



And what if I also add, as I may fairly do, that nothing so allures and attracts anything to itself as likeness does to friendship? Then it surely will be granted as a fact that good men love and join to themselves other good men, in a union which is almost that of relationship and nature. For there is nothing more eager or more greedy than nature for what is like itself.

- Cicero, *De Amicitia*

Now who will help me in the recovery of friendship is magic from hasbro and company.

- John DeWitt, *The Jolly Rancher*

Poetry is a serious business. The objects poetry chooses to employ in the service of its critique become seriously imbricated into that service, and their contexts and contents magnified, whether celebrated or condemned, by the optic of prosodic scrutiny that constitutes poetry's claim to singularity, if not formal exceptionalism. Regardless of the variously demotic or elitist ambitions of the genre, the objects poetry chooses, from Wordsworth's meanest flower, to Whitman's dead and dying soldiers, from William Carlos Williams's plums to Carol Ann Duffy's onion, obtain from verse, and bestow back into culture, a focussed attention, a dramatic purchase on the world which it is, arguably, one of poetry's essential cultural functions to constantly reproduce and clarify. Poetry makes its objects interesting. It sharpens things.

In May 2013 Punch Press, a small press experimental poetry publisher based in Scarborough, Maine, announced the publication of a one-off special issue of *Romulan Soup Woman*, a collection of poetry, prose, fan-art, comic-strips and other appropriated pop-cultural, esoteric and pseudo-scientific material, featuring among its roster of living, dead, original and re-animated contributors a significant number of poets, old and young, from the contemporary anglophone avant-garde. Punch Press advertised the journal on its website as a series of:

Passing remarks, communiques, lineated critiques, speculative commentaries and inter-ludic disquisitions on science fiction, the culture industry, thermonuklearen terrors and crustaceous justitia[.]¹

Despite being affectionately and, one would think, intriguingly described "by one reader as "a fucking nutso commentary on science fiction, poetry and labor," the perfect bound, 84-page journal has yet to

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receive any serious review or appreciation.² Collaging together (mostly) Star Trek inspired poetry, modified newspaper and cartoon clippings and oblique reflection on U.S. labour relations, the journal, and its advertising tagline, stakes an implicit claim for fandom as a tool, or a scene, of literary cultural critique. This claim is based on and within fandom's peculiar dedication to fictional lifeworlds that provide a ready-made archive of culture-industrial allegory, metaphor, imagery and language(s) that become productively malleable, exploitable, re-arrangeable and deployable in the service of a critique of social relations. *Romulan Soup Woman* is a strange object, befitting the essential strangeness of fandom itself, a social phenomenon expressed, as a number of critics have stressed, in scenes of psychological and affective excess in complete disproportion to the normative codes of consumption and reproduction. In the literature on fandom such excess is noted both as part of a negative typology of fans and fandom that the theorist wants to criticise and deconstruct (i.e. the fan as an obsessive maniac or sexual deviant), and as part of a more positive assessment of the way in which fandom intensifies and overreaches the standards of interest and attachment built into capitalist realism (i.e. the fan as a transgressor of consumer-culture norms). In both cases the fan is an aberration; they want more than they should do. By these lights, fandom - and fans - resemble poetry - and poets. Poets, writes the poet Keston Sutherland, know that they need more than what can be intelligently, or even, intelligibly, wanted. They desire, for example, "passionate visitation of justice upon the heads of everyone responsible for everything unjust."³ Poets are therefore, Sutherland claims, "indigenously stupid."⁴ By this term Sutherland means that good poets refuse to limit their thinking, and their verse, to the kinds of prescriptive platitudes of benign universalism proffered by official, mainstream literary culture. Such extravagance is not stupid because it is bad, but because it refuses to entail thinking soberly about the responsible apportionment of justice and injustice. Poets, like fans, are irresponsible; they want what most people cannot get.

