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WHEN SUBJECTIVITY FINDS ANOTHER SUBJECT

Subjectivity in Quotational Writing Practices

> *It is only when one subordinates the original intuition to the subjective distillations and limitations of one's own personality that one need be finally confronted with a kind of mirror image of one's egoistical conflicts as an end product.*
>
> —Adrian Piper

> *I don't even talk like this.*
>
> —Ben Fama

Radical appropriation in contemporary poetry has been both a significant and polarizing discourse for the past two decades. Even though there has been a lot of resistance to *quotational writing practices* (to borrow scholar Patrick Greaney's term), there has also been a lot of traction from poets, readers and scholars across a broad spectrum. I don't want to rehash all of its contributions and pitfalls here—lots of ink has been spilled elsewhere. In summary though, from an oppositional perspective the use of radical appropriation has been aligned with presenting a position where only the poet of privilege has the ability abandon identity; for these poets and scholars, a poem constructed of appropriated sources reeks of an apolitical strategy, an insensitivity towards others, or even worse. From another perspective, radical appropriation is used to consciously implicate a self that has been shaped by corporate mediation—a sense of self that has been dreamed up in the boardrooms of advertisers, software developers, and political policy makers. Often with quotational writing practices, the poet aims to contradict or highlight this "crafted" subjectivity while retaining or abandoning other elements of identity. Further, to belabor the obvious, poets and artist who repurpose popular culture are often constructing a critique of popular culture and their *relationship* to it. Poets and artist who quote heavily from more historical sources are often constructing a critical relationship to that history.

This use of repurposed source materials or identities isn't meant to replace a more direct investment in identity but, rather, to complicate any of our positions by addressing how our subjectivities are shaped, compromised, or borrowed. For instance, if I borrow some online language from a Citibank customer, I don't believe that I have profited from that stranger or I have been insensitive in my borrowing. When Citibank borrows that language, it is designed for profit; it is designed to mediate our desires and shape how we should feel about ourselves and our banking: consider those happy couples lounging about paying their bills online with an iPad every time you touch an ATM screen.

Even though poets across the globe have been using appropriation strategies for decades (often to reflect a culture over-saturated with production), the wide use of it today, as a direct response to a more constructed or mediated self, has generated a significantly new conversation in many poetry circles. The "poetic" appropriation of source material has become a common feature in the poet's toolbox, from post-conceptual poetry to lyric poetry. The ubiquity of this strategy replaces the radicality of the method. But radicality in poetry cannot subsist entirely on radically inventive forms. What I'm interested in here is how radical appropriation can act, consciously, as a mechanism for exposing how the self is constructed through the lens of consumer culture and social media.

For the purposes of this essay, I want to categorize contemporary poets who work with quotational writing strategies into three overlapping categories: 1) *the poet as curator,* organizing found material and fore-fronting the authorship through the selection and composition of these materials; 2) *the poet as proxy,* complicating the poet's own self in relation other "found" selves or identities; 3) *the poet as zeitgeist,* culling together a large sample of personal articulations (confessions, complaints, rants, reviews) to create a collective subjectivity.

1. Poet as curator. A ton has already been written about the poet as curator of found sources, but I want to pause for a moment on the author him or her self as the subjective selector and composer of borrowed material. Today, given the seemingly infinite stream of language that we encounter daily, the choosing of appropriated materials itself puts the author, as composer, at the center of the work. The significance of Barthes' "death of the author" has been usefully absorbed theoretically but as an assertion in contemporary poetics directly, it has lost much of its impact. Alternatively, I'm interested in drawing attention *to* authorship in quotational works via the choices made in organizing, assembling, and intruding upon found texts. At first, this shift may seem obvious as a sort of neo-expressionism—the found source material works its way through the unique filter of the poet and the result is a personal expression—but what seems less obvious to me is how and why poets construct a subjective "voice" within the confines of the found material. These architectures, these choices of strategy (or even *prosody*) reach beyond the content of source material and express the individual poet's *relationship* to the material and to the world. This subjective reflection of the poet is often minimized or discounted by those who critique these strategies opaque, cynical or apolitical. But, I would argue that embedded in these strategies is a subjective worldview—a set of socially engaged and aesthetic

choices inform these formal decisions, e.g. who has control over this "free" information, how can the poet re-gather a sense of self that has been so thoroughly targeted and manipulated, and how might these contradictions be made to glitter in a new context? The poet brings to bear everything he or she has learned about making poetry into these curatorial decisions.

