller and blogger whose work has appeared in the *Huffington Post* and *therealnewyorkers.com*. **Sandra Marchetti** ([https://www.pw.org/content/sandra\\_marchetti](https://www.pw.org/content/sandra_marchetti)) is the author of *Confluence*, a debut full-length collection of poetry from Sundress Publications. She is also the author of four chapbooks of poetry and lyric essays, including *Heart Radicals* (About Editions), *Sight Lines* (Speaking of Marvels Press), *A Detail in the Landscape* (Eating Dog Press), and *The Canopy* (MWC Press). **Frank Messina** (<http://www.frankmessina.com>) is the author of *Full Count: The Book of Mets Poetry*, a 2009 work that focused on baseball fanaticism. His 2002 book, *Disorderly Conduct*, focused on reactions to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. He has performed on stage with musicians such as members of Phish, the Spin Doctors, the Sun Ra Arkestra and composer David Amram. **Elinor Nauen** (<http://www.elinornauen.com>) is the editor of *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women writers on baseball* (Faber & Faber) and a member of the editorial advisory board of Southern Illinois University Press's *Writing Baseball* series. She has made baseball-related presentations at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Cooperstown, NY and Sports Literature Association's annual convention. **Mary Reilly** (<http://maryreilypoet.tumblr.com>) Mary Reilly is a poet and translator living between New York and Paris. **Elisavietta Ritchie's** (<https://elisaviettaritchie.com>) fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, photojournalism, and translations from Russian, French, Malay, and Indonesian have appeared in numerous publications including *Poetry*, *American Scholar*, *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Post*, *The National Geographic*, and *The New York Quarterly*. **Lauren Russell** (<http://caapp.pitt.edu/lauren-russell>) is the author of *What's Hanging on the Hush* (Ahsahta). A Cave Canem graduate fellow, she was the 2014-2015 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, the 2016 VIDA Fellow to the Home School, and a 2017 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellow in poetry. She is a research assistant professor and is assistant director of the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics at the University of Pittsburgh. Descent began when the poet acquired a copy of the diary of her great-great grandfather, a Confederate veteran who fathered twenty children by three of his former slaves, black women who have been silenced by history. The Negro League pitcher Jesse Hubbard was one of those children.

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## The Courage to Write: Brooke Ellsworth and Roberto Montes in Conversation



BY ALEX BENNETT

*In the midst of winter, I had the opportunity to speak with Brooke Ellsworth and Roberto Montes on their most recent works. We caught up on their relationship as friends and poets in the world, and how they see their writing functioning at present.*

**Boog City: Let’s start from the idea of acknowledging one another in the writing process. Brooke, you include Roberto specifically in Serenade’s acknowledgements. How would you describe Roberto’s role in your writing and editing processes for this book?**

Brooke Ellsworth: The role he played would be best characterized as supportive, although that’s not very descriptive. A lot of times when I’d send him drafts, he knows me well enough to not offer too many line edits because I just get defensive and ridiculous, which is always fun. But the moments that he does offer line edits are usually pretty striking for me because I don’t seek out many readers outside of myself. I know the kind of larger logic that he likes to apply to his poetry and I think I rely on that. It feels very self-reflexive for me to send him work.

**BC: And Roberto, same question: how would you describe Brooke’s role in the creation of Grievances?**

Roberto Montes: Just generally with me and Brooke there’s a supportive structure that sounds really gooey, but I think it’s true that we’re on the same page about how spiritually horrible just existing is. She’s someone who I was literally shouting at in all caps earlier today about how everything’s awful. With poetry, I think we have similar bents towards being not coy but protective of what we’re doing. I don’t send out my work a lot, just to Brooke and Justin [Sherwood]. Brooke has intelligence to make incisions in places that really help the work and trim the fat, which I rely on her for. In relation to Grievances, a lot of the work involves things that we experienced together or we talked about after they happened. I think nowadays especially with M.F.A. programs and workshops it’s easier to find people who will line edit your work than it is to actually address what it is that anyone’s doing or why anyone’s doing it or how one should exist. Brooke has always been a strong support system just by herself for me, helping me feel like I’m not going crazy and something is actually wrong or evil and I’m not just over thinking.



BE: That’s really insightful. It never really occurred to me until this moment that something that’s very similar between Roberto’s work and my work is there’s a level of not confessionalism explicitly but there’s always the personal at stake, if not the primary stake. I’m remembering moments looking at drafts from Grievances and likewise in Serenade where the poem tips into autobiography in a way that struggles against larger global contexts in good and positive ways. That’s a tension that crosses both of our books.