In his poem "Ode to Joy," the American poet Frank O'Hara, for example, wants "no more dying."⁵ O'Hara, as one recent critic described his practice, "synthesized cosmopolitan and populist impulses more thoroughly than any poet of the [twentieth] century," and as such acts like a fan all the time, writing obsessively and candidly about everything from Hollywood film stars, to jujubes, to money itself.⁶ Critics have yet to satisfactorily describe O'Hara's twofold commitment to the sensuous, emotional intensity of things, of the objects his poetry obsessively and candidly sharpens, *and* to the commodity form in which this sensuousness is available to our bodies, and to our contemplation. Yet this commitment constitutes, I think, the most important and lasting heritage and influence of O'Hara's work, especially for poets whose obsessions, object-worlds and labour return them again and again to the things that litter their poems like so much fruit on the path to Sweet Apple Acres. This essay is winding its way towards readings of two poems whose objects are identifiable with the world, and fandom, of the Hasbro Inc.-owned cartoon series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. In order to ascertain what might be at stake in these poems' uses of this object in particular, we need first of all to rehearse something of the significance of a commodified pop-cultural sensorium for contemporary poetry. The following account will of necessity be partial and incomplete, and the reading of O'Hara which I have begun and which continues below, preparatory and not definitive; but I hope to suggest that the comparison of fandom with the figure of the poet might prove useful in unpacking some recent developments in poetic thinking.

We continue with one of O'Hara's best short poems. This poem is called "Interior (With Jane)."

The eagerness of objects to
be what we are afraid to do

cannot help but move us Is
this willingness to be a motive

in us what we reject? The
really stupid things, I mean

a can of coffee, a 35¢ ear
ring, a handful of hair, what

do these things do to us? We
come into the room, the windows

are empty, the sun is weak
and slippery on the ice And a

sob comes, simply because it is
coldest of the things we know⁷

More sombre and reflective than O'Hara's better known "Today," with its zany catalogue of "kangaroos, sequins [and] chocolate sodas," "Interior (With Jane)" serves as a commentary on the uneasiness and ambiguity with which the object-world impinges upon and disrupts an emotional make-up disclosed as internally split (note the gaps that cut-off the beginnings of sentences) and disrupted (the sentences are then immediately line-broken) from the start.⁸ One noticeable thing about this poem is that whilst the first half of the verse is packed and buzzing with prosodic and grammatical suspension and ambiguity, its conclusion proffers an equal and opposite sense of calm, reflective resignation. How can objects "be what we are afraid to do"? What is their "willingness to be a motive," exactly, and how or why do we "reject" it? These questions are abandoned for a classically discrete object whose interior makes perfect sense without them, and whose presence in fact admonishes their reckless importunity. The role the "really stupid things" play in the poem is something like fungible filler to the delicate prosodic movement going on either side of them. That is not to say "a can of coffee, a 35¢ ear / ring" and "a handful of hair" are not the focus of the poem; they are; but by focussing on them the poem's peripheral vision too becomes relatively sharper and its wider field of action all the more complex and contradictory. What do these things do to us? How can objects *be* what we are afraid to *do*? The second of these questions, anaesthetised by prose, becomes a category error. More important than any real philosophical dilemma or ontological gap in the first couplet is the typographically balanced rhyme of to/do that stitches the contradiction back into the scene of its utterance; what "cannot help but move us" is the couplet above that very proposition, not the inadequacy or division to which it alludes. What these things do to us is to energise a mode of attention and a susceptibility to a certain quality of feeling. It takes a great deal of energy to imagine what the "eagerness" of "a can of coffee" "to / be" might resemble; it takes even more to imagine sharing in that object's singularity of purpose, let alone being afraid of such a thing. But the attention garnered by these objects does something else as well. It panders to our capacity to smother, with dreams and infinite longing, motives differentiable from those ingrained into the service of the "really stupid things" and their "eagerness." The visual punctum of the poem occurs, fleetingly, in the fifth couplet, as the broken-off "We" hovers tenderly over the "do" of "windows" in the line below. This prosodic easter egg is a glimpse of the possibility of a doing as singularly intense and particular as that of the objects' being, glancingly stripped of any objective or overdetermined motivation. It is as if, in this moment, O'Hara catches the "really stupid things" unawares and is, for once, more capable of moving than of being moved. In this moment (which is not a moment any spoken reading of the poem could realise or capture) we are not afraid. But "the sun is weak," and the poem ends in a "sob," overwhelmed by the clarity of the scene of objects from which it departs.