Noah Eli Gordon's *The Source* (Futurepoem, 2011) reminds us that this curating of sources need not be lifted from the Internet in order to be in dialogue with this strategy of radical quotational practice. It is the process itself that speaks to a contemporary notion of restructuring a subject within the appropriation, and not necessarily the sources themselves or how they are retrieved. In fact, Gordon uses only the sources available from a local public library. In his "Note on Process", he writes: "I read only page 26 of nearly 10,000 books at the Denver Public Library, culling them from bits of language, which I then fused together." After describing the procedure in detail, he finishes the "Note" with this: "It is now my belief that rigid and systemic modes of writing can embody an emotionally charged engagement with the world." This "emotionally charged engagement" is no less a "self" expression than a more direct personal expression—both are mediated by language, but Gordon's approach highlights this mediation. The "self" is located in subjective choices of the author, which are distilled and embedded in the curatorial choices he makes on both a micro and macro level of realization. The result is a compelling cascade of writing that clearly makes visible the subjective hand *of* the author, if not a more direct personal experience *from* the author:

> The story is essentially the same: if you are intent on your climb and would never consider cutting back, then balance the sphere of ordinary understanding not in any mere figure of speech, still bent over the shoes you're mending, but in actual fact loosened from its anchorage to the body. The most decisive adherence to the Source is a mere mechanical routine of carrying out abstract rules, a school bus painted with drab colors, tumbling as a fertility rite, the elevator door silently opening. As is the usual case with the cup of the flower to the bee when he sips, this correspondence is not inexhaustible, countering and cross-countering in serious conversations each extraordinary depth among the dumb thoughts clogging your feet.

It is the culling and fusing as "engagement with the world" that interests me here—embedded in the author's compositional choices is a worldview, a life of subjective experiences and aesthetic leanings that inform these choices. There are several examples in this oeuvre where the poet adds a note explaining process and source material as a way to not only relate to the reader, but also for the poet to reaffirm his or her *relationship* to the material.

Similarly, Tyrone Williams' book-length eponymous poem *Howell* (Atelos, 2011) leans heavily on the "Notes" where he reveals his direct quotes, research, paraphrases, inspirations, etc. Williams' version of appropriation exemplifies a less "rigid and systemic mode[s] of writing" than *The Source*; instead, Williams uses a dizzying list of sources that combine to reconstruct the historical small town of Howell, Michigan. His list of sources include: 19th century historical documents, censuses, news articles, correspondences of Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols, Malachi Ritscher), literary references to the writings of Hogarth, Joyce, Wagadu folktales, Acker, Spencer, Pamuk, Dante, Lorde, cultural references to Aunt Sally, English games, Joe Strummer, The Pit Pony Sanctuary, and many, many more. Williams' strategy is to use these sources both directly (quotation) and indirectly (research/inspiration), but the indirect paraphrases closely echo the diction and sentiment of the original texts. In an early poem of the book, titled *7. Military Matters & e,* Williams lays down the historical framework for *Howell*, and also reminds us that the "self" in this book is woven into his unique mash-up of this history:

> Three Smiths
> "were sons of the author of this volume"
>
> <u>My Three Smiths</u>
> "were sons of the author of this volume"
>
> Smith & Sons
> "were sons of the author of this volume"
>
> Smith, Inc.
> "were sons of the author of this volume"
>
> Smith, Smith & Smith
> "were sons of the author of this volume"
>
> [rite]
>
> "A rifle company"
> "the war of the Rebellion"
>
> "not recognized by the State Government"
> "the war of the Rebellion"
>
> "First military parade"
> "the war of the Rebellion"
>
> "enlisted and mustered"
> "the war of the Rebellion"
>
> [rite]

As readers, we're clued into the use of found text, of course, by the quotation marks, the endnotes, and the out-of-date diction that is preserved from the original source. Williams borrows this language to specifically create the patina of rural 19th century Michigan throughout the first section of *Howell*. The repetition of the ancestral-incestuous "Smiths" as "the author of

this volume" and "the war of the Rebellion" give the reader sufficient clues as to where Williams positions himself in relationship to the quoted material. This position is further accentuated by the chorus of the single word "[rite]", which acts as a commentary on the borrowed language. The "[rite]" speaks to: a) the social ceremony of this militia's "authorship," which will later be compounded by the presence of McVeigh; b) the indigenous settlers' arrogance—something akin to "God's given right'; c) the more sardonic *righhhht* heard in a contemporary vernacular as commentary.

