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A ≠ A

The Potential for a 'Pataphysical Poetic in Dan Farrell's *The Inkblot Record*

The first A was perhaps congruent to the second,
and we will therefore willingly write thus: A = A.
    Pronounced quickly enough, until the letters
become confounded, it is the idea of unity.
    Pronounced slowly, it is the idea of duality,
of echo, of distance, of symmetry, of greatness and duration,
of the two principles of good and evil.
—Alfred Jarry, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*

I am not suggesting switching from an uptight business
suit into sincere jeans . . . but rather acting out, in
dialectical play, the insincerity of form as much as content.
—Charles Bernstein, "Comedy and the Politics of Poetic Form"

The notion that we can be demystified, escape certain ideologies, or trade in certain ideologies for others—an uptight suit for sincere jeans—is itself a dangerous ideology that keeps us powerless. So what possibilities are left? Should poets simply give up and resign themselves to the status quo, regardless of their dissatisfaction? I contend that 'pataphysical texts like Dan Farrell's *The Inkblot Record* offer contemporary poetry a solution. Rather than attempt to alter the status quo or disrupt certain ideologies, 'pataphysical texts perform clinimatic swerves that show the arbitrariness and mutability of our understanding of the status quo. Rather than offering yet another alternative ideological frame, they allow us to think about the logic of framing. This poetic work is vital to a contemporary poetry scene peppered with trends such as Flarf and New Formalism.[1] While making a larger claim for the importance of 'pataphysical practices for contemporary poetry, this paper takes *The Inkblot Record* as its main case study as it exemplifies the political possibilities of a 'pataphysical poetic. Farrell's gesture of placing the language of psychology into the discourse of poetry

enacts the paradox outlined by Alfred Jarry that A ≠ A. The politics of this move are small but palpable. His poetic does not claim a "revolution of the word" or of the world, but rather performs an irreversible clinimatic swerve within them.

In 1898, *fin de siècle* French author, artist, and absurdist Jarry outlined his pseudoscience of 'pataphysics in *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician: A Neo-Scientific Novel*: "DEFINITION. Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments" (22).[2] Even this complicated definition, however, is deceptively simple and does not adequately capture the complexities of 'pataphysics as outlined by Jarry. When Jarry initially decided to write more systematically about 'pataphysics, he planned to publish a treatise on the topic. Ultimately, however, he chose to stage his pseudoscientific philosophy as literature (see Jarry xi). The decision to introduce his pseudoscience through a novel rather than through a treatise suggests that literature is the most appropriate venue in which to conduct 'pataphysical research (even research into how to define the term itself). It also reveals that Jarry imagined that 'pataphysics could not be explained by critical or expository means alone; 'pataphysics had to be *illustrated* rather than *described. Exploits and Opinions,* which came out of Jarry's desire to write a treatise on 'pataphysics, must be viewed as his attempt not only to define the term, but to show 'pataphysics in (literary) action.

Jarry devotes an entire chapter of *Exploits and Opinions* to the "Definition" of 'pataphysics cited in the previous paragraph. Within this chapter, Jarry describes the science in conflicting ways, alternatively calling it "the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics," "the science of the particular," and that which "will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one" (21). The proliferating definitions speak to a key tenet of 'pataphysics: absolute facts, and therefore absolute definitions, do not exist. In this light, the official definition of the term is revealed as a joke. And as if this were not enough, Jarry further complicates the definition by provocatively ending the chapter "upon the irreverence of the common herd whose instinct sums up the adepts of the science of 'pataphysics in the following phrase:" (24). Like the famous colon at the end of Ezra Pound's "Canto I," Jarry's colon acts as a frame for what follows, so that the rest of the book becomes, comically, "the phrase" that sums up 'pataphysics. Despite the definitions' individual differences, the comic web of definitionality woven by Jarry works to support 'pataphysics'

main purpose at the time of its inception: to critique science's truth claims.

