

3 Images from *Verge* (Artists Book, edition of 50, collaboration with John David O'Brien):

εργαστηριον

Verge

Replacement is the essential gesture. As in a dream: the figure you seek is in every figure, more or less. The steadiness of desire as desire itself not desire for. The focus is on what it is that's moving into or out of vision not the not the frame of the gaze, desire, which stays there. The world is a pour...

Was broken

Horizon
Meaning



Remains

"Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo. Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui ratione voluptatem sequi nesciunt. Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit, sed quia non numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaerat voluptatem. Ut enim ad minima veniam, quis nostrum exercitationem ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea commodi consequatur?"

A Collaboration
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Images - John David O'Brien

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(6 poems from *EtC*)

A Door Ajar

(published in *WebConjunctions*)

Is “barn” or barred
To hear in here is ha

Is

An open and shut case
For care What

Comes when everything
Is gone long

Says gate is too
Late Wait

Just shut it Then
Shut it again

Hard

In this empty stable shit
Is the only sign we were

Ever “born” or bored

What I heard was
That’s not what I herd

Laughing Cow vs Elsie

(published in *WebConjunctions*)

Big bovine heads float over the destroyed city
Laser beams of mean girl miffed fury zing
Down from their eyes the rubble smokes
No one can escape this I mean everyone
Is “collateral damage” but runs around
Anyway screaming in some squeaky foreign
Language waving their tiny well-cared-for
Hands the populace flees above the sub-
Title *Populace fleeing* (screams) I apply
My eye makeup in the same rear view
Mirror I’m using to watch this but a lot
Of the commotion is from the monsters’
POV “incomprehensible gibberish” we know
Means *save us* and the highly enhanced sound
Of those massive digestive systems working
Invisibly is *save us* “completely terrifying”

Elsie the Real Elsie

(published in *WebConjunctions*)

Died long ago was
Not Elsie at all
But “Good Enough
Lobelia” her live
Representative
(Because she was
Flirtatious she
Became “Elsie”
Swinging her hips
Fluttering long eye-
Lashes) died in
An accident her
Truck rear-ended
She’s buried so
There is no real
Elsie unless you
Want to count
The little girl
Who said she was
Car-sick whose
Parents didn’t
Care or else
Didn’t want to
Stop there are
Always more cows
Who can be “Elsie”
At least for as long
As we need to
Pretend she still
Exists a little girl
Grows up marries
Chairs a Department
Of Anguish 3 years
In the Diary Industry
Never forgets she
As the dizzy
Disinterested
Countryside
Continued
To spin past
Ended up puking
Into her own
Gloved hands

Elsie in a Corridor

(published in *Lana Turner*)

Faked from a rusted-out transport container set at the edge of a superfund site
A “ghost” in cobwebby veils of scare quotes she lounges applying bright layers
Of lipstick to the year of her mouth not so distant she’s been at it awhile
Her “project” everything’s red by now the morning the news feed the pickup the lone
Star state this music playing in the background so raveled in static
And ruptured by campaign promises the tune is a also a sort of after-
Effect no one who sees this should survive it she murmurs which is to say
Everyone who sees this ought to go embarrassed more or less ashamed silenced
For a time or else given over completely to “poetic” / “difficult” *soi disant* speech
I mean a lush smeary eloquence don’t kid yourself I mean all of this taking place
Now except for the heartfelt apologies scheduled for after after dark
The point here is the way the light is the same on either side of the long space
In which she practices mixing real confusion with willful ignorance as we
Listen to the sound of someone saying over and over again “You don’t
Have to do this” the point is it costs so much to arrange the point is the arrangement
The point is it’s just so you this ooze of red glossy stuff scent of chemical grease
“I love it” a particular intonation eye shadow next apply now for this death Take me
To Texas the Texans drawl sounding both imperious and lost
These channeled voices echo off the tagged steel ass ass ass Take me to
America ‘cause everything there is expensive sieve sieve and violent if you can stand
To stand at this end of the container and look at her she looks exactly
The way she sees herself that is not dying but broken by grief just enough to be pretty
Useful turning her back on that tunnel of colorless light everybody goes on and on about

L'Hameau de la Reine

("these are but the trappings / and the suits of cow")

(published in *Lana Turner*)

In a dream I saw the baby
Calves saw the constant stream
Of water on them hosed off
Hosed down saw the water
Turned on by the attendants
All in bright silk milk-maid
Dresses cleaning them keeping
Them constantly clean as
Their hides were stripped
Away as they were flayed
Alive and cut and they
Spoke only between cries
Of pain of their brand
How to use their youth and
Beauty to sell their books
Where they were cut into
Pieces as they spoke of boob
Jobs and Botox and hair-dye
Spray tans and waxing while
The blood was washed
Down the drains by those
Who waited on them who
May not have understood
What was said interrupted
As it was by screams and
Moaning nose jobs they
Said and what the perfect
Labia should look like
Under the sound of water
Hitting flesh and water
Splashing on concrete and
Water caught amid shreds
Of meat gurgling out at
The drain they insisted
They spoke of beauty
We are talking about
The good and the beautiful
They said above the sound
Of the hoses their own
Screams as we said then "so
'Tragic'" "heart-rending"