What Walter Benjamin referred to as the empathy of the commodity's soul, which, if it existed, "would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls," is not just felt and registered by O'Hara, but deeply ingrained into his poetics of love and stupefaction.⁹ Even the simple abandon of entering a room is fraught for O'Hara with the knowledge of "things" and their proximity to us. His empathy is as extraordinary as that of the "stupid things" he cannot refuse to adore and be undone by. We do this, and we know we do to boot. Anyone who has ever unaccountably "sob[bed]" at a can of

coke, or a Cutie Mark Crusaders number, is aware of the “eagerness” of the “really stupid things” to “move us.” The argument that such objects are what we are afraid to do, or that they at least have the capacity to represent, encourage or project something beyond our consumption of their use-values, has a certain pedigree in sociological and critical theoretical thinking about the potentially utopian nature of the objects of popular culture. O’Hara, I think, is generally more interested in sex than in utopia, and “Interior (With Jane)” is too prosodically ambiguous to be reduced to (or promoted to) anything like a thesis on late capital; nevertheless, the significance of O’Hara’s wider fandom - in the form of complex and hyper-sensitive attachments to ordinary products of the culture industry whose potential for eliciting extraordinary feelings, encounters and reflexions is explored across his oeuvre - is at least comparable to the theoretical reflection on consumer culture and utopianism summarily produced in the concluding pages of Henry Jenkins’ classic sociology of fandom, *Textual Poachers*. This summary (which paraphrases Richard Dyer) is that “Entertainment [which becomes the object of fandom] teaches us ‘what utopia would feel like.’”¹⁰ What would utopia feel like? Jenkins promotes a paraphrase of Dyer’s claim as part of the former’s recuperation of fandom as a positive mental attitude; he wants to recover the fan from the accusations of perverseness and kookery routinely deployed in the mainstream media’s attention to fan-cultures such as Trekkers. Jenkins’ usage elides Dyer’s conditional “would” in favour of a positivist account of the actually utopian experiences to which he claims the fans in his study share fleeting access. Dyer, in his 1985 essay “Entertainment and Utopia,” is, by contrast, more interested in the objects of fandom’s attention than he is in the fans themselves. He describes the contradictions flagged up by what he calls the “utopian sensibility” of, in particular, Broadway or film musicals, in the following manner:

[T]he ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet [...] However, this one-dimensionality is seldom so hermetic, because of the deeply contradictory nature of entertainment forms. In variety, the essential contradiction is between comedy and music turns; in musicals, it is between the narrative and the numbers. Both these contradictions can be rendered as one between the heavily representational and verisimilitudinous (pointing to the way the world is, drawing on the audience’s concrete experience of the world) and the heavily non-representational and ‘unreal’ (pointing to how things could be better).¹¹

The idea that “The eagerness of objects to / be what we are afraid to do // cannot help but move us” takes on, in the light of Dyer’s rubric, a more tortured optimism. From the point of view of the culture industry, such objects “cannot help but move us” because they have no other purpose, and we no other choice than to be moved. But the “deeply contradictory nature of entertainment forms” ensures, with no less determination, an affective spectrum of responses to the same objects, objects whose every facet, attraction and internal contradiction is magnified by fandom’s compulsorily obsessive optic. Fandom remakes its object in its own likeness, and that likeness becomes more and more like the fan. This endless cycle of mutual exaggeration and exacerbation, whose limits are naturally both as utopian and as reactionary, as progressive and as regressive as any fan might be, gives the lie to any categorical answer to the question of “what utopia would feel like.” And it opens up a great deal of room for thinking about the identification with, and the constructive use of, the objects of fandom’s attention, as well as that attention itself, in ways in which O’Hara’s poetry has always known, and is constantly telling us it knows, is possible.