I would suggest, too, that another *right/rite* gets played out here: by reframing this highly charged historical text, Williams is subtly *righting* (and, of course, *writing*) this history. It's not as simple as taking ownership of reframed quoted material, but appropriation does have this quality of emptying meaning from one context and recharging it in another. This is another "right" of the author; a right that Williams brilliantly employs throughout *Howell*—both quietly and boldly (consider, for instance, the echo of the titles *Howl* and *Howell*). This "right"—fore-fronted in this repurposing strategy—underlines how these sources are *righted* or *re-envisioned* as a patchwork for composing. Even though, again, the technique of repurposing here doesn't claim to be "new," the ways in which many poets think about self and subjectivity in relationship to this repurposing is an important conversation right now (forget about *new*) for the very reasons stated above. Williams torques both the language and the sources he uses to reinvent his relationship to these texts that make up this history. As he states from an interview: "every torque of the language renders 'meaning' problematic—which seems to me the precise 'condition' of African-American existence in particular and 'American' life in general." I would suggest that in *Howell*, it is not just the torqueing of language that problematizes meaning, but also the torqueing of the repurposed texts themselves.

2. Poet as proxy. The above-mentioned *relationship* is further complicated when we cast this same assembler and then problematize the subjectivity by pointing to a constructed or mediated self. Here's the shift: the newness of a repurposed text in its new context is transposed onto the newness of the relationship between the source material and the author-as-construct. Often in these texts, there is a semi-fictionalized protagonist—e.g. a borrowed self, a fractured self, a self aware of his or her own mediated construct.

This use of a constructed protagonist carries the second half of Kim Rosenfield's book-length poem *USO: I'll Be Seeing You* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2013). This character—seemingly an Eastern European stand-up comic—at first appears to be less co-mingled with Rosenfield's own

construct of self, but the character ultimately speaks for all of us trying to respond to, or process, the trauma of war. Rosenfield's *character* does this as an entertainer; Rosenfield *the poet* does this as an assembler and composer of unexpected texts. The use of this character, this particular character, goes a long way towards this notion of appreciating the idiosyncratic and personal choices that poets make with borrowed material. In other words, Rosenfield doesn't put words into the comic's mouth, but, instead, lets the comic put words in her mouth. This ventriloquism of choosing (or being chosen by) the comic and his text underlines the contradictions of artists and entertainers responding to wartime. The commentary is biting—a more direct critique is traded-in for a more confusing and unlikely displacement that implicates the author, reader, and repurposed material into one big contradiction. From *USO*, Rosenfield's character, behind the scenes, tells us:

> oh
> you've been
> to Afghanistan?
> or Iraq
> UAE
> Dubai
> or
> Saudi?
> there is
> a certain
> volume
> we apply
> to ourselves
> for we do
> these tours
> as well
> at the end
> of the
> day
> we're just
> the customary
> garland
> of goofballs

In addition to borrowing the persona of the wartime comedian, Rosenfield chooses to keep the awkward grammar and syntax which reflect the persona's use of a borrowed language, English, which we assume is the native language of the poet. This meshing emphasizes a relationship to the speaker; instead of correcting or improving the English (the situation), Rosenfield emphasizes the awkward relay from the (CNN-like) mediated action of war to the audience. Rosenfield, via the borrowed USO comedian, also becomes a confused entertainer-mediator of trauma. Rather than relaying information about the war that we could find elsewhere, Rosenfield creates a subjective response-as-spectacle that elicits feelings of confusion and frustration. For her purposes, the indirect may well be a more genuine approach than the direct.

Similarly, Steven Zultanski's book-length poem *Bribery* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014) makes use of a protagonist character who confesses to doing crimes that were researched and committed by documented criminals. But the "I" figure of the poem borrows the confessions of these crimes and then re-articulates them through his character and other characters who are also falsely presented as perpetrators. The bribe, finally, is enacted onto the reader who feels complicit and held captive by the rants of this faux criminal (not unlike the reader's relationship to the narrator in Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground*). Zultanski's character rants: "For instance, there was that time that Obama followed that young man into the subway and kidnapped him (the same young man that I followed into the subway and kidnapped) and / brought him back to his apartment and chopped him up into little pieces with a bunch of different saws, each designed for a different part of the body…" In this passage, the fusion of the real criminal, the author, and Obama creates a protagonist who is the product of repurposed material to represent a larger social being raging against an unjust world.