In *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* (1984), Kenneth Beaumont outlines four specific critiques of science held by Jarry, providing a useful snapshot of his main concerns. First, Jarry challenges the idea that there are "laws" of science. In his opinion, they are only descriptive generalizations that attempt to link unique events and phenomena. Because all rules have exceptions, science deals with probabilities as opposed to actualities. Second, 'pataphysics contends that explanations put forth by scientists are chosen arbitrarily, and are just some of many possible solutions. In a word, there are multiple ways of interpreting the same data. In *Exploits and Opinions,* Jarry gives the example of gravity:

> Instead of formulating the law of the fall of a body toward a center, how far more apposite would be the law of the ascension of a vacuum toward a periphery, a vacuum being considered a unit of non-density, a hypothesis far less arbitrary than the choice of a concrete unit of positive density such as *water*? (22)

Jarry asks why we assume that there is a force pulling us toward the earth when a theory that posits the opposite seems equally, or even more, viable.[3] Third, 'pataphysics questions the assumption that induction is a valid method for discovering truth. Lastly, 'pataphysics is skeptical of the use of sensory data as "evidence," since it is always relative to a perceiver (see Beaumont 191-93). In sum, Jarry's "science" reacted to the explosion of a new faith in a science that advocated progress and the discovery of truth.[4] And yet, though Beaumont is right to situate 'pataphysics as a critique of science, it is not that critique alone that has made the practice influential for contemporary poets.

When I use the word 'pataphysical in reference to contemporary poetry, I refer to that which, like 'pataphysics itself, wages critique through the tools used by Jarry: parody, mimicry, and exaggeration. Jarry was not sincerely proposing a new science—one that could get closer to the "real truth" than traditional science—instead he offered an exaggerated, extreme, and eccentric version of scientific methods in order to expose their arbitrary nature. 'Pataphysics imagines a science that incorporates the exception, the accident, the slip, and the possible into our understanding of the repeatable, the expected, and the probable as a way to avoid generalities—a project best situated among the genres of satire, farce, and parody. In its purest form, then, 'pataphysics is more of a verb than a noun, perhaps explaining why, as Roger Shattuck argues, Jarry "never did much more than name it and sketch in its outlines" (188). To understand 'pataphysics, one must see it in action.

'Pataphysics was put to work in North America by the Toronto Research Group (TRG), formed in 1973 by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. The TRG writes, "If 'Pataphysics is 'the science of imaginary solutions' and the source of answers to questions never to be posed, then "Pataphysics (the open quotation of a double elision) will be 'the literature of all imaginary sciences'" ("Introduction" 7). The move from the single to a double elision emphasizes the fact that contemporary 'pataphysical literature is involved in citation and quotation—open questioning of existing material— a move that becomes particularly important to Farrell's work. Although Dan Farrell is not officially associated with the TRG or Canadian "Pataphysics, he was certainly influenced by their ideas and was in contact with others who were similarly influenced through the Kootenay School of Writing. In short, his work should be read with the Canadian "Pataphysics' "first amendment" (301) to 'pataphysics in mind.

The Inkblot Record (Coach House, 2000) collates one-sentence responses to the Rorschach test from six source texts, all published in New York between 1942 and 1989. These texts supply the content of the book; the form results from that simplest of organizational linguistic procedures: alphabetization. The outcome is approximately 100 pages of block text (left and right margins aligned) with no paragraph breaks or any indication of differentiation from one section to the next. Anaphora, however, heavily punctuates the text; repeated first words or phrases stand out because of the systematic organization:

> Shape. Shape and appendages. Shape and head; climbing. Shape, black bear, no real body. Shape, coloring, white and gray stone. Shape inside a heart effect, a real heart. Shape, it has no head, part of tail, more nearly a moth with open wings, color has nothing to do with it. Shape of a pillow. Shape of urn, gray of wrought iron. Shape only. Shape, tail coming out. Shape with pendulum sticking out. Shaped like a heart. Shaped like that. (61)