What happens when the latest crop of indigenously stupid poets meet their own fannish catalogue of really stupid things? What do they do to us? The current surge in thinking about the utopian elements of pop-cultural imaginaries in contemporary poetic practice comprises almost as many versions and iterations of fandom as it does poets. From committed investigations into the tone and shape of the life made imaginatively possible by the fannish adoration of childhood pop songs, to the anodyne and crushingly boring sycophancies of alt. lit.-inspired internet poetry, contemporary poet-fandom assumes

a relationship to its objects for the most part stripped of O'Hara's speculative fear of doing what those objects are. It is instead shot-through with a kind of righteous justification and heartfelt pride in its attachments and karaoke-like affections. The utopianism in this work is not the "immense changing of the valences" which characterises, for Jameson, the Utopian project.¹² It is smaller and more sharply defined than that, local and intermittent, often wretchedly unambitious, sometimes movingly earnest, rarely extraordinarily delightful. The poetry may focus on the utopian sensibilities, ironised or not, of pop songs, movies, celebrities or even the linguistic canon of pop-cultural reference itself. The trend (its blunt end) is also noticeable for its stupefied cerebrations on the existential vacuity of online social relations and a concomitant elevation of these relations themselves into the content matter of the poetry, poetry which then becomes an object of fannish adoration itself, encased in a meniscus of neo-sincerity it becomes churlish, even pompously self-righteous, to criticise.

The poetry I have just now briefly described wears its utopian fantasies on its sleeve; it responds to the utopian sensibilities of its objects by variously sharpening or blunting the force of their emotional resonance. I believe the poems I want to conclude by discussing are a part of this trend because they too contain thinking about the utopian elements of pop-cultural imaginaries, and they contain them in the form of references to *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*.

My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic is a wonderful cartoon. It is the latest incarnation of Hasbro Inc.'s *My Little Pony* franchise. Created and patented by Bonnie Zacherle in 1983, the franchise has since developed through a number of "generations" of toys, animated features and ephemera. *MLP:FiM*, the fourth generation cartoon series, was developed for television by Lauren Faust, first aired in October 2010, and has accrued an increasingly enormous amount of attention from fans, critics, and critics of fans. The attention is well-deserved. The twenty-two minute-per-episode show is characterised by an all-female cast conceived and designed by Faust to be empowered, adventurous and multi-dimensional anti-types to the previous *MLP* depictions of fey, cutesy, unimaginative ponies. It is beautifully, hyperactively animated in Adobe Flash, scripted with wit and verve, voice-acted with extreme ingenuity and includes musical interludes easily the equal of any mainstream or viral pop composition. The show's story lines, the parameters of which must abide by the legally binding informational/educational codes to which Hasbro adheres, are concerned with overcoming adversity through the virtues of collective responsibility and empowerment, the celebration of difference and its incorporation into a socially diverse field of collective action, and the destruction and defeat of attempted dictatorial and/or militarised control, enslavement or otherwise imposed autocratic regulation of the in-show universe. The show's central protagonist, Twilight Sparkle, is a scholar and practitioner of esoteric pony-lore and ancient magic. The other five main characters of the show, who together with Twilight Sparkle constitute the so-called "Mane Six," each represent an aspect of comradeship essential to its concept: loyalty, kindness, generosity, laughter and honesty. These are themselves ancient, practically Ciceronian virtues. In the service of the in-show universe's state power, that of the kingdom of Equestria, they also implicitly default to the Ciceronian hierarchy of friendship's subordination to virtuous statesmanship and to the politics of harmonious imperial governance. Indeed, the show's major narrative arc over all four seasons thus far aired concerns six precious artefacts known as the "elements of harmony," a weaponised archive of talismanic energy which the Mane Six employ to channel and direct the powers of friendship against the enemies of Equestria's fragile equilibrium. These enemies include the character Discord, a progenitor of chaos and misrule ingeniously voiced by Star Trek actor John de Lancie (whose character Q in Star Trek exhibits a number of similar traits to those of Discord, including playful omnipotence and the disruption of codified norms of social hierarchy). In more recent episodes Discord becomes a friend to the Mane Six, aiding them in their struggles, and is accepted by the ponies as a valuable ally.

