

elisa gabbert

Elisa Gabbert holds degrees from Rice University and Emerson College. She is reader for *Ploughshares* and an editor of *Absent*. Recent work appears or will appear in journals including *Pleiades*, *LIT*, *No Tell Motel*, *Kulture Vulture*, *RealPoetik*, *H_NGM_N*, and *Redivider*, as well as the forthcoming anthologies *The Bedside Guide to No Tell Motel – Second Floor* and *Outside Voices 2008 Anthology of Younger Poets*. Her collaborations with Kathleen Rooney can be found in *MiPOesias*, *Foursquare*, *Past Simple*, *Dusie* and other journals. A chapbook, *Thanks for Sending the Engine*, is out from Kitchen Press.

PLAYGROUND OVER FIELDS IN SIENA

I had this vision you'd climb off the see-saw
too fast, so I'd crash into the dust,
my spine telescoped, my coccyx smashed.

Now I can't think of Siena—corrugated
earth, oversized sky, all that obscene
panorama—without feeling a twinge

in my joints. We took a few snaps,
abstracted ourselves from the playground.
Went to an *osteria*, ordered wine

because it was cheaper than water, but
it was worse than water. I don't know why
we kept drinking it, until everything

tasted dirty. Or why, in so many
of the pictures, your eyes are rolling up,
like you saw something falling.

CAMERA OBSCURA

Candelabra on the wainscoting, hairline fracture
on the ceiling. An ancient stereopticon

leaves dust rings around my eyes. This tiny room
cannot contain my desire. My desire

flaps and beats against the walls
like an idiot bird trapped inside the flue.

The pinprick of light could be coming
from any direction. Somewhere else

the sky withholds its endlessness. On the tip
of my desire's tongue—flame blue.

Desire explodes and the last thing it feels
is every point touching something.

EGO OF THE DISTANCE

Mysteried distance, resistant distance: it glimmers
out of visibility. The distance that runs seemingly

along all my images like a fold. Like a hairline
crack down my mirror—I am always

looking at the distance, at it splitting me.
I am warped along that fault.

Sometimes the distance looks at me
and for a moment I feel requited

but then the distance rushes away
at impossible speeds like the other side

of the balloon, the other end of the expanding
universe. It doesn't remember

when we were touching, eye to eye.
Or just doesn't fetishize that time like I do.

I call out after the distance, *Is it me?* The distance
responds with Doppler effect, *It's meeeeeee*

MY ENEMY

has fallen in love with me. A finger gun cocked

in the small of my back, his other hand
around my neck, he whispers, *Quoi, quoi, quoi*. . . .

His fingers smell like bowstrings, breath
like milk. Is this from my dream? I fantasize

to my rape fantasy, but I can't get closer
than this. My skin feels pinched. I drive

down the street and there is something
under every leaf; each flutters independently

as if to its own breeze. Again that silky breath,
its omnipresenceness. . . . The party isn't over

but he's made a French exit—he wants me
wanting more, and I want it too—these quantities,

our needless desires. We require promises
to lay out like pinafores, white eyelet dresses.

To snap like tiny needles, along gossamer
stress fractures. Fault lines. Sweetness.

We succumb to this. A random symphony
of car alarms accompanies his kiss.

ESCHATOLOGY

a woman and a man
the woman smaller than the slightly
less beautiful than the man

they sneak an antic kiss in the hallway
an interlude an intermission
to the miserable party

and like characters in the movie
of the party they are not could not be
aware of me

I am driving driftly
through a parallel dimension
when they suck into each other when they

suck their epic kiss along the highway
it almost sucks me off the road
it rushes up in my choke

these people don't know me and
none of them is me to the point
that I do not exist in spite of this

the universe continues it persists
in grandiose ignorance
of my utter nonexistence

it bulldozes cold down the path
toward its own more impressive
untimely more unnoticed death

DI SASTERPOEM (FOR KR)

I want to drive under the overpass all night,
turn the stripe of light, the light's blink
to a strobe effect—turn the light epileptic—

the interior goes orange, night-orange, the orange
of black—the edges go sharp/slack, sharp/
slack. I think *So this is how it feels to be high—*

I always think that when I'm high . . .
& I play & replay the film clip of K
when she stood up to go—when the towering

wave of her drunkenness hit, flattened her
there—when she fell like a building
down into itself, its own empty air—

freeze frame & rewind—those heart-breaking
legs, collapsible spires—it never gets old.
She's with me now, half-asleep in the back

& ice-cold & now the moths are coming,
the moths of spring—moving toward the car
as it moves toward them—we will pass

thru each other's fields. Don't be afraid, K—
though afterward we may not remember
who we were before the crash.