Apart from the repetition and alliteration that occurs by default in an alphabetized list, particularly in sentences that are reactions to a similar set of questions and visual stimuli,[5] reading the responses in this form draws out other striking parallels. These strange "shapes" become associated with altered bodies: "no real body," "no head," "part of tail," "tail coming out." Given the diversity of responses, and even greater diversity of potential responses, repeated words in such a small section jar the reader. The sheer number of hearts, heads, and tails, as well as the two strange responses that invoke the notion of the "real," cause us to contemplate the connection

between responses. In this form, the text simultaneously showcases the highly individual nature of each response while accentuating the uncanny relationship between responses. Farrell's 'pataphysical gesture of transplanting raw linguistic data from the realm of psychology into the discourse of poetry puts the language, as opposed to the patient, under the microscope.

Due to the book's alphabetical organization, it can be used as a kind of reference book, situating the poetic language in the discourse of information. This text's encyclopedic nature places it within a larger trend in contemporary poetry that Craig Dworkin has identified as "applied 'pataphysics." Dworkin explains the trend as engaged in "the constructing of useless reference tools, the proposing of imaginary solutions, and the cataloguing of exceptions" (32).[6] Farrell's text is a prime example of the kind of "useless reference tool" Dworkin alludes to. In this form, the book grants us easy access to ridiculous facts: the only response given by a subject in these six source texts beginning with a "q" is "Quite fat" (56). More subtly, Farrell resists commonplace assumptions about what makes a literary text cognizable by displacing himself as the authorial "I" and combining source material in a way that evacuates the text of any distinguishable subject.

Ironically, this move reclaims the Author that Roland Barthes pronounced dead. Farrell was not the author, in the traditional way that we think of the term, of *The Inkblot Record*. *The Inkblot Record* insists at every moment that Farrell's hand was absent from the process of composition; the source texts are listed in the back of the book and the paratext includes a note that insists on Farrell's reluctance to tamper with the sentences in any way other than their organization: "Orthography in *The Inkblot Record* is consistent with [the source] texts" ("Sources" n. pag.). Farrell's book literalizes Barthes' assertion that all texts consist of other texts. Barthes argues that a text is never an expression of inner feeling, but rather "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). Farrell takes literally Barthes' assertion that an author's "only power" comes from "mix[ing] writings" (146). Farrell responds to Barthes' cry that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), by calling authors to reclaim writing *through* reading. Farrell's position as "author" of this text *is* that of reader, disallowing critical readers to fall into the trap that Barthes describes, namely that the notion of authorship allows critics to close a text, to solve the puzzle sociologically, historically, or psychologically (147). Asserting

its status as a text that cannot be solved, *The Inkblot Record* is primed for a 'pataphysical parody of science's ideology.

The Inkblot Record is 'pataphysical in that it parodies scientific method by systematically organizing the language used by clinical psychologists to diagnose and analyze patients, and placing this language in a context where its aesthetic qualities can be examined. By putting the raw data into this new context, the text illustrates the claim that 'pataphysics makes: that the solutions proposed by science, or any other discourse, are just one of many possible solutions, one out of many ways of looking at data. The notion that these sentences can be used to diagnose a human being is just one way of interpreting the data. When these sentences are stripped of their diagnostic potential and put into a literary context, can we come up with a different interpretation? Rather than generalize and extrapolate meanings from the sentences, *The Inkblot Record* attests to the particularity of every single response and showcases the exceptions to the rule. Farrell's text allows us to examine the bizarre, unexpected, and uncanny aspects of the responses—their rhythm, syntactical parallels, or simply their beauty: "Like a cockatoo, large, sharp beak, body, facing away" (44), "Pair of eyeglasses. Pair of hands. Pair of pliers" (55), "White dead bare branches" (102).

By cataloguing particulars, a 'pataphysical move in that it avoids generalizations, *The Inkblot Record* not only documents the expected responses to the Rorschach test—"a butterfly," "a cloud," "a flower" (5)—but also the anomalous responses. In fact, the cliché's main function in the text is to cast the anomalous responses into relief. "Pelvic bone. Pelvic bony structure. Penguin or seal, black. Penguin, white belly, feet. Penis. Penis there. People. People" accentuates the oddity of the responses located just a bit further down on the page: "Pistachio ice cream," "pointed orange hats," "President Eisenhower" (56). The clichéd responses act as background to the figure of the particular. And since this is the product of systematic reading rather than authorial design, a reader cannot deny the reality of the peculiar responses.

