

convolution

convolution

convolution

convolution



**Natalie Czech**

2 Icons

**Craig Dworkin**

8 Klatsch

**Astrid Lorange**

18 Some Preliminary Notes on  
Conspiracy as Theory

**Josef Kaplan**

20 An Appeal

**Holly Melgard**

34 excerpts from *Inner Critic: A Journal  
of Inner Criticism*

**kristen gallagher**

38 meditations on objects of some  
importance

**Jason Simon**

40 Lobby Cards

**Steve Zultanski**

48 Love in Outer Space: Eight Notes on  
the Expansiveness of Poetic Form  
Due to the Portability of Aesthetic  
Devices

**Juliana Huxtable**

56 *TRANSITION from There Are Certain  
Facts That Cannot Be Disputed*

**Nick Montfort**

62 Two Radical Translation Projects:  
Renderings and Heftings

**Aram Saroyan**

69

**Chris Alexander**

70 Exploded View

**Joey Yearous-Algozin**

75 Keep Your Friends Close  
// We Upload Trash

**Diana Hamilton**

80 Write in your Sleep: An Annotated  
Bibliography of Dreams

**Jacolby Satterwhite**

85

**Kim Rosenfield**

94 Potential Space: Psychoanalysis and  
My Poetics

**Shiv Kotecha**

96 5-6 Paragraphs on Not Being Special

**Carlos Soto Román**

99

**Karl Holmqvist**

102 Concrete Poetry

**Sophia Le Fraga**

**Karl Holmqvist**

**Harry Burke**

104 In Conversation

**The Editors**

111 Postscript on Klatsch

**Etel Adnan**

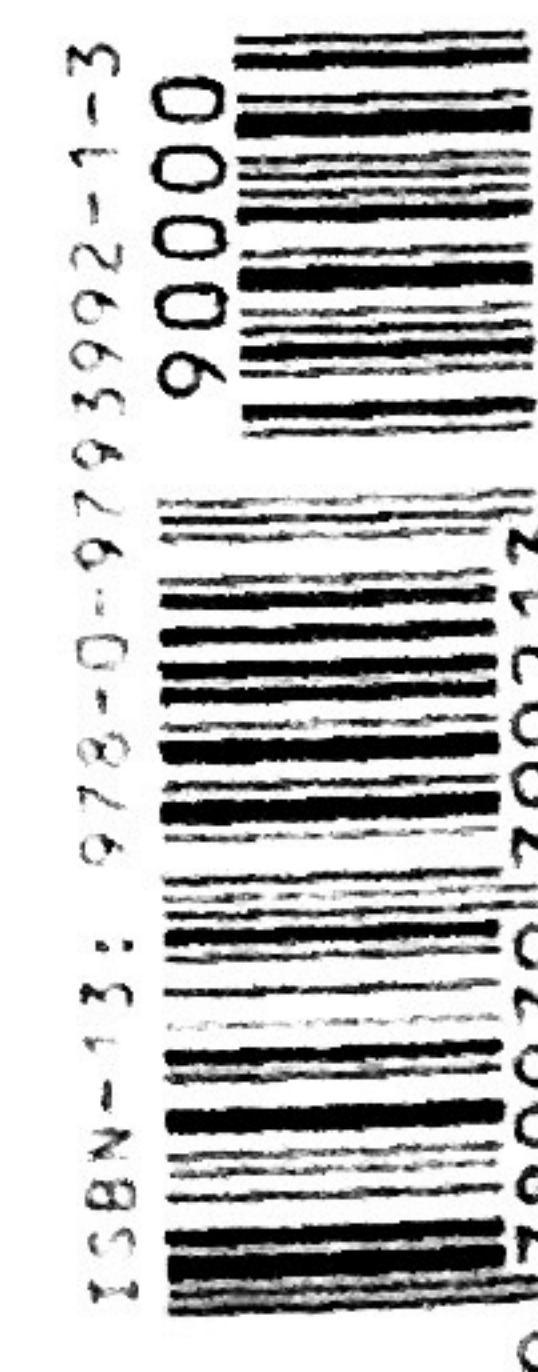
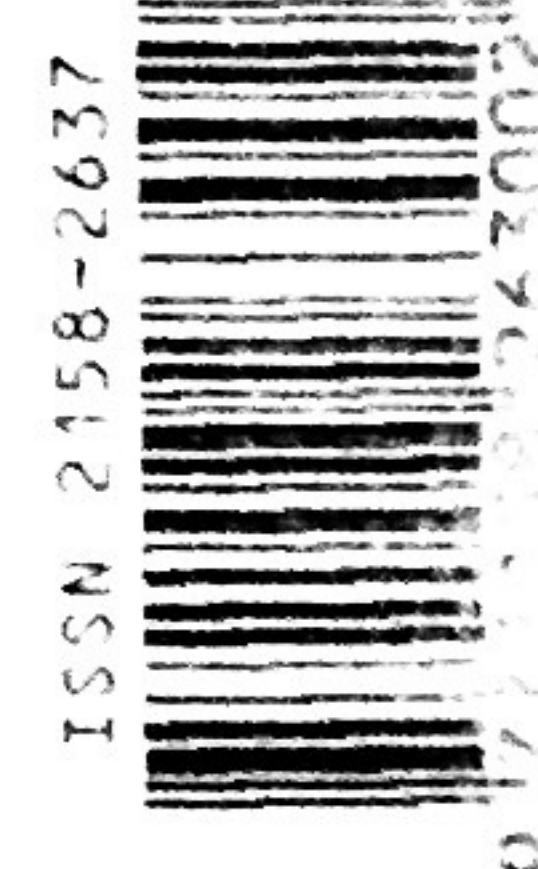
118 Portrait of a Poet