In Zultanski's earlier book-length poem, *Agony* (Bookthug, 2012), he employs a protagonist who seems to be less ambiguously the author. However, the real main character of the book is research, information, and calculations of highly charged emotional scenarios, e.g., how many yards of family pet intestines would it take to wrap around his suburban boyhood house, or how many human tears would it take to fill a public fountain: "The volume of each tear, on average, is .012 cubic inches. / So. I've shed, so far, at least 144,419.5 tears, more or less. / Which means I have at least 232, 907.25 tears left to shed." The subjectivity and affect in this example is obvious, but the real subjectivity, for me, comes in the decisions about concept, form, and research. In part, the brilliance of these works is in their relationships to the technology, and not an inventive use of the technology itself. Zultanski borrows these calculations and research as a fresh way to define personal angst, and emotional outrage—both private and public. The "author" is very much present in these books, but also the author has morphed into something more unstable, contradictory, multiple.

In many works of poetic appropriation, especially recently, the *self* and the proxy-like protagonist *composed as self* are so carefully welded that they easily slide into each other. In both Ben Fama's *Fantasy* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2015) and *Cool Memories* (Spork Press chapbook, 2013) the speaker could be dozens of online voices brought together by a flat tonal affect. This avatar-ish voice wraps ennui, love, and darkness under one blanket; the author's subjectivity is located in the orchestration of this tone. As readers, we become less concerned with which lines are original and which lines are lifted, and we become more entranced by the

icy, vacuous, poignant, simulated world he has created. The poem *Sunset* appears as the last poem in the chapbook *Cool Memories,* and the first poem in the longer book *Fantasy*. I prefer *Sunset* in the context *Cool Memories* for several reasons: 1) by appearing at the end of the book, we're left with this: "palm trees pulled upward in a constant state of abduction. loft music. brian wilson. in the shadow of young girls in flower, john ashbery. i'm going to miss you when you rebrand. i'm going to miss you." ; 2) at the end of *Cool Memories*, after *Sunset*, there's a quote that goes deliberately unattributed (as do the hundreds of online utterances). We have quotation marks but no author—even though it's a fairly well-known passage from Baudrillard[1]—Fama's simulated sunset at the end of the book confirms the pervasive coolness throughout; 3) the title *Cool Memories* is perfect for this book, and especially pertinent to the poem *Sunset*. The first hit with "cool" is, of course, something like "awesome", and "cool/awesome memories" certainly mirrors the vernacular of the poems in the book. Further though, in *Sunset* the "cool" points to cool as in "detached." This coolness is very affective given that *Sunset* begins with some instructions for "when you encounter an active shooter situation." Fama attended Virginia Tech in 2007 when the campus shooting took place, but in the poem, *Sunset*, he composes with a host of sources to construct a response that is subjective *in another way* as opposed to speaking directly about his personal experiences. In an email exchange with Fama, he writes: "The shooting at my college was in 2007, and I tried to write about it for years in a more direct way but failed, but then in 2011 my workplace held this workshop—*Active Shooting Training*. Hearing the sort of matter of fact instruction that confronted a new gruesome reality was the only slant, cold, way I could approach the topic, so I just transcribed it. That language indicates more about the experience than any more direct attempts I made":

> in your workplace, or commonly visited public areas, it's advised to plan now
> to increase your chances of survival. visualize and plan escape pathways…
> silence any electronic devices, lie on the floor and remain silent. sometimes you
> just need to buy something. life is full of responsibilities. joyce carol oates at
> the beverly hills hotel. i take a selfie of myself crying for a world i cannot access.

I don't find Fama's "cool" approach to this massacre less genuine and less engaged, but rather I find it equally moving, probably more moving, that Fama found a way to use this material that also implicates the carnival of media that surrounded the event. Like so much of Fama's writing, it appears all at once personal and removed by the flat affect of his tone—everything is reduced to this same tone. It's a powerful response to our daily bombardment of love, trauma, etc., all in one steady stream.

