

Number that cannot be another—which must also be the zero figuring the void around which his sevens roll—goes beyond both neomedievalism and algorithmic conceptualism in its implicit signing of the poem into the physical universe.

Two footnotes on ambiguous types of seven seem an appropriate conclusion. Meillassoux writes that the “Septentrion” of *Coup de dés* is the Little Bear, which contains seven stars, including the Pole. But more commonly, and etymologically, it is the seven stars of the Plough (*septem-triones*, seven plough oxen) in the Great Bear, which point to the Pole. So there is a knowing doubleness to “*le Septentrion aussi Nord*” revealed by Mallarmé’s final page. There is also the fact, not mentioned by Meillassoux, that every throw of a die results in seven, if you add the upper and lower faces together. The “sacred” figure of 707 may therefore also symbolize that “modicum of absoluteness” no combination of pips can abolish.

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Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. 319pp. \$39.95

Burning City: Poems of Metropolitan Modernity. Edited by Jed Rasula and Tim Conley. South Bend, IN: Action Books, 2012. 574pp. \$25

In the past several years, as the historical avant-garde hit parade celebrates centennial after centennial, many works have bounced through copyright Plinko into the public domain, and others will soon follow. But this hardly makes the “retrieval” of the avant-garde archive a *fait accompli*. Large swaths of the cultural field never entered effectively into literary marketplaces, and even cultishly celebrated works seem to fall perpetually out of print. As Jed Rasula writes in his introduction to *Burning City: Poems of Metropolitan Modernity*, “The lack of ready (and readily comparative) access to many texts has left a conspicuous gap in awareness of early twentieth-century avant-garde poetry as a shared encounter with the phenomena of metropolitan modernity.” Like Pound’s Mauberley, many a poet is forever risking a “final / exclusion from the world of letters.” Or to put it another way: at every revival for some Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a forlorn Alfred Richard Meyer or Farfa nurses a forgotten ode to the “Newyorkcocktail” in the corner.

The idea of a “final / exclusion” from this phantom canon largely conforms to print culture’s restrictive scales of production and protocols of

obsolescence. To some degree, digital apostles have sought to undermine these logics by hastening what Johanna Drucker calls “that terrifying but very real prospect”: “the migration of our cultural legacy into electronic environments.” While promising avenues of access (the Modernist Journals Project, Ubuweb, etc.) amalgamate public archives of innovative poetics, they struggle to marry expanded availability to models of cultural valuation fit for the info-glut era. Perhaps the work of collecting, organizing, and displaying the Modernist archive, far from being over, is only just beginning. Do literary Modernism’s cumulative self-imaginings belong in museums? In mausoleums? In anthologies? On servers? A century after the event of Modernism, how can we stake out a position beyond Walter Benjamin’s collector, whose Utopian compensations for historical loss arrive at the exclamation: “We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to ‘assembly’”?

Two new books provide strikingly different answers to such questions. Rasula and Tim Conley’s *Burning City* offers an ambitiously international anthology of Western vanguard poetry between 1909 and 1939. It is organized into 574 pages of clusters or “galleries,” some focusing on major metropolises (Paris and New York among them) and others grouped into more rarefied dossiers: “Aviograms,” “Chaplinades,” and “Electric Man.” Jeremy Braddock’s *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, emphasizing the same period, chronicles collecting as one of the preeminent aesthetic practices of (largely anglophone) Modernist poets and art patrons. Both books rightly begin from a serious consideration of Modernism’s own, indigenous systems of collection and display. Yet they clash productively over what it means to anthologize Modernism, then and now. Braddock’s historical account of the rise and fall of Modernism’s “interventionist literary anthology” provides a historical lineage for Rasula’s experiments with its impossible revival.

