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Dead poem office / David Prater.

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# Dead Poem Office



1977  
1978  
1979

AG09/174173

**DEAD POEM OFFICE**

Kate's Photograph  
Xanana's Dog  
The Sprawl  
Thomas Pynchon & the Art of Anonymity Maintenance  
A Photographer's Wet Dream  
Cars  
[       ]  
Last Night Betty  
America  
Slam!  
Peppercorn Rent  
Black G.S.T.  
Funeral For Democracy  
Dead Poem Office  
The Boys Who  
Run Lola Run  
Leaves of Glass  
That's Buddha

FOR ADRIAN

## KATE'S PHOTOGRAPH

this photograph is of kate running away  
from the camera (from me?) as i hold  
the camera to my eye, chasing  
a collage of colliding bright flames  
fading into the lake as backdrop  
frozen still —

"the shutter shuttered, i shudder  
in the cold morning," running away  
from the camera, running like a  
riptide (running, so i could never —

so i took it just to catch her  
for an instant:

one leg caught in floating mid- air...)

running ... in the ice-cold morning i saw  
her face in the mirror reflected  
and the railroad tracks at the bayside  
clack ing by in st ut ter ed neg a tiv es

## XANANA'S DOG

You can call me Xanana's dog but  
You can't run from my lapping tongue; please  
Say a prayer for Xanana's dog but  
Don't you dare tell them where I am.

They can't find Xanana Gusmao, though  
They search the church for him, crying:  
"Where did he go, where is Xanana?" So  
They arrest me, because I'm Xanana's little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,  
In the day remember, asleep at night forget me but  
In the day remember that I am Xanana's dog.

Free Xanana!

They chain me up, but I'm Xanana's little dog;  
They set me on fire, but I'm Xanana's little dog;  
They call me names, but I'm Xanana's little dog;  
They beat me and try to make me speak but I am only a little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,  
In the day remember, asleep at night forget and  
In the day remember.

Trouble comes for Xanana's little dog;  
Java comes for Xanana's little dog;  
East Timor says goodbye to Xanana's little dog—  
"Goodbye, Xanana's little dog!"

Xanana, Xanana Gusmao!

Please help me, I am only a little dog!

## THE SPRAWL

To bring it back to rock 'n roll influences, when I was writing Neuromancer,  
I'm pretty sure I was listening to Springsteen's Nebraska & thinking  
'OK, it's not hotrods, it's computers'.

**WILLIAM GIBSON**

i grew up in a shotgun row / sliding down the hill /  
out front were the big machines / steel & rusty now i guess

**KIM GORDON**

springsteen i'm on fire cutting slack down the line down the wire from atlantic  
city where the girls are so pretty they wear makeup & pretty red shoes let's call  
them all betty lost in a sprawl of their own perfecting threads of knotted hair &  
that wow! expression

betty's waiting but bruce doesn't show up though he left a note that read put  
your jacket on because the long sprawl nights are getting cold she's beside a  
railway track disused since the whole world went cable wobbly old lines rusted  
no cabooses for who knows how many years bruce

bruce where are you man she needs you badly now the sprawl's got into the  
water supply there & folks are talking about fluoride again bruce get your arse in  
here take that tape out of your back pocket time to play it man don't be sly

there's a girl waiting outside in the cold for you let's call her betty she's standing  
next to the cypherpunk graffiti having just finished her shift at the diner & she's  
wondering whether you'd be up for a drive down by the old wooden bridge  
remember the place you used to go when she was your high school sweetheart

she's still got the ring and your last payslip you left it in the envelope when you  
bolted with the money that was going to be for her college education you had it  
all figured out she'd continue working her shifts & you'd keep sending her little  
payslips to let her know you were saving up for that mansion on the hill

but then something happened bruce the little payslips stopped coming the bed  
got cold she got sad she began to forget the feeling of your stubble against her  
shoulder shunted off to another yard now even the ring slipped off her finger  
because her hands were too cold in that cold single bed in her uncle's cold house



she's never been on an aeroplane bruce but she's telling everyone she meets  
that you're coming back for her when the light burns bright in august no she  
hasn't started walking down that road yet she's still waiting for the chiming  
guitars to kick in and that bloodcurdling scream to issue from your mouth bruce

the radio relay towers send the love buzz down through the aerial & out the tiny  
speaker now the sound gushes into her pelvic region broadcasting its own signals  
uncannily 80s & the fog rolls in bringing rumours of the closure of the very last  
automobile factory steel mill timber yard & nomination for presidency

bruce why did you do that why didn't you give the republicans a murder song  
instead too late now for the forty one shots they've already been fired the  
smoke's cleared leaving a bleak industrial landscape coloured metallic blue  
complete with one or two dogs & a telegraph pole tilted at forty five degrees

here comes betty again with that make-up on & hair real pretty & bruce is  
singing maybe every thing that dies some day comes back but she's lost in the  
sprawl of smoke your cigarette sends pluming into the atmosphere as the car  
blasts straight towards