**BC: How did writing these most recent books differ from previous works?**

RM: It’s very different. It’s a lot scarier. I remember one time when I was applying to M.F.A. programs I asked Bill Knott to send me a recommendation, and he sent one to me. There was an extra one, and I ended up reading it cause I don’t have any ethics and it was literally three lines. The third line was like (I don’t remember it exactly), “that he is still writing is a testament to his courage.” That was the first time that made me realize (Knott was joking and whatever) that people stop writing after undergrad, which I hadn’t considered. After the MFA writing is definitely harder, and now after the election it’s been way more difficult. It made me think that the way I was writing before and the purpose that I was working towards – that I was mistaken somewhat. So I’ve been retooling all of that on the backend.

**BC: While you were writing Grievances was there a lot of retooling?**

RM: After I published I Don’t Know Do You, I was doing what I suspected a poet should do here in Manhattan, interacting with people and trying to be in the scene and all that, and I just felt like shit all the time. So a lot of Grievances is about 2014 through 2015. It was written in 2016 and eventually published in March 2017. One of the horrible things is that there are some references to violence but because violence keeps happening, I think people read it as happening now. It was all pre-election. I actually had another full-length manuscript. After the election I realized, “I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing, and this isn’t going to help anything.”

BE: There’s actually a moment in my process too where I realized alongside my editor that there are poems that are pretty explicit in their temporality. The eponymous poem “Serenade” specifically references the year 2014, and I remember remarking that I never really considered this book to be pre-election poetry. But now that I’m reading it there’s a certain level of consideration in it that I probably wouldn’t have had the patience for today.

**BC: I don’t want to get “gooey,” to use your word Roberto, but I do want to ask you both what you admire in the poet you’re sitting next to: who they are as a writer or if there’s something in their most recent publication that you’d like to talk about.**

BE: As an omitted poem from Grievances, “Elegy” in Hyperallergic is an amazing poem and gave me goosebumps, which is very Siskel and Ebert of me to say. I think it is an incredibly important poem. The poem aptly placed at the end of Grievances, “Acknowledgements,” is an important piece for any reader of Roberto’s work to settle into the ethical landscape that he requires of his audience. I would have to agree with Bill Knott that Roberto strikes me as incredibly courageous. There are moments where I read a poem and I’m convinced they’re written to be read in a room with a certain group of people in a way that asks them to consider what brings them there. He asks his readers in life to consider, why are you standing here? What’s at stake for you, and what side are you fighting on?

RM: What side ... that’s too nice to me.

BE: It’s true.

RM: There’s a poem I’ve already told Brooke and everyone that I love obscenely: “Fucking Island.” The last line reads “my ocean is moral.” There’s a Cassandra-aspect that I really like in Brooke’s work. Her poems have an irreverent quality that manages to contextualize Armageddon as it’s happening but without without diminishing it.

BE: Can I blurb that?

[both laugh]

RM: What I’ve always appreciated about Brooke’s work is it’s courageous in a tactile way. There are leaps of logic that I would never think of that defy a thesis statement. Brooke’s poems are self-cannibalizing. They’re constantly recontextualizing what the poem is aiming for and inverting it on itself in a way that I find exciting but also courageous because it’s not in the climate of how poetry is meant to be sold and institutionalized in this world of awards.

**BC: The next question is a fill-in-this-sentence question: “If poets had [blank] they would [blank].”**

RM: I’m pausing because I’m trying to think of a clever answer.

BE: My first thought is, if poets had money they would suck.

RM: I was trying to do something with money, too. I feel like there’s something there.

BE: I’m gonna go with that. That’s my shrug-off response.

RM: If poets had what we wanted it wouldn’t be enough. That has nothing to do with poetry; that’s just whatever. But poets don’t want anything really. They want to win.

BE: What do poets want? They want to win.

**AB: And one final question: do you have dreams of future collaborations together?**

BE: Oh man. Collaborative projects. I don’t even know what that would look like. We have many unfinished Google Docs of projects.

RM: It’s true.

BE: But they’re in planning stages of many things writing and otherwise. Maybe when we die they’ll publish our Google Docs.

RM: It’s really just shit talking, but for a good cause.

BE: That’s a good tagline.

‘[T]here’s a level of not confessionalism explicitly but there’s always the personal at stake, if not the primary stake.’