Braddock claims that the “interventionist” anthology, beginning with F. T. Marinetti and Paolo Buzzi’s *I poeti futuristi* in Milan, with Georgian Poetry in London, and with Ezra Pound’s *Des Imagistes* in London and New York, joins the “privately assembled, publicly exhibited art collection” as a preeminent Modernist aesthetic practice. While the acuity of this argument relies in part on intermedial comparison, Braddock’s work on Modernist anthologies deserves its own spotlight. Such anthologies (including those of the Futurist, Imagist, and Spectra hoax coteries, *Others*, *The Lyric Year*, and the radical social anthologies of Nancy Cunard and Alain Locke) cannot be caricatured as hierophantic consecrators of prestige nor as defenders of canonical distinction. Instead, with the Greek Anthology as a signal light and Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury* as the rocky shoals, the interventionist anthology assumed that positive artistic involvement in social life was possible, and that

it might even transform the future—or at least the literary marketplace. These anthologies invented literary history at its beginnings, rather than reviewing it compulsively from a place of completion.

Braddock locates twin termini for the heyday of the interventionist anthology in Pound's fascistic *Profile* (1932), with its extreme, out-of-touch subjectivism, and Cunard's communist *Negro* (1934), with its failure of faith in the political potentials of poetry (devoting only 11 of 460 pages to poems). According to Braddock, the failure of anthologies to "secure a patrimony" for poetry equal to the museum pushed literary Modernism into the surrogate, institutional roost of the University Archive. This doesn't quite seem like the right causal claim, and so Braddock adds that this failure was only partially self-enacted: it was also inflicted by what he calls the "hegemonic institution" of René Wellek and Robert Penn Warren's teaching anthology *Understanding Poetry* (1938). *Collecting as Modernist Practice* could therefore be regarded as a companion volume to Rasula's *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940–1990*, which likewise regards the postwar anthology as a deus ex machina gaveling a sudden, unforeseen judgment against international Modernism. For Rasula, the postwar anthology makes a restrictive set of "canonizing assumptions," hallows the "compulsory reiteration of sovereign moments," desires "to certify familiarity as authority and ownership," and ultimately embalms poetic art. This anthological wax museum is a technology of display simulating cultural achievement. Rasula abhors the national anthology, which "sanitizes things of their metonymic associations so that a new order can prevail—the taxonomic initiative of the collection itself."

Burning City takes very seriously this injunction against scrubbing or sanitizing "metonymic associations," insisting like few anthologies before it on vanguard poetries as intricate and international networks of coincidences and contiguities organized around music halls and cabarets, matinee icons, late night libations, telephony and telegraphy, postcards, and Baedeker guides. The section titled "Cineland: Chaplinade" offers an example of this typically pleasing accidentalist style of arrangement. The oft-anthologized "Chaplinsque" by Hart Crane is swarmed by over a dozen other artifacts of Chaplinalia, from Umberto Saba's "Charlot in the Gold Rush" to Xavier Abril's "X-Ray of Chaplin," with its prescient admonition that "Charles Chaplin's reality belongs to everyone but him." None of the poems share any special formal identity—Abril's poem is a numbered series of pithy punch lines that converse formally with Ramón Gómez de la Serna's *Greguerías* or Oliverio Girondo's *Membretes* rather than with Osip Mandelstam's "Charlie Chaplin" or Rafael Alberti's "Charlie's Sad Date." The anthology's internationalist outlook seems to sacrifice important measures of poetic particularity in order to gain thematic focus. An anthology-goer making her way through

this gallery will not know what conventional markers of poeticity (rhyme, alliteration, etc.) pertained to the poems in their original languages, nor even the languages from which the poems have been translated, nor who the translator is, nor the years in which the poems were composed or published (although some of these questions are answered in the scholarly apparatus at the back of the book). The point here is simply to register that “Charlie Chaplin” was a phrase in the lingua franca forged by the global commerce of Modernism.

What does it mean to organize an anthology in “galleries” of fascinations and enthusiasms, rather than by national literary historical narratives or authorial chronology? The gestalt vision is of a poetry thickly enmeshed in a planetary techno-optimism, defined largely by the spaces and icons of a new culture industry, and by accelerated routes of transportation and communication (the age of wireless appears as the proprietary stamp “T.S.F.” [*Transmission sans fil*, “Wireless transmission”] all over the book). This hardly presents an account of the fixations of the avant-garde that has not long been available, say, in Stephen Kern’s *The Culture of Time and Space* or Marjorie Perloff’s *The Futurist Moment*. But to organize (or pathologize?) Modernism’s poetic production as galleries of fixations rather than to group it by schools, -isms, authors, nations, or innovations can feel by turns scrupulously historicist, surprisingly fresh—and also occasionally wax-museological.