THOMAS PYNCHON & THE ART OF  
ANONYMITY MAINTENANCE

the choice of sunglasses is impor-*tant*  
but on the maple leaf? ray-bans are out  
too miami vice ... beetle specs no dead  
giveaway (tint in sunlight) chem-mart?

anonymous average ok collared shirt  
i'd prefer a gaudy hunter s thompson  
hawaiian no. but beige is a city colour  
camouflage same with pants & as for  
loafers? i shudder ... afraid so ... dumb

haircut also necessary a weekday's truly  
impenetrable disguise thus my surprised  
& anxious fury in the bright

— click!

i shouted

fuck you pal! on my way back to Macey's  
but on reflection maybe the cheap fucking  
sunglasses did give me away after all.

## A PHOTOGRAPHER'S WET DREAM

ah! luang prabang ancient capital unesco  
world heritage magnificently preserved  
in pristine condition please bring cameras  
film & kleenex for the mop-up /click! &  
we're off through the view-finder: monks  
kiddies grannies trannies ripe for developing  
when you get back to your secret laboratory  
national geographic are definitely interested  
oh i'm spent! /i'm spent again! / how the stock  
churns like spectators through a turnstile!  
i can feel it! the money shot's in my sights!  
i'm getting warmer now! i can't hold off much —  
oh!

— click /click

/jesus! —

click /click

— oh!

another kleenex moment

## CARS

*for Bruce Beaver*

surfacing breathless  
in the peaceful domain  
from the tunnel like dogs  
a sax's sporadic coughs of sound  
beneath these great figs spread their roots  
like fingers digging into sand or dirt  
or a bridge sinking into memory

now the cars come out  
green water sloshes —  
a bell rings suddenly  
in alarm  
then stops  
another grumble

Jazz

you stenciled it on the page  
i saw eternity written on the floor in chalk  
as the train plummeted towards the city  
the lines looped, joining like belts  
my buckled notes & letters

cars spluttering  
shade & sunlight wavering  
in the astonished green water  
like your words

Jazz

domains of sound  
a moving ferry

& someone walking past.

1

2

3

4

5

6

- 
1. a poem never written or sent
  2. by the bay
  3. lackadaisical
  4. meaning unknown
  5. too smart for its own good (trans.)
  6. remember

## LAST NIGHT BETTY

last night betty went down to the river & never came back  
she put on her old black leather boots put her shit in a bag  
left a note saying once you start living there's no running back  
left the radio on left the dishes to dry in a rack

last night betty went down to the cane fields & never came back  
stuck her thumb in the general direction of love on a map  
left a note saying don't believe bruce i'm not giving him jack  
left a sign in her window & thereby invited attacks

last night betty went down to the railroad & never came back  
put her demons on notice i'm taking my memories back  
said goodbye to the river her lover her tiny red shack  
left a note saying now i believe that my organs are black

last night betty went down to the highway & never came back  
took a walk past the pits & the black tire marks on the track  
whistling as she covered my grave with a heel & some trash  
took her shoes off & trudged through the glass out the back

last night betty went down to the phone booth & never came back  
left the note in her pocket & promised to call me right back  
last seen dropping a coin in the slot & then turning her back  
turn away from the circling birds & the modern world cracks

## AMERICA

please  
do  
not  
put  
anything  
into  
this  
toilet  
unless  
you  
have  
eaten  
it  
first

SLAM!

hell-bent spent relentless immune  
to the edicts of the so-called poetic government WHAM!  
this is your legs-up honey  
pass me a barrel of small press

engage enrage camouflage your age  
croon to stare off the so-called block blues BAM!  
last drinks mud-guts  
get off my new page

intuit don't do it live through it  
canonise free speech & so-called soft blades SHAZAM!  
wake down spring picket  
coz this old mike just blew it

emote devote or free float  
pretend until the very so-called end & then SLAM!  
into the bright superstructure of now  
but please just make it matter people —

they'd be grateful for it.