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[1] "It is not 'real' nature which suddenly transfigures the atmosphere of everyday life, but holidays—that simulacrum of nature, the reverse side of everyday routine, thriving not on nature but on the idea of Nature."

3. Poet as zeitgeist. This last category overlaps with the previous two. What I'm interested in here are poems that directly repurpose personal articulations, often from online sources: confessions, complaints, advice, descriptions of feelings, etc. I've found that some readers of this poetry often feel insulted, duped or wronged: borrowing people's articulations of feelings crosses a line that more "objective" repurposing might not. Is it because the poet is benefitting from someone else's situation, and, if so, what is the benefit? Is it because a lot of these borrowed articulations might just be our own? It's interesting when working with these borrowed personal articulations, how the poet-borrower often finds that these heartfelt confessions are also borrowed from elsewhere. They, too, have the familiar ring from a song lyric, the news, an ad, or even another online post. The sheer vastness of web information reveals that these expressions of joy, grief, sadness, etc. are limited—we all share from the same affect language pool. As readers, we might be uncomfortable with the public version of personal expressions that we all share and help construct.

In 2000, with his book-length poem *The Inkblot Record* (Coach House Books), Dan Farrell wrote one of those most lasting examples of *poet as zeitgeist*. In the text, Farrell culls and alphabetizes over 2000 Rorschach responses, dated from 1942-1989. Farrell uses several of the word processing technologies that were available to him at that moment to copy these responses, but the innovation of the piece has little to do with how he uses technology. Rather, *The Inkblot Record* demonstrates a groundbreaking possibility for what poets can now do with information that is suddenly more readily available and more easily transferrable. A reader could search for Farrell's subjective experience to gain clues for why he would undertake such a project, but that equation is limited. I find it a more satisfying to complicate those subjective choices with how the author is using everyday technology to reconstruct notions of archiving and documentation and, further, new ways for poetry to utilize the artistic innovations in duration, repetition, minimalism and conceptualism. In the end, the text reads as a powerful testament into our cultural psyche, and the unique position of the author is "mirrored" in this:

> Beautiful green ball dress. Beautiful, it's nothing, just a reflection, at least
> three miles away, see evergreen trees and looks like smoke aurora
> around fire, heavy black smoke, forest back here. Beautiful reflection,
> very far away. Because eyes drawn down. Because he used to go out of
> control when I was young, out of anger. Because here's its head, body,
> arms on the sides, big feet, with something sticking up in the middle;
> that's why I call it a monster with a pogo stick. Because here's the back
> (imitates sitting), yeah, they're shaped round. Because here's the wings and
> here's the hole part. Because here's their legs, and there's where their legs
> are connected to their bodies, goes up to their chest, their head. Because
> I couldn't see the head I assumed a soft substance. Because it goes out
> like this (traces outline with finger). Because it has so many colors…

The subjectivity of the author seems nearly invisible in *The Inkblot Record*, but, of course, these responses didn't reframe and alphabetize themselves. The author masterfully conceived and composed of the piece knowing full well that a powerful accumulative expression would be the end result. Where does this place subjectivity and authorship? To dismiss the relationship to the material as detached is too simplistic, though it may be both engaged and critically disengaged at once. Rather than placing intentionality within this simple binary, it seems more meaningful to consider the ways in which *The Inkblot Record* uncovers how the expressions of our "feelings" are recorded, collected, and institutionalized.

In Monica de la Torre's poem *Doubles* (from *Public Domain,* Roof Books, 2008)*,* this question of identity and the protagonist is more directly in focus, as the author transcribes a stream of emails by individuals who are searching for "Monica de la Torre". The first email, for example, is by someone looking for her mother presumably named *Monica de la Torre*: "If you read this message and know something about her please communicate with me. It is possible that she doesn't use her real name now." The poem fuses identities and, simultaneously, multiples them. The effect is a text where the author—herself implicated by name—enacts a dizzying identity mash-up before our eyes. We are drawn not only to the borrowed text here, but also to the borrowed identities and the mix-up of the doubles which all point to an identity blur specific to web browsing. None of these speakers are Monica de la Torre herself the poet, yet, by composing with this material, she assumes all of their identities (this longer excerpt is useful to get a sense of the thread—check out the book version for images):