Lactorium

(published in *Jubilat*)

And your heartlessness and your longing for lies are like milk to me
And your self-harm and your scapegoating are like milk to me like your rage and
Your unwillingness to pay taxes your desire to buy cheap things these are like milk
And your dirty wars and your drones are like milk to me
Because the words “collateral damage” and “byproduct” are so white
And your anxiety and your depression and your plastic and your failure to recognize
The guilty above a certain level of influence are all so thick and creamy
And your tolerance for violent injustice I drink this I drink this thickness
And your active shooter is like white milk to me and your racism is a kind of milk
And the killing of children is like milk to me the body left on the street is like milk
And your sexism is like milk to me your rape culture
And your protection of the abuser who is white and male is exactly like milk to me
And your adoration of the richest and most powerful is like milk to me
And the years when you fail to work on a cure for the disease because you despise
The afflicted those long decades are like milk to me
And your guns are like milk to me your precious guns more precious than anything
And the blood of the dead is like mother’s milk to me this spilling
Whiteness the names of the dead and the grieving I go on swallowing
And your protection of corporate interests and banks is like milk to me
And your privatized racist prison system is like milk to me
And your inadequate healthcare system is like milk to me
And your underfunded educational system failing that’s just like milk to me
And the pale word “addicted” erases everything
And justice has a white bandage poured over her gouged-out eyes
And the word “undocumented” is full of vitamin D
And your air force and navy are like milk all the whiteness you pour into
“Trouble spots” for “stability” spilling out spreading out blanking out
And the tears of those sleeping on cardboard and rags under the overpass salty milk
Because the word “homeless” is like the word *milk* I drink it and drink it it’s like
Drinking sunlight it builds strong bones and teeth and teeth
And the phrase “can’t hold down a job” is like milk to me
And your bullying your shaming every way you hurt the spirit is like milk to me
And your worship of the fascist your support of the dictator is cold is like cold milk
And student debt and catastrophically failing infrastructure
And your love of the lies of the would-be legislator these are just like milk to me
And your prescriptions for painkillers the refills the new prescriptions and medications to help you
shit and to help you stop shitting and the anti-anxiety pills and the anti-depressants that stopped
working and the new anti-depressants that might be working or might not be working and every
pharmaceutical company lobbying doctors to prescribe more painkillers white white
Blanked out by your logging and mining and fracking and drilling and every place ruined
Forever is now that it’s ruined forever and uninhabitable just like milk to me
And the end of languages cultures species knowledges ways of living is like milk
And your contempt and self-pity and fear are also like milk to me

And all the lives deformed or erased by your lies and imaginary needs are like milk to me I drink
and I'm drinking I choke and go on it's endless this white on white on white on white flag
unfurling to drip from the edge of nothing into nothing stinking of methane

(3 poems from *Enduring Freedom, A Little Book of Mechanical Brides* [Otis / Seismicity 2012])

With

the kiss of white on white
pages the book shuts a bride-
to-be dreams her dress a deep
pile of ashes the wind lifts
unfurling the long pale flag of
shreds to lace and then
this red incoherence the few
stuttered vanishing words
of the service dust to dust
the shadow of meanings cast
over these open snowfields
after the weeping faithless
reader through whose burning
eyes what lies ahead passes

Bride of the New Dawn

She appears to be recognized as herself and not herself, new because endlessly recycled, not what she was but not what she will be—see? Not married and not not married, the processional's a ritual meant to extend a magical present, until the head of this pin is the size of a rented hall and all of us angels, stepping out on the long blank train of her on-going gown. To go in single and come married out is easy enough, what matters is to enlarge the interstitial, to live as long as we can in the not exactly no longer and the not quite not yet also. Where organ music drowns the ill-digested vows and the empty stomach growls. Hesitant. The BND goes down slow as a pill we can't really swallow, stuck chunk in a stalled gulp between yesterday and tomorrow, at one and the same time belated and punctual. It's the system itself we've come to see (open the plug of that rubber-edged rose window), not me and not you, but we: the marriage of church and state made visible, audible, available. Here *Dearly Beloved's* an embarrassing gurgle, and the costly gown so much densely crumpled bathroom tissue backing up one overworked way in and out of the usual world. From the mouth to points South, scrawl that in soap on the vehicle? From "will you?" to "why don't you ever?" on the march to "irreconcilable." Hey—whoa! Away with you hand-wringing nay sayers: be here now now now now.... Cheeks are flushed and eyes overflow as we grasp her new handle, here to hear the I do as a couple of hard blows: that flesh-blunted sound of bone on bone dislodging as cough a caught morsel not thoroughly chewed. Back out, back up, quagmire, circle: proposed solutions involve the usual budget expansions, extended tours of duty, and additional troops.