Many (not all) fans of *MLP:FiM* call themselves, and are called, "bronies." The word is a portmanteau of "bro" and "pony." There is some controversy over the gendered nature of the term, since many female fans also participate in the fandom; some of these fans have adopted the alternatively gendered "pegasisters" by way of redress. By dint of their adoration of a cartoon ostensibly (although no longer)

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made solely for girls between the ages of two and eleven, adult male fans of the show have attracted (and have to some extent capitalised on) a cynical and conservative backlash against the fandom, one which expresses all the features of reactionary disgust and fear of perversion that have historically and consistently characterised reactions to fandom in general. Brony fandom is marked by a devotion to the fictional universe of *MLP* in the form of vehement assertions of appreciation for the show's core moral messages, increasingly well-attended national and international conventions, cosplay, fan-art, fan-fic, interaction with the show's creators, animators and voice actors, online forums and documentary footage. There are at least two feature-length films about fans of the show.¹³ According to the latest statistics, the fandom is overwhelmingly white, male and heterosexual.¹⁴ A huge amount of pornographic fan-art and fan-fic is produced by fans of the show; or by those who at least know some of the fans' predilections well enough to be able to cater for them. Responses from the fans to homophobic and other disgusted, negative accusations levelled at the brony community range from the humorously good-natured, such as the "I will love and tolerate the shit out of you" meme, to the equally reactionary, defensive, and occasionally outright misogynistic, assertions of virile heterosexuality and normativity.¹⁵ The latter strain of response is well exemplified by an image macro, presumably intended as a riposte to accusations of the inherent sexual deviancy of the fandom, depicting a woman's ass and legs next to Twilight Sparkle's ass and hooves, above the tagline: "Your dick can't tell the difference: so why all the fuss?"¹⁶ Hasbro Inc., meanwhile, has reaped the profits of the explosion of interest in the *MLP* franchise, recently reporting a hike in its hundred million-dollar revenues in the first three months of 2014 thanks to increased sales of the *My Little Pony* toy line.¹⁷ This line itself has, of course, greatly expanded in recent years to encompass the new range of characters and set-pieces featured in *MLP:FiM*.

With all this in mind, here is a verse excerpt by the American poet John DeWitt, from his 2013 book *Visceral Apocrypha*. The poem from which it is excerpted is called "The Jolly Rancher."

How could you change the channel at a time like this?
And tomorrow truffles but who does that?
This rigmarole should be ad hominem but who again
is on the board, who is sorry
who, why who
are you, the late Compton, to tell a man when to move out a dimension?
I - or, rather, my financial advisors - grab
a hold of my dull guy, I mean it
and recover the meaning you renounce
when you hear what the pretty colorful characters say about x, y, z
as they lay their hands on the Stain Bibles and say, 'Bumps'
and actually huns that is a fine answer
to the question you're meant to have.
Now who will help me in the recovery of friendship
is magic from hasbro and company.
They go by names they don't deliver
the boneless Wyngz are so hard on the FDA
dealing with personal shit
sell me that, not some happy ending and then what.¹⁸

The lines about Hasbro Inc. appear in a section of verse marked by a rhetorical insouciance which breezes through the poetry's questions without expecting any answers. The most important question in this section, for our purposes, is not even graced with a question mark. The merest shred of earnestness or enthusiasm that might begin a reading of the lines "Now who will help me in the recovery of friendship / is magic from hasbro and company" seems to wilt into a glib sardony by the time they are over. On the semantic face of it, the lines attempt to figure precisely the kind of utopian companionship that Jenkins finds in fans' over-appreciation of their objects: we might gloss them as

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saying “let’s magnify, and revel in, the qualities of loving reciprocity and mutual aid represented by the cartoon and reject the conditions of profiteering corporate manipulation which control their representation in this particular form.” But this reading of the lines does not do justice to their tone of critical despondency. The lines are a specimen of a useless enthusiasm. The language of “recovery” is the language of debt collection and financial restitution. Whatever notion of “friendship” is speculatively wrested from the million-dollar profits of Hasbro Inc. in the first line, it is cynically revealed in the second to be the merest mirror-image of corporate-industrial “company.” The icon of this reveal is the line-break itself: as retrospectively cack-handed and groan-inducingly obvious as a bad magician’s trick. If, to quote Jenkins again, “Fandom’s very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture,” then what DeWitt’s poem knows only too well is that this critique, by its very existence, simply lauds an *unconventional* or otherwise eccentric form of essentially the same culture.¹⁹ Yet the poem also knows full well that the version of the question “Now who will help me...” that we have just rehearsed is, in a sense, exactly the “question you’re meant to have” and not one that might actually help anybody. If indeed the lines do only intimate, through deadpan recapitulation, the idea that (for example) *whatever scope for critical détournement Hasbro’s My Little Pony makes possible, it would be better served by a radical optimism completely inimical to anything resembling a nicer capitalism than it would by siphoning off friendship from the magic of corporate ideology* - then so what? Who cares? What does that line-break really mean? I do not think this poem dispenses with its objects so quickly. Amidst all the affected coolness of the surrounding lines, those two beginning “Now who will help me...” betray the very optimism they would appear to sarcastically, even snidely, “recover.” They betray this optimism by the excessively, almost aggressively de-natured line-break between “friendship” and “is magic.” The line-break protests too much. Behind the lines’ (and the line-break’s) imputed and self-avowed cleverness, there is a real and charming defencelessness which prevents them (and it) from turning sour. What the line-break means is this: it is easy to the point of dim-wittedness to be sceptical about the altruism of the childish products of the culture industry; but it is impossible to entirely abolish the utopian sensibility of *Friendship is Magic*.

