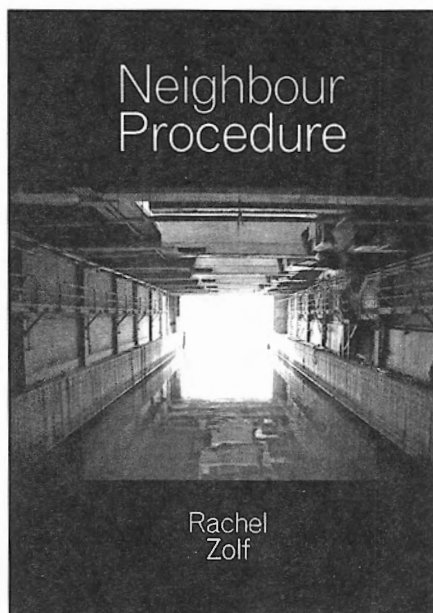


REVIEWS

Neighbour Procedure

Rachel Zolf

Coach House, 2010



*Shoot and Weep:
Horror at the
Heart of Divinity*

Review by Nikki Reimer

RACHEL ZOLF'S *NEIGHBOUR PROCEDURE* ushers the reader through the "horror at the heart of divinity." In a blurb on the back of *NP*, Judith Butler writes, "something happens to poetry in

these pages, so I no longer know what precisely poetry is or can be." In these pages, poetry acts, enacts, sets up and then blows apart a discourse of war; reading it unsettled me. Zolf's poetry exposes the following fallacious ideas: that there is a disparate *us* and *them*, that the subject position of witness or writer is an innocent one, that language is safe. Language is not and has never been safe. Or neutral, as Dionne Brand has taught us. "If every breath of fresh air is a border" (Zolf) then the act of taking a breath is charged with political significance. A border is a word that enacts what it says; a border is a speech act.

'Shoot and Weep,' Zolf instructs at the beginning, and in reading *NP* we are implicated in the shooting that happens in the pages, the carnage that ensues, and we may well be moved to weep. In this book, Zolf works procedurally with language, intertext, translation and the concept of the neighbour as a productive third term. She has spoken elsewhere about her idea of "the neighbour" as a possible alternate subject position (one which she ultimately rejected), akin to a witness, aside from friend or enemy, which may be brought to bear upon a disaster that exceeds representation. In this work, Zolf explores the relationship between Israel and Palestine, though relationship is an imprecise term for the ongoing hostilities and propaganda of war. In Zolf's *Afterthought* at the back of the book, she mentions, from the *Breaking the Silence: Israeli Soldiers Talk About the Occupied Territories* website, that a soldier described the "neighbour procedure"—the IDF use of Palestinians as human shields, including forcing Palestinians to break walls inside their neighbours' homes, so that the army can move literally through the walls from house to house." Who is the neighbour in this procedure? S/he is neither friend nor enemy, though s/he could be either.

The book begins with "*A priori*," a series of conjunctions or suppositions that build upon each other to ultimately suggest, "the truth does not lie in silence:"

"If jihad is the first word learned"

"If the space between two words can be bridged"

"If the planes return safely"

"If you are Hamas"

"Did not participate in hostilities" lists exactly that: what civilians were doing when they were killed. "When she approached the barrier, (w)hile flying a kite at the beach, (w)hen he picked grass for his flock" etc. This listing speaks both to the horrors and to the everyday banalities of occupation. In "*Grievable*," as Zolf notes in the *Afterthought*, she invokes

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Judith Butler and Frederico Garcia Lorca in a naming of the individuals whose circumstances of death is replayed in "Did not participate . . ." The list of names signifies a horror at lives wasted and implicitly questions whether some lives are more grievable than others, yet there is also a poetic beauty in the sound of the names and the look of them upon the page. The poem "The capacity to give names"

reminds us that power is intrinsic to naming and that violence is inherent in renaming: "consumed," "demolished," "snuffed," "extinguished," "devoured," "lay waste to," "struck at the heart of," "ravaged...with fire and sword."

Biblical verses, Hebrew letters and Arabic numerals are variously inserted, rewritten and voiced throughout the book, as Zolf's "mad affects" erupt and destabilize what we thought we knew of Israel and Palestine. Current global politic, too, is implicated, when the "(n)ighbour renews itself in the inexhaustible/Violence a sudden address of oil," which to me echoed ongoing conflicts over oil and of course the destruction in the Mexican Gulf.

"How could we have failed to be grotesque?" Zolf asks, and how are we to respond? We are grotesque! We are variously informed, destabilized and implicated in "scenes of Biblical destruction." We have learned that "loss has made a tenuous we." And we know "they caught us with our pants down." Or "(s)omeone walks on your feet. It's Dada...Dada Dalai Lama, Buddha, Bible and Nietzsche...(s) old in the museum in homage to Duchamp/I am here accidentally." Absurdity abounds, to make us laugh and/or cry.

Dense, intense, political but never polemical, Rachel Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure* is a tough, powerful, thought-provoking work.

Citations

Breaking the Silence: Israeli Soldiers Talk About the Occupied Territories. <http://www.shovrimshatika.org/index_e.asp>

Brand, Dionne. *No Language is Neutral*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990.

Zolf, Rachel. *Neighbour Procedure*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2010.

All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy

Jack Torrance

(Edited by Phil Buehler)

www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/512660



Review by derek beaulieu.

IN *All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy*, Phil Buehler attempts to document, assemble and continue Jack Torrance's manuscript from Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film *The Shining*.

Conceptually, recreating Torrance's manuscript from the few frames of film shown playfully concretizes the fictional output of a fictional character. Only a few pages of the manuscript are revealed in *The Shining*, but every page consists wholly and entirely of the phrase "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" repeated ad infinitum over a presumably several-

hundred-page manuscript. Shelley Duvall's character, in the filmic reveal of Torrance's creative masterpiece, emotionally collapses as she finally realizes the extent of her husband's crumbling sanity. Under the mental anguish of the Sisyphean task of nonlinearity, Torrance's grip on reality is weakened, much as readers reject the strain of such a non-traditional manuscript.

Buehler suggests that novels formed entirely from the materiality of "work" without the "play" of narrative are inherently "dull" both to the reader and the author, refuting Cagean ideas of repetition and reiteration. Kenneth Goldsmith argues the resultant text—if chosen and constructed well—will eschew the "dull" and the "boring" alike. Unshackled from the plot of the film, the page-based representation of Torrance's cinematic failed "novel" is a metatextual commentary on the interplay between text and page, between confessionalism and conceptualism and between procedurality and intentionality. While *The Shining* suggests that Torrance's insanity was the result of alcoholism and the influence of the Overlook Hotel itself, *All Work* presents an obsessive text which documents how the interplay between linearity and nonlinearity sent the author into a mental tailspin.

All Work problematizes the interplay between text and author. The manuscript is no longer the fictional output of a fictional character; it has become as "real" as any other novel. Metaphorically, Torrance achieves presence only through the publication of his novel, just as writers only occupy the role of writer when they publish. Writers are only writers when they write; when they cease to write, they cease to exist.

The labour of writing defines a writer's existence despite Torrance's dictum that "all work and no play" will denigrate the writer into a "dull boy." Paradoxically, *All Work*