In this form, the language becomes less about any individual subject than a searchable collection of linguistic oddities. Organized alphabetically and presented in bulk, the language attests to something beyond the psyche of any one subject. The language draws attention to other information, whether about the Rorschach test, the test subjects as a group, or the psychological industry during the second half of the twentieth century. But let us not get too optimistic. *The Inkblot Record,* like a good 'pataphysician, resists generalization at every moment; the *truth* of Farrell's book lies in the fact

that it does not proffer any final claim. 'Pataphysics does not want to replace one system with another, but aims to highlight the absurdity of conflating systematicity and predictability with truth.[7] *The Inkblot Record* enacts this 'pataphysical negation: it is neither/nor, both/and; it simultaneously exposes the language it alters while exposing its own bias. Again, however, this should not be taken as an argument for a nihilistic poetic. Indeed, Farrell's 'pataphysical practice is deeply rooted in politics.

Rather than propose an alternative linguistic space that might be able to combat capitalism, for example, Farrell's text ends up describing, with 'pataphysical precision, the reactions of the subjects in the six source texts. In other words, rather than creating a language that attempts to disrupt or alter its complicity in capitalism or phallocentrism (Language poetry or *écriture féminine*), Farrell's work shifts the focus to the materiality of existing language, already infused with capitalism, but strips it of its use value. If we believe, with Ron Silliman, that "what happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word" and that "these developments are tied directly to the nature of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed (deformed) into referentiality" (125), then Farrell's book forces a new attention to the materiality *of* that capitalist language.[8]

One might argue that *The Inkblot Record*'s parody of psychology through an appeal to systematicity is stunted by the fact that the Rorschach test has faced criticism as a pseudoscience itself.[9] Examiners ask subjects to create imaginary solutions to the problem of the inkblot: "These slits here could be eyes too, like from a science fiction monster or something" (Farrell 73), "Well, you really have to use your imagination to see the tree" (101), or "Well, if you really use your imagination you could make it a mushroom too" (90). The imaginary solutions that people conjure often verge on the hysterical:

> Two boys or young tough men with pug noses, wild green hair, probably Irish. Two bulls. Two cannibals over a brewing pot. Two chickens with their hands pushing away from each other. Two crabs and coral. Two crabs on either side. Two crickets sassing each other. Two crocodiles, looks like they're about to die. Two dancing ladies, each is missing a leg, an arm and a head. . . . Two frogs engaged in a rather profound discussion on the structure of the nervous system of which they have diagram right behind them. (84-85)

The test itself asks respondents to put content onto indeterminate forms—to make meaning out of strange formless inkblots. The subjects admit that what they are offering is just one of many possible solutions and often begin

their responses with hesitation: "If I turn it this way . . . " (107), and "This part could be . . . " (81). Despite the imagined nature of these responses, an anomalous response can still be diagnosed as a pathology.

The most controversial use of the Rorschach test was its use in trying to understand, or discover, a common pathology among Nazis after World War II. Although the psychologists were unable to find any "specific inclination towards violence, aggression, or sadism," in an interview with Sinja Najafi, Eric A. Zillmer notes the test did reveal "an oversimplified problem-solving style," which he takes to suggest that "they were not creative thinkers, were easily influenced by authority, were attracted to the rigid and quasi-military Nazi hierarchy, relied heavily on denial, and were lacking an 'internal moral compass'" (n. pag.). Equating non-creativity with a lack of an "internal moral compass" and attraction to military hierarchies is nothing if not an imaginary solution. So if both the original responses to the Rorschach test and *The Inkblot Record* attest to their 'pataphysical nature, what does *The Inkblot Record* accomplish?