The British poet Connie Scozzaro registers a similarly nuanced spectrum of affective relation to the *My Little Pony* world whilst simultaneously engaging in a vociferous criticism of the gendered hierarchies of ponydom absent from DeWitt’s poem. This is an excerpt from one of the last poems in Scozzaro’s 2013 collection *Contrapposto Action Queen*, “Women, Swum Through the Cracks.”

She’s got this glittery feeling down town,
sitting in the bathroom with her hand mirror, so psyched
to find at last her twilight sparkle, her own
tiny cheerleader pumping her fists, tickling as she goes
but when she looks harder, she sees it’s just a rash, maybe disease, or thrush.

[...]

I’ve been living in the victory pool, salivating for the future,
dreams *chlorinate*, aquatique, I earn what I deserve,
it’s always gold & labour sparkles on a toilet floor.

[...]

I, heartbeat, toughgirl, kicked down New York on the internet.
For my crimes I was imprisoned, and I cried into my panties for a week:
I’m a mother, a *mother* I cried. You are a thug, a thug, they said.

Don’t look at my pony like that
you don’t have the right, or any rights at all
you are in prison and your eyes are punched out

don't look at my pony like that.²⁰

Like the other subjects and objects in the poem that are constantly displaced and substituted, Twilight Sparkle moves from heroic icon to bathroom cleaning product within the space of a couple of stanzas. At first a “tiny cheerleader,” a heroine in miniature, upon closer inspection Twilight is “just a rash,” some psycho-somatic residue of over-identification, a mess later mopped up for minimum-wage as the narrative voice laments that she “earn[s] what I deserve, / it's always gold & labour sparkles on a toilet floor.” Interpolated into a scene of gendered domestic labour, Twilight's capacity for heroism is reduced to the barest hollow victory that rebarbative cutesy sarcasm can muster. But by trapping Twilight in its own material universe, I think Scozzaro's poem does more justice to some semblance of queer resistance in the figure of Twilight Sparkle than any straight-faced celebration of her powers could. What I mean is that the stanza beginning “Don't look at my pony like that” seems to mock the bourgeois femininity of “my pony” at the same time as rejecting the (male) gaze of utopian investment and/or pornographic objectification from a community too deeply buried in their objects to notice how exclusive that community really is. Inclusivity in the brony community, as represented in John de Lancie's documentary *Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of MLP:FiM* (and as suggested by the responses to pejorative accusations of queerness mentioned above), is characterised not by a celebration, or even a defence, of non-white, non-straight, non-cis-gendered male membership, but by these groups' elision from the assertions of inclusivity itself. The repeated claim that de Lancie's film makes, implicitly and explicitly, is that being a fan of *My Little Pony* doesn't mean that you're gay. Such a claim re-inscribes the notional toxicity of queerness, *and* of femininity, because it conflates queerness and something to be afraid of, like being in prison, or having “your eyes [...] punched out.” Brony fandom tends to crush the queer object of its adoration beneath a welter of heteronormative gender binaries and assumptions. Scozzaro's poem refuses “this glittery feeling” of fandom's reactionary proclivities by satirising the object of its attention, presenting instead a version of attachment that is radically unstable and violently inassimilable to popular taste. It also, like DeWitt's poem, contains amongst its disparate and shape-shifting scenes an ineradicable and powerful optimism about the object of its real desire and anxiety: the pony. Despite everything that Twilight goes through in the rest of the poem, she is, after all, rescued by the poet and placed, like a force- or containment-field, either side of a dizzying reversal in which the “I” of the previous stanza transforms into the “you” of this one:

Don't look at my pony like that
you don't have the right, or any rights at all
you are in prison and your eyes are punched out
don't look at my pony like that.