## PEPPERCORN RENT

Well, to be honest with you, I'm not Prepared to provide any references. No, not at this stage. They haven't Been model tenants, exactly. Rent Is always late & often in the shape of trees I don't need, if it gets paid at all. We're still trying to reconcile the account as we speak. Then there was the sub-letting, which led to all kinds of complications, as you can imagine. In the end we had to go to the tribunal in order to have them evicted & the locks changed, though what good that's done, I'm not sure. Just shipping the problem elsewhere, hence your call, I suppose. But as I hope you'll understand, we've been swamped with these sorts of requests Recently, so I'd ask for your patience With regards the paperwork & such. The fax isn't working, I'm afraid. You should receive our reply by January next but then there's Liberation Day & the parade. It's good to know some People still bother to make checks, observe procedures, ask permission, follow orders. Have a nice day, okay?

## BLACK G.S.T.

- \_\_\_% of childhood.
- \_\_\_% of country.
- \_\_\_% of memory.
- \_\_\_% of hope.
- \_\_\_% of laughter lines.
- \_\_\_% of dots.
- \_\_\_% of uranium, bauxite and aluminium.
- \_\_\_% of cowboys.
- \_\_\_% of dance.
- \_\_\_% of saltwater crocodiles.
- \_\_\_% of totems.
- \_\_\_% of Canberra.
- \_\_\_% of your head.
- \_\_\_% of Charles Darwin.
- \_\_\_% of protectors.
- \_\_\_% of peppercorn trees.
- \_\_\_% of truth.
- \_\_\_% of dignity.
- \_\_\_% of black armbands.
- \_\_\_% of Tiwi.
- \_\_\_% of Albert Namatjira.
- \_\_\_% of football.
- \_\_\_% of Wimbledon.
- \_\_\_% of gold.
- \_\_\_% of language.
- \_\_\_% of Lowitja O'Donoghue.
- \_\_\_% of Hindmarsh Bridge.
- \_\_\_% of white guilt.
- \_\_\_% of deaths in custody.
- \_\_\_% of Uluru.
- \_\_\_% of Arthur Tunstall.
- \_\_\_% of running.
- \_\_\_% of petrol.
- \_\_\_% of Michael Long's feet.

- \_\_\_% of Rumbalara.
- \_\_\_% of Ruby Hunter.
- \_\_\_% of gum trees.
- \_\_\_% of clean water.
- \_\_\_% of immunisation.
- \_\_\_% of dreaming.
- \_\_\_% of Captain Cook.
- \_\_\_% of terra nullius.
- \_\_\_% of historians.
- \_\_\_% of talkback.
- \_\_\_% of little things.
- \_\_\_% of crying.
- \_\_\_% of big things.
- \_\_\_% of sorry.
- \_\_\_% of reconciliation.
- \_\_\_% of stolen wealth.
- \_\_\_% of everything.

## FUNERAL FOR DEMOCRACY

Summer revolution, flowers in your  
Air. Nike sweatshops. You are here:

be there. For Pericles' printable  
version of our democracy just died.

Come & join the funeral, bring a Lotus.  
Or your own war dead. We have

shredded our constitution like ham.  
I don't take the peace movement

seriously. Then again as a National  
Security Analyst I might be wrong

& so I tell it like it used to be, with  
a cortege of (Shit, the Fourth Reich's

on at the following Florida venues!  
A page has been torn from our torso,

I swing high my own private drive.  
Democracy's dead. The hand brake's –

## DEAD POEM OFFICE

I read the last rites over your submission today  
& since our procedures have been streamlined  
I'm delighted & at the same time proud to say  
That we've found a place for your poetry here.

Give us your poems & in several years' time  
We'll give you an idea of death's landscapes.  
Redundant rhymes, image, metaphor sublime:  
Your four line stanzas, our grim burial plots.

Taking a rejection personally is well-advised.  
That's why we never say no to anything sent.  
Our acceptance procedures have been revised:  
Please note in case of future correspondence.

Simultaneous submissions remain unwelcome  
As we pride ourselves on our unique position  
Within the mortuary canon. Flattery seldom  
Impresses as much as genuine humility does.

On behalf of our hard-working gravediggers  
Congratulations once again on your success.  
In future issues, as our catalogue gets bigger,  
May we transcend our obsessions with death.