The text not only accentuates the materiality of language, but also highlights the status of language as linguistic data, allowing us to see how that linguistic data can be used to different ends.[10] Changing the frame shows that the language does not have to be interpreted psychologically and strips the content of its use value as a diagnostic tool while betraying its original context at every moment. Psychologist Bruno Klopfer notes:

> The distinguishing feature of *Psychodiagnostik,* as compared with previous attempts at using ink blots as psychological material, is the complete shift of emphasis from the more or less imaginative content of the subject's response to certain formal characteristics in the concept formations. In other words, the interest is not so much in what the subject sees as in his method of handling the stimulus material. (4)

Since in Farrell's presentation of inkblot responses no given response can be attached to any one speaker, and the language is removed from the subject's "method of handling the stimulus material," the sentences are rendered invalid as diagnostic tools. As mentioned earlier, the text also resists the emergence of clear subjects. In the lengthy section of sentences that begin with "I" (24-41) we sometimes hear intimate details about a person, but the notion that any knowable "I" can emerge from reading this text is soon disrupted by the proliferation of "I's":

> I always had a feeling he was a sneaky person, I remember him laying little traps for my mother, makes me feel he was a very alone person. I always wanted to

play, but I worked since I was thirteen. I bet they have tartar. I can see the
projectiles going. I can't look anymore, it's too frightening, it makes me feel crazy.
I can't look or I'll go crazy again. I can't make anything out of all of it, but this
lower part looks like a very exotic butterfly. I can't say what else. I can't tell. I can't
think of anything else. I couldn't see, that made it even more frightening. (24-25)

We may be prompted to think that we are learning something about a
person—"I'm frightened," might suggest a particular respondent is easily
frightened. However, given the juxtapositions we are inclined to wonder if
we are not learning more about the test and the examiner, or even the reader,
than the so-called subject, since others were similarly frightened.

The Inkblot Record asks its readers to perform a task similar to that of the
Rorschach test subject. Apart from the list of questions on the back cover
and the list of source texts printed at the back of the text, the paratext of *The
Inkblot Record* does not indicate how Farrell produced the material, or that
the book is comprised of responses to the Rorschach test. Even the cover is
not the expected image of an inkblot, but rather a picture of the kind of
rolling stool one might find in a doctor's office. In short, Coach House's
paratextual decisions offer minimal guidance for a reader on how to
contextualize the text, making the first reading a kind of test case for the
reader. Even after a reader becomes aware of the context, Dworkin argues
that if there is something to be diagnosed it is the reader's projective habits:
"Rather than ask what patients see in the form of blotted ink, [Farrell's]
enjambed sentences prod us to perform the inverse function and imagine
what image could have possibly provoked these texts" (42). The difference
between Farrell's test and the Rorschach test is that Farrell will not be scoring
us at the end. Through an appeal to the absurd, the amusing, and the artificial,
'pataphysical texts like *The Inkblot Record* highlight their contradictions and
mock any truth claim other than their status as textual facts.

It would be impossible to catalogue all the possible responses to the
Rorschach test, which means that *The Inkblot Record,* or any project like it,
cannot give a complete account of the language of Rorschach respondents.
But this is precisely the point: *The Inkblot Record* does not profess truth, but
rather insists on its existence as a particular, isolated, discrete, and singular
set of data. This data cannot be extrapolated from and the sentences that
comprise *The Inkblot Record* do not add up to any generalization. But it does
allow us to notice facts about this language that were previously indiscernible
because of the context. Enlightenment may not be attainable; every insight
has a blindness. We may go from dark to dark, but dark does not equal