It is not, then, an army of aberrant and porn-hungry bronies from which Twilight needs protection, but from the nigh-on schizophrenic narrative voice of the poem itself. It is, we recall, the “she” of the very first stanza of the poem who destroys what she discovers to have been the illusion of empowerment which Twilight represents by looking “harder” at “her own / tiny cheerleader” until it (she) dissolves (or solidifies) into an irritation or an STD. The pony remains iconic and irreducible even as the narrative voice gets pulled inside-out and every which way; it (she) survives the attacks and greedy cathexes of the poem's various voices, and it (she) does so in the face of extraordinary and life-threatening violence. “Don't look at my pony like that,” like DeWitt's “sell me that, not some happy ending,” is a plea for the courage and hopefulness preserved by a dialectical attention to the things we love and the kinds of love we subject our things to. Beyond, or perhaps beside, this profundity the line is impossible not to read without feeling some measure of solidarity, finally, with the material object to which it refers back, that is, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. It is at the same time an injunction against doing exactly that, since by doing so you are looking directly at something ineffable and soggy, something that might at any moment disappear, something it does not behove poets to swear by or uncomplicatedly advertise, since to do *that* would be simply to capitulate to the idea that such objects are the fantasies of a better world rather than the already deeply embroiled fantasies of this one. And whilst it might be argued that good poets are not usually worried about behaving much of anything

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anyway - since their naturally excessive behaviour ensures that their responsibility is not to some pre-ordained code of poetic licence but to everyone, and to each other - most poets that act like fans are content to shed their irresponsibility in favour of the cold, comforting pathos of the things they know. These excursions into the objects of DeWitt's and Scozzaro's poetry provide evidence of an alternative strategy. "Don't look at my pony like that" is, I think, already doing exactly what its cartoonish proxy others cannot be.

Joe Luna's most recent publication is Ten Zones (Hi Zero, 2014). He lives in Brighton, UK.

Notes

- ¹ "Romulan Soup Woman," Punch Press, <http://damnthecaesars.org/romulansoupwoman.html>, accessed July 2, 2014.
- ² Michael Cross, "Romulan Soup Woman," *The Disinhibitor*, July 16, 2013, <http://disinhibitor.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/romulan-soap-woman.html>, accessed July 2, 2014.
- ³ Keston Sutherland, untitled article, *QUID* 18: 3-6 (3).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 281.
- ⁶ Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 21.
- ⁷ O'Hara, *Collected Poems*, 55.
- ⁸ For "Today," see O'Hara, *Collected Poems*, 15.
- ⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Verso, 1997), 55.
- ¹⁰ Richard Dyer quoted in Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 281.
- ¹¹ Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movies and Methods: an anthology*, Vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), 220-232 (228-229).
- ¹² Frederic Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York and London: Verso, 2010), 423.
- ¹³ These are *Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony*, directed by Laurent Malaquais (2012) and *A Brony Tale*, directed by Brent Hodge (forthcoming 2014).
- ¹⁴ See the 2014 *State of the Herd Report*, available as a PDF here: <http://www.herd census.com>, accessed July 2, 2014.
- ¹⁵ For "love and tolerate," see "Bronyspeak," *Know Your Meme*, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bronyspeak>, accessed July 2, 2014.
- ¹⁶ A version of this image (without "dick" in the tagline) can be found here: <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/445883-my-little-pony-friendship-is-magic#media-title>, accessed July 2, 2014.
- ¹⁷ "My Little Pony sales help Hasbro show a jump in quarterly profits," Yahoo! Finance, <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/little-pony-sales-help-hasbro-show-jump-quarterly-034449154.html>, accessed July 2nd, 2014.
- ¹⁸ John DeWitt, *Visceral Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Shit Valley Press, 2013), unpaginated.
- ¹⁹ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 281.
- ²⁰ Connie Scozzaro, *Contrapposto Action Queen* (London: Bad Press, 2013), unpaginated.