> From: mcorreche@tenaris.com.ar
> To: Undisclosed recipients
> Subject: abandoned
>
> I am looking for Mónica de la Torre, my biological mother. She traveled from Argentina to Barcelona with my father in 1975. She went back to Argentina and disappeared when I was two, after being accused of subversive activities. I've heard rumors that my mother might be in the United States. If you read this message and know something about her please communicate with me. It is possible that she doesn't use her real name now.
> Thank you,
> Mercedes Correche
>
> ***
>
> From: Monica de la Torre <silliconvalleygrl8@yahoo.com>
> To: mcorreche@tenaris.com.ar
> Subject: Re: abandoned
>
> Hi! I am Monica de la Torre, but I am not your mother! I am Regional Student Representative for the #1 Region in the Nation, Santa Clara, California! I haven't always felt like a leader, but several experiences in my life have helped me to learn to gain confidence. I'm living proof of the quote "Leaders are made, not born!" I encourage you to have the same positive attitude!
> Monica de la Torre
>
> ***

From: monica@door.org
To: Monica de la Torre <silliconvalleygrl8@yahoo.com>
CC: mcorreche@tenaris.com.ar
Subject: Re: abandoned

Dear Monica de la Torre,
Your irresponsible reply to Mercedes Correche went to everyone on the listserve www.sebusca.org. I don't know what you're thinking, but I'm pretty sure that the woman who found herself in the vulnerable situation of having to write such a painful email did not appreciate your leadership messages. As for you, Mercedes, believe it or not, my name is also Monica de la Torre. I am an officer at the Door Legal Services in New York, and I specialize in family law. Should you need some information pertaining how you can go about dealing with your mother if you do find her, please write to me. I'll gladly offer my services to you at no charge.
Compassionately, Monica de la Torre

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From: Becky Varnum <bevarnu@mindspring.com>
To: mcorreche@tenaris.com.ar
CC: monica@door.org
Subject: Re: abandoned

Dear Mercedes,
I am a close friend of Monica de la Torre, the legal advisor in New York, who sent me your email. I play tennis and clearly remember beating a woman named Monica de la Torre at the Wolverine Invitational in Ann Arbor in 1998. I even recall that the final score: 6-2, 6-0. She had a Spanish accent but she tried to convince me that she'd grown up in Texas. She obviously was concealing something. I can get in touch with the organizers of the tournament and ask them for more information on that strange woman.
Best, Becky

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To: mcorreche@tenaris.com.ar
From: Manuela <lamanuela@transmexicana.com.mx>
Subject: Mi madre

Hi Meche:
My English is no good. Do you speak Espanish? My friend Manuela here in Veracruz has a transsexual website and says to me that you are looking for me. I am stripper, go-go dancer, performance artist and top model. I do not want anybody to know the real name that my *mamacita* put me when I was brought to the world as a boy. Why do you want my data? If you have interest in my show, come to Veracruz. If not then good-bye.
Chau honey,
Mónica de la Torre

In order to draw a sample from a seemingly random swatch of 2008 online culture, *Doubles* trips up our notions of (online) identity. The effect is a text where the author enacts an uncomfortable identity blur before our eyes. Monica de la Torre, the poet, is absent in this thread, but present as an author composing these shifting and related selves, and their subjective responses. So, on one level we have the subjectivity of our author as curator—as the one who conceptualized the project and arranged the material—but on another level we have the poet as avatar, drawing our attention to her own complex sense of self, allegorically, via this technology. De la Torre has constructed the text to reflect something about an identity blur that is specific to web browsing, but also to a larger cultural question about identity and, further, perhaps to her own relationship to national identity.

Similar to Farrell and De la Torre, Diana Hamilton's book length poem *OKAY, OKAY* (Truck, 2012) is a poly-vocal reframing of online personal posts describing private feelings (usually crying), in public spaces (usually the workplace). One of the unique qualities of the poem is how Hamilton seamlessly links the various posts. It's a very different strategy than Farrell's, whose text is closely edited but organized alphabetically. Hamilton's chooses to edit these posts with an ear towards an unhindered read, where the accumulative effect of her technique is that there is one speaker even when we know there are many. It's obvious enough that the editorial choices of Farrell and Hamilton differ because they different poets with different experiences working in different historical moments with different ideas for what they want the text to achieve. But beyond these more obvious mirrors of their subjectivity, I'm interested in how all three of these poets choose to compose with a chorus of found voices in order to articulate a collective expression that parallels a more "directly personal" expression. It's not simply a choice of choosing the direct or indirect; for Hamilton's *OKAY, OKAY* the entire text pivots on how Hamilton uncovers and then reframes these larger issues of gender, authority, and the American workplace:

> Sometimes it's very hard to separate the work mode from the personal mode and the feeling mode. And sometimes you do get to the point, we've all been there, we've all done that walk past our coworkers, from the boss' office to the bathroom. You know, it happens, we cry, we go to the bathroom, we clean ourselves up, we drink a glass of water, um, definitely try to cool down the body, in order to stop crying. Work is about facts, it's not about feelings.

Or on the previous page…

> There's no crying in mascara. There's no crying in computer science. There's no crying in Weight Watchers. There's no crying in bootcamp. There's no crying in bull markets. There's no crying in Varmint hunting. There's no crying in public diplomacy. There's no crying in radiology. There's no crying in prison. There's no crying in gymnastics. There's no crying in homework. There's no crying in the post office. There's no crying in opera. There's no crying in fashion. There's no crying in porn. There's no crying in the break room. There's no crying in the workplace.

The lines roll into each other with an ease that reinforces the zeitgeist collective chorus of the work force. Throughout, *OKAY, OKAY* resonates a collective feeling of *we're all in this together*, as an alternative to a single subjective voice responding to a singular personal experience in the workplace. Further, by orchestrating such a poly-vocal text, Hamilton underlines the constructed identity of the female worker in the work place. By repurposing the articulations of so many speakers in this text, Hamilton casts a wide net across class and education differences. She could have chosen to apply a more "ethically correct" filter to dictate her choices, but the result would have achieved less of the larger zeitgeist that she's going after. Equally, she could have

chosen to be only condescending, or only funny, or only violent, and those choices would reflect the author's position as assembler as well; however, in those examples, the author would lose the opportunity to reflect something particular about this mass of personal articulations available to us at any time. In this sense, the most *authentic* or *sincere* choice here might be the one that includes this sort of varied democracy of articulations. Like several of the texts already mentioned here, Hamilton organizes her choices in the balance between compassionate embrace of the borrowed subject and critical distance: *to entirely embrace the borrowed would be naïve; to position oneself with only critical distance would cynical.*

I find Hamilton's text moving precisely because it *is* borrowed and, simultaneously, it *is* personal given the curatorial editing choices she makes: she conceived of the idea, she culled the source material, she edited the text, etc. In doing so, she creates a culturally broad barometer of these feelings at this given moment—a collective *chorus* that reflects a specifically contemporary arena of affect. The space between private and public utterances collapses here, and the quotational strategy, the public borrowing, resonates with the private self. The intersection between how Hamilton, the author, processes these personal articulations and how these personal articulations have *already been* processed through a culture driven by mediation technologies, is at the core of new ways to think about subjectivity. This complicity with borrowed and mediated subjects is the relationship that many poets using appropriation strategies want to emphasize or critique. In this way, instead of feeling duped or mocked or superior to some of these borrowed voices, we, as readers, might feel complicit… which is a long way of saying: I might want to cry at work, but you might also want to cry work, and, in fact, all of these other people are crying at work and all of this crying gets written down and then collected in one place and all of it belongs to all of us until somebody comes along and says it doesn't.

Russian minimalist poet Lev Rubinstein writes in the foreword of his book *Compleat Catalogue of Comedic Novelties* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014): "For me the artistic text is important and interesting as both the cause and effect of *conversation*, as the optimal realization of dialogical consciousness." It is exactly this notion of *dialogical consciousness* around new ways of thinking about subjectivity in quotational writing that propels this essay. It is a writing practice that both causes and effects a dialogue about how poems respond to other dialogues in contemporary culture, especially over the past decade. My own views are informed by contemporary ideas in poetry, art and culture, and by conversations around how identity and subjectivity has been reimagined therein, especially in relationship to the language-based technologies that shape our

everyday lives. As poets, our position to this relationship has not been made cold and minimized by the indirect, but, rather, distilled and reconfigured as a complex prism of a self aware of itself via mediation. How we define this relationship matters. Or at least it matters if we believe that poets have the possibility to reflect or contradict or even shape a cultural moment. There are limitless ways to do so… I'm working to identify one of them.