We might then regard *Burning City* as a paradoxical object: an archaeological reconstruction of what Braddock dubs the future-oriented, interventionist anthology. Rasula and Conley have raided the tombs of Modernism’s little magazines and painstakingly revived their reveries of the “new.” The retrospective Modernist anthology antiques Modernism’s abortive, cosmopolitan optimism for our own fantasias of network society. Both the successes and failures of the archaeology of intervention are uniquely highlighted in *Burning City*’s reenactment of the “typographic versatility” of the vanguards. Faced with the vast history of graphic innovation, Rasula apparently resorted to typesetting much of the book himself. This starts off well enough—the anthology’s title cleverly imitates the jagged title case that Heinz Schulz-Neudamm so memorably concocted for the poster art to the film *Metropolis*. And the editors laudably claim to “restore” the emphasis on “visual composition,” understood not as stylistic idiosyncrasy but as a shared innovatory idiom. We are lavished with full color plates by László Moholy-Nagy and Anatol Stern and painstaking translations of Marinetti’s diagrammatic poems that lose little in transposition. But many other visual poems reproduced from digital images (by Depero, Severini, and Cangiullo) seem to have been dropped into the anthology from low-resolution scans, and the typefaces employed where historical verisimilitude is not at stake are frankly unlikeable.

These are quibbles when confronted with an editorial work as ambitious, accomplished, and ardent as *Burning City*. Yet an anthology that articulates its work in so many diverse metaphors—one part museum “gallery,” one part tourist guide (“multi-sensory Baedeker”), one part pantascopic “flyover,” and one part fetish—necessarily reminds us that the poems could be shuffled according to several protocols. Rasula and Conley’s editorial ingenuity has the side effect of sidelining national literary histories, linguistic diversities, genres, and figural and formal aspects of verse that still exert drag on poetry as it sings of a singular, radiant metropolis. This is not an argument with *Burning City* so much as it is with the print anthology as such. Imagine its online successor: high resolution, hyperlinked, annotated, and tagged, layering dozens of organizational possibilities without deferring this collection’s real refreshment of the anthologist’s creative, curatorial, and evaluative functions. We already need a *Burning City 2.0*, as good as this one is.

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Jay Wright, *Disorientations: Groundings*. Chicago: Flood Editions, 2013. 98pp. \$15.95

Readers of Jay Wright’s poetry know him as a relentlessly allusive and idiosyncratic mythmaker who is always playing more games than one. Wright’s study of West African cosmology and ritual practice fully emerged in his second book, *Soothsayers and Omens* (1976). But from the start his poetry laid claim to multiple identities and traditions, and has continued to do so with a sort of exponential simultaneity. One never knows where a new volume is likely to take him, or us.

In Wright’s thirteenth book of poems, *Disorientations: Groundings*, the range of associations (or should I say “associates”) has never been more varied. Divided into four sections named after the Dogon tribe’s graduated system of religious initiation, Wright’s sequence features recurring appearances by Argentinean poet Robert Molinari (“Molinari, / with his caked fingernails and an eye / for Delphic hemlock”), quantum physicist Niels Bohr, and the notorious cynic, Diogenes, who spreads his fishnets “Here in Ajijic,” Mexico. (Wright blows the unities of time and place to high heaven.) Other figures include “Don Alfonso,” “Don Lupe,” “Stratis Thalassinus” (the Greek poet, George Seferis), “the Cusan” (Nicholas of Cusa?), “Baca” (“Biblical Baca”), (Luis) “Cernuda,” (José) “Gorostiza,” “the Intrusive, Insubstantial, Hypertensive, and Insulting Ronald Firkbank,” “Thomas the Pythagorean Scot,” “Langston” (Hughes), “Bruno,” “the Carolingian,” “Aden,” “the Parisian,”