**Robert Grenier**

120 For Etel

**Aram Saroyan**

122 Also





For the last year or so I've been looking at the relationship between scholarship and conspiracy theory. In particular, I've been interested in the ways that research becomes tied up with different kinds of conspiratorial modes of thought: in a basic sense, the way that research requires special attention to a set of often imperceptible connections that reveal themselves as increasingly relevant, as if they spoke to a larger whole mostly hidden, apparent only by effort. In another sense, the intellectual labor of research is valued in such a way that one form is in competition with another, one researcher with another. More and more, it feels that scholarship is threatened, not only from outside the research institution (now more or less an historical category) but also from within. For these reasons, too, scholarly work can feel like an exercise in paranoia. So the relationship I'm drawing out here is ambivalent and has to do with the sublime emergence of networked thought as well as with workplace anxiety. My idea is not to fetishize conspiracy theorizing as a cognitive practice, nor to champion paranoia as a work ethic. What I'm trying to do is work out whether the conspiracy theory as a genre can tell us something about the conditions under which research is done today, and if, by thinking with the genre, we can consider the aesthetic, affective, political dimensions of research (a category that for me includes diverse kinds of material-conceptual practices) that are productive of knowledge.

At the same time, I've been thinking a lot about writing in contemporary art. I am trying to imagine a theory that takes writing as a critical material practice, in order to move on from the readings (dominant in the mid- to late-twentieth century) that treat language as material (in theories of the expanded art object) and/or the material as linguistic (in expanded notions of the literary). Important as these readings are, they serve to reinforce historical models of disciplinarity, showing how, for example, fine arts can "read" and how the literary arts can "look." Thinking about how the process of writing is undertaken in contemporary art and literature requires a rethinking of the disciplinary knowledge that have set the terms for engaging with and interpreting language—not least because it's near impossible to claim or prove a "home" discipline from which to think and read. I've been thinking of this approach to reading the practice of writing in contemporary art as a kind of "poetics"—a way of considering the composition of writing and its contextual livelihood above attempting a single symbolic interpretation.

- † Conspiracies urge towards a total explanation for a set of contingent particularities; similarly, scholarship generalizes local concerns in order to understand the logic and practice of "concern" as a critical apparatus. The difference between a conspiracy theory and a scholarly argument is that, in the former, the drive towards totality is genuine, whereas in the latter it's understood as a temporary fixation or passing delusion. For conspiracy theories, the final reveal reveals that what we feared all along was, indeed, there all along, and the reward is the knowledge of what we knew but could not prove. For scholarship, the final reveal reveals that what we assumed we knew was in fact a falsehood, a red herring, and the reward is the knowledge of the limits of our knowledge.



‡ Let's say we consider scholarship a close ally of conspiracy theory; the practice of research, we can claim, is akin to a mode of thought that perceives, through a strange collusion of paranoia, desire and experimental detective work, a theory of connectivity that belies a large but difficult-to-see truth. Central to this relation are the affects that accompany both scholarly and conspiratorial thinking: positive feelings like triumph, euphoria, affirmation, gratification; and negative feelings like anxiety, envy, despair, fatigue, and fear. If the aim of the scholar is to uncover hidden truths through the disciplined labor of focusing-in, the conspiracy theorist's aim is to uncover hidden truths through the disciplined labor of focusing-out. In the former, the truth is a matter of detail and in the latter a matter of the total scene. In both cases, the negative affects associated with the seemingly impossible task of maintaining focus are alleviated by minor achievements and the occasional major break-through—moments of relief that punctuate the task at hand, make it endurable. In this sense, scholarly and conspiratorial thinking produce and are produced by a dynamics of ambivalent feeling—the vacillation between high and low moments.

A genre is a set of promises, a contract in which expectations are met, or not, depending on an adherence to external laws by internal efforts. A genre is also, paradoxically, always a success and a failure—it must succeed in order to be recognized; it must fail, ever slightly, in order that the genre can continue to produce desire in the form of its future promise. If the conspiracy theory fails to fail by always managing to prove its own perfection, then as a genre it is at once delinquent and transcendental.

‡‡ In his new book *In the Flow*, Boris Groys discusses the paradox of conspiracy; the conspiracy theory makes a claim to universality that differentiates itself against other universal claims. To say it again, the conspiracy theory projects universal truth b in order to refute, debunk or reveal the catastrophic universality of a. This approach, which we might call homeopathic, in its best case outcome shows universality itself to be the problem; its performance in/as b is directed towards the collapse of a.

Continuing this formula, conspiracy becomes a mode of thought that offers itself as a radically visible version of what otherwise appears as unremarkable facts that both constitute and govern worldly life. In the 90s, conspiracy-obsessed texts like *The X-Files* understood the relationship between big and little paranoia as fundamental to the project of reimagining the world in its global-total scale. An anomalous, marginal bubble of government might expose the rotten core of governmentality; the unlikely alliance, as Sianne Ngai has written (in her wonderful chapter on paranoia in *Ugly Feelings*), between the obsessive-paranoid mystic and the rational-skeptical empiricist might show the danger of over-investing in either intuition or reason alone in the face of a reality which is mostly incomprehensible to both sense and logic.