dark, as A is not equivalent to A. And this is the lesson of 'pataphysics: everything is extremely particular, singular. Built into the definition of equivalency and identity is a potential for rupture, a fundamental difference. *The Inkblot Record*'s political power comes by enacting, or acting out, this phenomenon. It proves that no two solutions are the same and that each is equally imaginary by creating a consciously artificial, alternative, and absurd solution to the Rorschach responses. Acknowledging the task of complete reformation as futile, 'pataphysical poets find promise in deformation.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw 'pataphysics and similar anti-rational, anti-positivist, and anti-linear discourses explode alongside a cultural shift characterized by a general distrust of truth claims, skepticism about the possibility of complete coherence, and a questioning of authority. This shift from absolutism to relativism manifested itself in a variety of artistic techniques from William Burrough's "cut-ups," to Allan Kaprow's "happenings," to Andy Warhol's silk screens. More recently, and at an exponential rate, poets have been turning to procedural techniques like those found in *The Inkblot Record*.[11] These poets are not so much interested in "direct treatment of the thing" as "systematic treatment of the thing," using formulas, constricted vocabularies, and other experimental writing procedures.

Although 'pataphysics underwent a general revival in many different contexts in the post-war era, it has dramatically appeared recently in the contemporary poetry and poetics scene. The last two decades have seen the launch and explosion of Goldsmith's *UbuWeb*,[12] a digital archive of all things avant-garde; Northwestern University Press published *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* as part of their Avant-Garde and Modernism series; *Contemporary Literature* published an article by Craig Dworkin entitled "The Imaginary Solution"; Jerome McGann launched a lab dedicated to Applied Research in Patacriticism;[13] and *Open Letter* published a special issue on Canadian 'Pataphysics.[14] Some of the main concepts taken up by poetic avant-gardes from 'pataphysics are the notion of equivalence, the idea of the clinamen, and a belief in absurdity. Equivalence has come to represent the idea that one "solution" is not more correct than another; they are all equally imaginary.[15] The clinamen, a term Jarry appropriates from Lucretius, is the small swerve or derivation any atom can make that means nothing is repeatable and things can happen accidentally.[16] Lastly, contemporary poets latch on to 'pataphysics' absurdity: their modes of engagement are exaggeration, parody, and mockery, which they employ to showcase the arbitrariness of certain ways of thinking. In short, beginning with what Beaumont has called

a "Jarry revival,"[17] North American poets have been participating in 'pataphysical practices, whether that be in the conflation of chance and constraint seen in the work of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage, the procedurality and scientific precision of Ron Silliman or Christian Bök, the attention to the combinatory possibilities of the alphabet in Steve McCaffery, or the creation of virtual textual spaces by Brian Kim Stefans.[18]

This post-war flowering of 'pataphysical enterprises might be no surprise given their affinity with postmodernist sensibilities.[19] Indeed, despite the small amount of critical work on Jarry's 'pataphysics, similarities between Jarry, Derrida, and the Nietzsche of *The Gay Science* have been outlined (see Barker). I argue, however, that Jarry might more appropriately be seen as a literary forerunner to Paul Feyerabend, who argued against adhering to any specific method or theory, whether that be a "gay science" or deconstruction. In Feyerabend's last letter, he writes:

> It is very important not to let this suspicion *deteriorate into a truth*, or a theory, for example into a theory with the principle: things are never what they seem to be. Reality, or Being, or God, or whatever it is that sustains us cannot be captured that easily. The problem is not why we are so often confused; the problem is why we seem to possess useful and enlightening knowledge. (qtd. in Feyerband xvi, emphasis added)

"Deteriorate into a truth" gets at the heart of Feyerabend's critique: all truth claims are false—even that one—and to assume their truth is to deteriorate. We might summarize this view with the help of a popular sign at political rallies: "If your beliefs fit on a sign, think harder." The irony of the sign—that the statement itself fits on the sign—captures a 'pataphysical sentiment that is not simply a performative contradiction. When considering 'pataphysics, we must always remember Jarry's clinamen, that acts as a constant disturbant behind the "sign" of his science.

Rather than arguing over whether or not it is possible for poetry to establish new linguistic orders (as many contemporary poets attempt, or claim, to do) or avoid any political valence whatsoever, 'pataphysical texts re-imagine, through various formal tactics, the ideologies, bias, and predilections of existing discourses. 'Pataphysical texts do not attempt to escape or disrupt ideology, but rather expose the political and aesthetic aspects of language, which close readings show are always intertwined. Instead of using language in non-normative ways that disrupt its complicity in capitalism, phallocentrism or any other *ism*, 'pataphysical poetry participates in a Foucauldian enterprise where "[ideology] always stands in virtual opposition to something else

which is supposed to count as truth," but "the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault 60).