SNOW MAN REMIX

After Wallace Stevens

You must think of the thing
to regard it, & this ruins the effect:
thing absorbs your gaze; the heat

transfer from your brain waves excites,
starts to melt it like a wicked queen.
See the ice trees shimmer & drip

as they shrink. See the forest level sink
as its new form is shunted invisibly up
to the sun. There it goes! Photosynthesis

in reverse: it makes a creepy sound
like a suction cup pulled off a mirror.
Try to do this w/o watching yourself do it

in the background. Impossible—
the mirror always knows. Think *nothing*
& you're still not thinking nothing.

BLOGPOEM W/ AUTORAPE

There are no new words, words I haven't mispronounced or –used before, so I'm starting over— with that A-hole who gave me an Atomic Harvest tape and his debate club shirt that said *Making the world safe for hypocrisy*; he saw all those kids get killed in the bonfire, left a creepy note on my car that I balled up and tossed in the dumpster. I was eating an eggplant parmesan sub, I lost that too. This is my fake abecedarian, blasphemous chiclet diary entry read by no one. Feels like getting caught telling jokes to myself that I've already heard. They pretty much tell themselves, I pretty much just sync them up with my laugh track. I'd like masturbation better if it could be a surprise attack.

118 REMIX

After John Berryman

He asked himself, Am I having fun? How would I
know? The dancing was tiring,
young alien bodies slamming & prodding
from every side. He felt if he were still himself
he'd find some dim alcove for two

and perform out of self-love & -loathing
a glam murder-suicide, redundant
in action but not intention. This paisley loveseat's
the colors of blood & semen, and anyway
who would see him?—Aha,

one hot girl hovered apart from the crowd
on the floor of the club, a superpowered girl,
caped in stealth, who turned everything she looked at
transparent, impossible to touch.
His hand went right thru himself.

BLOGPOEM THE LITANY

It wasn't really flying. More like a breeze
stiff enough to blow me with my toes
just dragging thru the tulip fields. The tulips
need cross-kingdom interaction. The bees
need a day off. Amsterdam needs a Richter's
scale of quaintness. The museums need
hyperlinks. The clouds need a comment box.
The insects need a revolution, the bridges
need mnemonics, the canals need lucid
dreams. They need to read the memoirs
of a river. Staff pick: the Ganges'. The kids
need more advanced diversions, they need
a hovering trike: Hummingbird™. Society
needs more tulips, yet more—the fields
are wide. The people need more opiates, or less.
One way or the other they are not satisfied.

WALKS ARE USELESS I I

After Chris Tonelli

There's nothing to be sad about.
My sadness grows restless, nostalgic

for a better bore, the tragic bore
of yesteryear. The stink of the city

grows worse, but at the same rate
that we get used to it. 'Tis a bore

and nothing more. Even the clouds
are bored, arrange themselves into more

and more exotic vegetables.
Where is the war? I can't see it.

I feel incredible. What I mean is,
I feel like no one would believe me.

I WAS SO DRUNK LAST NIGHT

I stood on the edge of the balcony to survey my kingdom. Dusk-filtered, the tulips all seemed to be made of gold. I waved to them with cashmere socks on my hands, an improv against the cold. I was so drunk I woke up in the cedar chest. I couldn't stop smelling it: wine deep, the memories of the forest. My forest. I have no idea where I left my bike. I was so drunk I became obsessed with the image of a miniature Doberman pinscher seen through the latticework. And then a bike lying out by the pond, its pedals still gently spinning. Pedaled by the wind. By the drunken night. It was not my bike. Was it my dog? I put air quotes around everything I said. Everything I said was lyrical, Cyrillic nonsense. I tried to air-write my alphabet. I was so drunk last night I took a picture of your phone with my phone. My phone was in love with your phone, called yours and hung up. Felt awful. I fell asleep and wasn't aware I was itching all

over like crazy. Forgot where I left my body. I was so drunk I was nothing but body. I was sure I was surrounded by friends. I was so drunk. They had me surrounded. They told me to drop the Maglite. I realized my friends are bees and can only love me by stinging me. Their attack was a kind of ecstasy. They attacked me to death to sleep.

SCREENSHOT FOR ALLEN

Here's you. Here's your street. Now zoom out—way out.
That speck on the right-hand side by the scrollbar is me.
Hanging on the coast. Hiking around, in the cold-day air,
cerulean wind whipping at our faces with our own hair.
Over the dunes, always more dunes. You would have said,
Why does it have to be so sandy? Since you weren't there,
I said it instead. I wonder what you were doing then.
Probably writing out equations on unlined paper
in your fast loopy hand: something I couldn't comment on
except at this superficial level. How stupid of me
to find your pencil marks sexy. To prefer them
to the world: the huge freezing ocean: it does nothing
for me. This gull wing jutting up out of the sand.
Is there a bird down there, objecting? Politely?
Excuse me, world. I wasn't ready to be buried.