White Bride

Blank page. It's this dress—I can't breathe in it. Deep flounces of colorless fabric as if trying to reset a clock, to look back and not look back. Salt at the wrist—then all the way up the arm to the shoulder, now the heart. Bandaged: appearing where she disappears. Sample sales and floor models, dry cleaners selling “unclaimed gowns,” thrift shops. It's a costume or an heirloom or it's both. It's a copy. It's unique. It will only be worn once, and then it was only worn once: on the most important day of.... “I pretended I was in a play,” she confesses, speaking of her wedding, “I'd done theater—I knew how to get through it.” Colorless scentless bleed of time and this feeling of connection to events we didn't experience. “I wish I'd put it on before and learned how to walk around in it...” Unmarked or almost: maybe a smudge of dust or a faint smear of what looks like rust at the edge of—but you'd have to know where to look. Charity stores and bargain bins: because it costs too much to clean it. “Regrets?...I wish I'd known how hard my dress would be to move in: I would've practiced.”

(2 poems from *Dark Archive* [University of California Press 2012])

White Box

(notes)

Object: tiny white box the size of a sugar cube,
White outside like a sugar cube white like *like*
Easily mistaken for a sugar cube, placed in a bowl full of white
Sugar cubes after being first touched with glue and then rolled in white
Sugar (Domino brand) and allowed to dry thoroughly. Hole
Barely larger than a pin prick on one surface

Inside:

- A) your own eye reflected shadow upside down
- B) smear of cloud [all I love]
- C) three words

Wandered lonely as

White box to be dissolved

Behind the bars

A song or show not mine snowing

Our representative

Having broken the thermometer

Holds out a ball of mercury in one slightly shaking hand

Disintegrates sheared off

By wind to reveal the thread-like textures

*

It's the worked surface that has remained—despite the obvious intention and effort—both illegible and 'white' or blank insofar as we understand that space to be empty. Suggestive of sky, but otherwise unfinished: commentary on attention. What seems not to exist because we aren't willing to attend to or allow for its actual situation? The journalist sticks the microphone up to the face of the grief-struck friend who speaks directly to the vanished as if the dead became the TV audience: "Our thoughts are with you..."

*

The little white boxes referred to as doves as clouds as "little white boxes" rarely,
If ever, discussed in the same breath with sugar cubes

Sweet, aren't they?

Having experimented with the representation

Tilted plane picture plane window candle cloud mirror shade

Under the pale grit of the surface faint lines

Fallen pine needles under fallen snow under more recently

More or less clear caught instances

Slant reference or rather comparison loves doves

Stanzas little white

Boxes of ash poem columbarium

Restless flutter from place to place looking for what

Glittery plane

Passing reference suggestions

Boxes of moonlight as if light were lent existence

“Open the box the words inside the box open the box” (Carol Snow): the sense of the thing *through* the words for not ‘in’ so there is no—despite the opening—way to release. Already these cubes are a little more worn, a little less white. Heaped into that cage for crickets, a sort of icebox. What if you could arrange to meet someone who had died (what gate is this, colorless). Paler figure and lighter ground: shapes so abstracted the subject is the (shifting) relationship itself

Not, as tongued out, covered with sugar but broken glass. Crushed to a fine dust. Ground

This sky so long nothing

She is almost as real to me as she was *she neither feels nor sees*

Immense circular smear livid powdery

*

Then drink the ink that is your cage, singing insect, representative. *Is that true* turns into *is that possible*. Suddenly I was alone with some things: what I was swallowing the material; gradually what I was saying what I was saying. Finally let them dissolve: in each a letter left in a box of dust to be lost among similar compartments. Communicating through a torn throat dark thick blood choking breath. White box. “At last I’m home and have time...,” I wrote on the postcard she wouldn’t...the words won’t reach her.