Even if the relation between Jarry's 'pataphysics and Farrell's *The Inkblot Record* is imaginary, reading the text *as if* it were real allows us to situate it within the contemporary moment and within a literary past. 'Pataphysics can help critics of contemporary poetry account for the political importance of texts that neither attempt to instigate social change directly nor assert that poetry holds power only because of its (imaginary) status outside politics. Farrell's poetic does not claim a "revolution of the word" or of the world. Farrell's text performs an irreversible clinimatic swerve within those structures. Just as the sentences that comprise *The Inkblot Record* can never be completely severed from their original context, once read in this book, neither can those sentences ever again be seen outside of its context. By showing that the same linguistic data can be used to very different ends, the book reveals the arbitrariness and mutability of our view of any data. *The Inkblot Record* not only "lays bare the device," but playfully enacts the art of (re)devising.

NOTES

1 Flarf began as a listserv of the Flarfist collective in 2001. Initial members included Nada Gordon, K. Silem Mohammad, and Gary Sullivan. Flarfists use the Internet as a source text, entering strange combinations of terms into search engines to garner unusual, and often inappropriate or offensive outcomes. For a brief introduction see the Flarf feature in *Jacket* 30 and Kenneth Goldsmith's "Introduction to Flarf vs. Conceptual Writing." For an excellent critique of Flarfist techniques see Dan Hoy's "The Virtual Dependency of the Post-Avant and the Problematics of Flarf: What Happens when Poets Spend Too Much Time Fucking Around on the Internet." In poetry, New Formalism began in the 1980s with writers that called for a return to older forms that emphasized rhyme and metre. See Monroe K. Spear's "The Poetics of the New Formalism." In my mind, Flarf and New Formalism represent two reactions to the problem of form in contemporary poetics. Flarfists take the "form" of the Internet and evacuate it of all meaning—turning it into a game and using it as a venue for low jokes. New Formalism has reacted in the opposite way, arguing that the only way to reclaim poetic form in a meaningful way is to return to older understandings of form.

2 Although *Exploits and Opinions* was written in 1898, it was not published until 1911, ful-filling Jarry's postscript: "This book will not be published integrally until the author has acquired sufficient experience to savor all its beauties in full" (Jarry, "Notes" 136).

3 N. Katherine Hayles uses a similar example in *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and*

Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century to explain the current scientific moment we are in: "Imagine, for example, that we are sitting in a diner, waiting for a hamburger. In the ordinary view the plate, knife and fork, and ketchup bottle are 'real,' while the pattern they form is a transitory artifact of their relative positions. But suppose that we were to shift our perspective so that we regarded the *pattern* as 'real,' and the ketchup bottle, plate, knife, and fork as merely temporary manifestations of that particular pattern" (19). She argues that this shift in worldview is comparable to the change in perspective caused when Copernicus proved that the Earth was not the centre of the universe. This shift, including trends in science such as quantum mechanics, is evidence of the world becoming more 'pataphysically minded.

4 Jarry was part of an anti-positivist reaction to science around the turn of the twentieth century, which Beaumont says had three main critiques: "Firstly, the movement questioned the methods of science, pointing out (a) that science deals not in certitudes but merely in useful hypotheses containing a greater or lesser degree of 'probability'; and (b) that science deals not in literal descriptions but in 'working models' or 'symbols' of reality. Secondly, it questioned the equation of 'reality' with the merely scientifically observable and measurable, arguing that it is only a part of total reality which is accessible to such observation and measurement. Thirdly, it questioned the doctrine of epistemological realism (or 'naïve realism')—the view accepted, at least implicitly, by the great majority of scientifically-minded thinkers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, that through our senses we perceive the world exactly *as it is*" (190-91).

