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Individual

Keston Sutherland

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Alexander Nehamas writes, “What is involved is less a matter of understanding and more a matter of hope, of establishing a community that centers around [beauty]—a community, to be sure, whose boundaries are constantly shifting and whose edges are never stable.”⁶ Beauty not as pleasure, as ideal, as perfection or goodness, not as truth; beauty as juxtaposition, collision, a muddying of the waters, utopia, state of emergency, of emergence.

/ Notes /

¹ C. D. Wright, *One Big Self: An Investigation* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 32.

² Qtd. in Peter Winch, *Simone Weil: “The Just Balance”* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190.

³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” *The Crisis* 32 (1926): 290–97.

⁴ See Claudia Rankine and John Lucas, *Situation 1* (2010), <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/video-situation-one>. See also the written script published in *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014), 128.

⁵ See the Academy of American Poets introduction to *Situation 1*: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/video-situation-one>.

⁶ Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 81.

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WHITNEY DEVOS is a PhD student in Literature, with a Creative/Critical concentration, at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her dissertation project, “From Logopoeia to (Un)documentary,” approaches documentary and investigative poetics as forms of experimental historiography. Her poems

have appeared or are forthcoming in *Whiskey Island*, *Spork* online, *lo-ball* magazine, *Caketrain*, *The Destroyer*, and elsewhere. Responding to Susan Sontag’s assertion that “the best theory of beauty is its history,” she is currently at work on a book-length creative project that seeks to historicize beauty and the beautiful through poetic form.

INDIVIDUAL

KESTON SUTHERLAND

In 2007, the size of the notional credit default swap market was roughly twice the size of the U.S. stock market, six times the size of the \$7.1 trillion mortgage market, and eleven times the size of the \$4.4 trillion U.S. treasuries market. The individual body whose activity is, despite everything, the origin of value for Marx is traced in these numbers in an outline so faint and so distorted that it seems like a trick of squinting. The vastness of these markets is more than just their size. It is the vastness of a virtual imperiousness to labor, a chasm of seemingly near infinite separation from the individual body and all its original activities of production and metabolism. The power of the individual body to produce value looks trivial and archaic next to the power of the credit default swap; next to the capacity for wealth creation of the financial derivative, what Marx called the “capacity for work” or “Arbeitsvermögen” of the body and its assemblage of fragmented part-objects is a vanishing origin.

The primary separation of the individual life from its potential fulfillment has been a perennial theme for poetry. There has always been

poetry that has tried to make the pain of that paralysis more knowable, or poetry whose gift has been a kind of intimacy with separation itself. Juliet's overpowering protest that her bounty is as boundless as the sea, her love as deep, was quoted by Hegel in his early essay on love, and the idea of mediation that he would develop in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the idea of a kind of work that makes an infinite gift to consciousness in the form of the expressed truth of the object. The idea of work that produces nothing but a gift is also important in *Capital*, where it is directly satirized. Marx says that surplus labor is given to the capitalist by the worker "as a present." The value-objective truth hammered home by this grisly joke is that labor-power cannot produce gifts. Anything that can produce a gift will not be labor-power, and the individual who makes a gift will not be the subject whose own activity separates its life from fulfillment. Poetry tries not to be these things; and to honor their proscription, poetry tries to be exactly what they are not: it tries to get our own unrealized potential back within reach, first of all by making possible new powers of intimacy with separation. Separation is known anyhow in the body, but is studied and learned in poetry, where the truncation of the subject and its vanishing archaic origin can be tested and contested at every turn.

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KESTON SUTHERLAND is the author of *The Odes to TL61P* (2013), *The Stats on Infinity* (2010), *Stress Position* (2009), *Hot White Andy* (2007) and other poems, and of *Stupefaction* (2011), a book of essays on Marx and poetry. He teaches English at the University of Sussex and, together with Andrea Brady, runs Barque Press.

BANANA REPUBLICS OF POETRY

M. NOURBESE PHILIP

Whole and undivided, the banana leaf begins life as a long, green flag, its pliable center spine dividing the intense expanse of flutter. Within a couple of days, at the most, it will be a fringed flutter in the wind as the leaf splits then splits again and again along its horizontal ribs. What was once whole, single, and unitary is now many.

The torn fluttering tatters of the banana leaf reawaken a memory I never knew I had. Having grown up in the Caribbean, I must have witnessed this shredding many, many times, yet as if and, indeed, for the first time, I notice this process of whole become multiple. And, as if there are specific receptors at the cellular level within my eyes that awaken at this particular image—the torn fluttering of banana leaves—there is a small explosion of recognition—behind the eyes. A knowing again of that which I didn't know I knew.

Each torn strand sparks a memory—a burst of potentiality—as if my eyes were not simply receiving the images passively, but reaching out to the split, the torn and the broken happily fluttering in the wind. Medieval theories of optics and vision suggest that the act of perception alters us; that seeing is a much more active relationship than we think of it today. But these were not the thoughts that occupied my mind as I gazed at the now fringed flag of possibilities.