*

The right hand like some kind of cloud floats above the rest of the prone figure

He's lying on the couch again rewinding that movie

A puffy glove of cumulonimbus wavers at the end of a sinuous ribbon of arm straying away
The head is somewhat swollen the eyes, worried, open checking the set
Rolling in the palm of the other hand a silver ball, liquid, heavy

To be in the megaplex of popcorn-scented tranquility watching things blow up in safety
"What am I doing here, dressed in these clothes, writing 'poetry'?" one character poses
Like I've never been to the Lake District

Murky water rises under this vacant or pensive mood and he lies
Still as if nothing were happening not asleep just "concentrating"

One hand dominates slowly closing
From each outstretched finger of the other suspended
Drop-shaped drops distorted reflections of light from the screen

One huge white fist turning in the gulf

Golden Hummer out of which two white guys descend in yellow slickers at the storm's start,
leaping up into the 110 mph wind to see how far it will blow them, laughing; "in such jocund
company"

Cuts back to the looped track of the wide grind
Eyewall making landfall

(2 poems from *Subject* [University of California Press 2005])

Wake

Widening line of light
What isn't inked
 ("the area of its competence

A visit to the morgue at night?
(Averse?)

 Traversed
By the frame
A hand (reaching in? withdrawing
 (From outside

To lift (this sheet)

Sheer homesickness--the text

+

Awoke a serial homesickness (the text)
for a place you lived in--off and on--for years
(yes) but never liked. *Why wait?* Sickness:
a visit to the morgue at night. Home:
You never lived there, never left. Lift (now):
And part the white canvas they draped

And waking white the scattered where
they dropped

Or wither--dreamed as grasped--reversed:
"I sang in my chains" ("like"); the corpse
Laughed until the top of "my" head also
Came off and What can o' mystery

I or in among the roots a sickness
suckled or mouthed a gap confess

And woke in the secret blacked out
obscene of what you'd never, ever, ever

And woke ("sheer nonsense") layers of plastic
Or *What is it between us?*

The doors flung open the drawers pulled out
a hectic fever burning in what withered

Tie me tie me please he was heard to murmur
weakly to the past

I did not think that I would sing to you
he seemed to say

Or something like that

+

Wake: outside the frame beyond his 'fit'
Wake: frothed a blankness in the passage of what
Wake: we waited (and silence)
Wake: tilted sudden and sick in the chop
We kept our heads
We held our posts

Our *secrets*, one frothed,
hissed

Wake: j'accuse eau

Wait: she wet
Her fingers and (reaching in) snuffed
Wake: the flames (reaching over
their heads

Wait:

Wake: outside the designated unable to recall
What she had smoked

(What weed we'd) (spooked, spoke
Woke: uneasily beached in the bleached out

+

O, widening (perfidious
To lift ("The beloved features

+

Abruptly woken ("and") where we'd left her out of reach
Of the too much Watteau flowers out of focus in the arms

Tied she turned to watch her watch while waiting drenched
On the edge of a grave preoccupied by violent argument
What nostalgia I think this is praying (yes) *precisely*
Your hands at my throat

+

Something of the original some harmony of the original white

+

Of or like?

And woken again later What? Can a mystery
girl get no sleep (a “smoldering glance”)

Kept trying to find out what she knew what
she could remember and What

Can a mystery girl get no mystery
back to recall herself to herself as she

Once

(No shut

I chained in “my” song

(distrust

Circles

(Breath cleared)

Window

fluttered

Edges fragile petal

Dust your touch

Would tear through

caught in

Oh I see

(Through) you you

Said

(O the snow the O

Made for the gone

Eye holes)

Oh they were so still, stilled, style

Oh they were

such echoes

Spill

Beautiful each

In its box labeled

Singing in the

We'd disappeared into

Laced our stiff

Bodies to each sorry

Try again window

Swinging perch in each

O

Singing their fool

Heads off thank you

Paper thin stutter there

Shrill each seeming

To sing how

Delightful

(1 poem from *The Surface* [University of Illinois 1991])

Sand Box. 1952.

—*Homage to Joseph Cornell*—

1.

This is as much of the ocean as we ever wanted.
Framed.
White foam sliding away from a single starfish,
Some ball bearings, and a few broken springs.
We know how to let go gracefully,
The wooden frame a little worn at the edges,
The pane of glass painted with blue lines. . .
These are formalities we were brought up to appreciate.
Doesn't the window own the view?
That's how I love you.
Blindly.

2.

This is a package we don't have to open,
Summer shipped after us, into fall.
"We found some things you forgot here."
(The blue string knotted by spiders or sailors.)
"I bet you thought you lost these."
The yellow sand spilled like a scarf
Under a dry starfish and two ball bearings,
Arranged by an astronomy of broken springs.
And that translucent smear of amber along one edge,
A single silk stocking
(Why bother to send it at all?)
Sheer as your shadow, smelling of must and salt.

3.

This is a music box. The ocean breaks
Here in other ways than we know,
Casting its clockworks onto a dry shore
Of cracked white paint and sand.
It has no sound of its own. Like a shell.
You remember the life you left there.

Under glass nothing is accidental;
In mirrors and water it happens twice.