5 Although the way that the Rorschach test has been administered has changed over time, those who administer the test typically ask any number of stock questions and use the same ten stock inkblots. *The Inkblot Record*'s paratext frames the book around the systematic questioning of an imagined examiner. The back cover reads, "What do you see? Why? What would it be? What was the difference? What might that reflect in your life? What made you think of that? What kind of an animal is it? What in the card gave the impression of mice? What about this part? What's the connection? What gave you that impression? What do you mean by that? What do you mean? What do they remind you of? What does that make you think of? What does that call to mind? What does it remind you of? Was this part of it? Shape too? Only shape? Nothing else? Is the sex organ male or female? Is there anything else about them? Is it big or small? Is it a face? How much of the face do you see? How do you see it? For example? Do you see more than the profile in any of these? Do you have any special reason for calling them bears? Do they seem alive? Do they have anything to do with each other? Does it look like it's moving? Could you tell what gives that feeling? Anything else?"

6 Some exemplary poets that Dworkin addresses in his essay are Kenneth Goldsmith, Douglas Huebler, Darren Wershler-Henry, Christian Bök, and Judith Goldman.

7 Beaumont writes, "To read ['pataphysics] as a 'serious' attempt to affirm 'beliefs,' new or old, would be a total misunderstanding of Jarry's purpose" (199). Although here Beaumont is specifically referring to the last chapter of *Faustroll,* he makes the same argument for the book (and 'pataphysics) in general.

8 Dworkin notes, "part of Farrell's larger project has been to chart the psychological matrix of capitalism, and the ways in which even the most scientific discourses, with all of their cultural authority and supposed objectivity, are of course socially constructed and implicated" (42).

9 The validity and usefulness of the Rorschach test has been widely debated. See James M. Wood, M. Teresa Nezworski, and William J. Stejskal's "The Comprehensive System for the Rorschach: A Critical Examination."

10 For another example of this phenomenon, see Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day.*

11 See Marjorie Perloff's recent *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century,* which deals specifically with texts that rely heavily on citation.

12 The "Ubu" of *UbuWeb* is a direct reference to Jarry's most famous character, star of his *Ubu Rex, Ubu Cuckolded* and *Ubu Enchained.*

13 See http://www.patacriticism.org. Last accessed December 2010. The website is currently unavailable, but can be seen via http://web.archive.org at http://web.archive.org/web/20100526163417/http://www.patacriticism.org/index2.html.

14 Canadian poets have had the most sustained and intimate engagement with 'pataphysics and their influence cannot be overestimated. For more on Canadian 'Pataphysics and the TRG, see McCaffery and bpNichol's *Rational Geomancy*. For a critical view on the subject, see Jaeger's *ABC of Reading TRG.*

15 The rationalization for the title of *Rational Geomancy* is telling of this idea's influence: "We mean by Rational Geomancy the acceptance of a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature. There can be no absolute inter-pretation (i.e., system of alignment) for the geomantic view of literature sees interpretation as any system of alignment, any organization and/or reorganization of those energy pat-terns. As we shall see later interpretation of this kind is equivalent to both a reading and a writing upon the ground of all literature" (153).

16 For a more extensive discussion of the clinamen, see Bök 43-45 and Warren F. Motte Jr.'s "Clinamen Redux." "Clinamen" has become a central term for several poets, most notably Steve McCaffery and Joan Retallack.

17 The introduction to Beaumont's *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* is entitled "The Jarry Revival."

18 For more examples of poets who might be classified more loosely as 'pataphysical see Charles Bernstein's syllabi for his graduate courses "Unsettling the Word: The Attack of the Difficult Poems (The Aversive Poetics of Estrangement, Disturbance, Expropriation, Abnormality and the Pataqueerical)" and "Poetry Ordinary and Extraordinary: The Pataque(e)rics of Everyday Life." Bernstein introduced his recent coinage, "pataqueerical," at the Rethinking Poetics conference at Columbia University in 2010.

19 Although the difference (or not) between modernism and postmodernism is constantly under dispute, Jarry's pseudoscience falls more in line with the popular understanding of postmodernism.

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