## THE BOYS WHO

The boy who wanted to be a film director. The boy who vomited at his tenth birthday party. The boy who smiles at dead rainbows. The boy who cries. The boy whose mother won't kiss him goodnight. The boy who wouldn't grow up. The boy who disappeared. The boy who got shot at. The boy who never left. The boy who said the boy who looks after all his sisters is a girl. The boy who had no sisters. The boy who kissed his best friend's sister. The boy who missed out on kisses. The boy who runs. The boy who drew spirals on his wrist. The boys who swam across the river. The boy who followed them never made it back. The boy who travelled there. The boy who dreams. The boy who was a girl. The boy who bellows. The boy who finds god. The boy who suddenly thought he was god. The boy who draws pictures of god that look like nuts. The boy who was a nut. The boy who invented peanut Butter. The boy who ate crocodiles. The boy who lied in his sleep. The boy who'd sell his own aunt for a peanut. The boy who understood French movies. The boy who thought he was a French movie & later turned out to be right. The boy who tried to fly to the moon. The boy who he met when he got there. The boy who met boys out the front of the movies offering peanuts. The boy who'd seen it all was mistaken because he hadn't yet seen the boy who sees boys who say they've seen it all. The boy who insists on wearing white shoes. The boy who likes to steal white shoes. The boy whose shoes were once white. The boy who tried to eat peanuts but didn't know he was allergic to peanuts. The boy who offered them to him was very sorry. The boy who died never knew he was sorry. The boy who did it never did it again. The boy who wanted to be the film director never grew up to find out who did become the boy who wants to be the boy who after all.

## RUN LOLA RUN

why do you cry run lola run  
does pain cause it (lola runs  
are your eyes leaking & lola  
why do you run lola runner  
in a hallway run crying lola  
after me crying run in pain  
caused by lola running lola  
ran away from pain & cried  
why does pain cause it lola  
runs away run lola run run  
as fast as you can cry lola's  
running away from me her  
tears running down cheeks  
(lola why are you running  
is it me lola run who causes  
it who caused it lola run  
run lola why do you cry as  
you run & why am i crying  
lola keeps on running as the  
movie camera tracks her  
tears running on & on lola  
why lola why do you cry &  
does pain cause it lola runs  
why she runs i cry run lola  
run lola run cause me pain  
lola never again lola never  
run lola run to me lola run  
as fast as you can lola runs  
back to me backwards lola  
why do you run lola away  
lola run away are you that  
runaway on the radio lola  
run lola run why do we cry  
lola don't run lola - walk

## LEAVES OF GLASS

summers angles false starts hits trail a fuselage of painted mist  
the leaves & seasons glue assist suspension under glass portraits

snails delay hollowly all along convex carpets of autumns soft  
crackle as the lens sends back fortitude in the shape of bells

winter kills the leaves of glass passing from time to liquidity  
an abstract class a new botanics snakes in an inkwell timbre

these yes more shaded areas where spring sells dynamite &  
sodden memory engines rhyme automated slices of yesterday

lines formed by horizons clutch at rain drops soft pleasant hells  
pealing sentience from mechanics tending their hydraulic shifts

whose stare disrupts the unguent on the sky made up like drought  
these more yes besides the wheel was rounder in those days

questions served a function yet the day he decided to drive away  
shards upended ceaseless sharp hollow clouds hovered over him

slow as seasons eaves or darts beneath roads plovers throttled  
subtle crickets bat migrations dopplering their fearless trill

besides this ecstatic twilights rate highly glints in a web of  
sugar strings times changer shellbursts oblivion to barriers

walls transparent objects whirr with uninterrupted mass gravity  
steps on painted glasses coats the shining bottles empty of air



## THAT'S BUDDHA

When it rains non-stop for twenty four hours,  
that's Buddha.

Both the rain and the ending of the rain,  
after which the freshness is Buddha, too.

When you walk beside the lake,  
Buddha is in the water, disguised as a golden cow.

Both the lake and the camera you use  
to take a picture of the cow are Buddha.

*It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.  
That's also Buddha.*

When the cooks at the dumpling restaurant  
laugh at the way you eat your food, that's Buddha.

When graffiti walls disappear overnight, only  
to be replaced by acres of bricks, that's Buddha.

*It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.  
That's Buddha.*

When you dance, Buddha is your DJ.  
When you kiss, it's Buddha's tongue inside your mouth.

When you fall in love, you will find Buddha  
sitting on a small cushion inside your heart, eating KFC.

Are you ready?

*It begins to feel as if everything is Buddha.  
That's also Buddha.*

*That's Buddha.*

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This chapbook (whose title is based upon REM's collection of b-sides, *Dead Letter Office*) is a companion to my debut poetry collection, *We Will Disappear* (soi3, 2007). Visit the publisher's website for full details: [www.papertigermedia.com](http://www.papertigermedia.com).

Cover image: *Sand dispenser, Sapporo* (2006).