

**BOOG READER 8**

**FROM**

**DEAR FILESYSTEM PANIC**

**BILL LUOMA**

**BOOG READER 8**

**GENDER TROUBLE**

**JULIANA SPAHR**

*from Dear Filesystem Panic* © Bill Luoma 2006

Boog Reader pamphlets design, DAK.

It is set in GillSans Condensed 11, 37, 38, 44, and 60pt; NewsGoth BdCnlt BT 14pt;  
NewsGoth Cn BT 55pt; NewsGoth Cnlt BT 10 and 11pt; and NewsGoth XCn BT 10 and 11pt.

Boog Reader pamphlets are published periodically by Boog Literature. Additional copies of this pamphlet are available for \$3 in stores or at events, \$4 mail order unsigned, \$5 and \$6 signed.

*Boog Reader 8* is published in an edition of 30—10 of which are numbered and signed by the poet—for his Segue reading, Oct. 28, 2006, with Juliana Spahr.

Send SASE or email for catalog

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*Gender Trouble* © Juliana Spahr 2006

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*to Clint Eastwood*  
*"I'll see you in hell, little bill"*

# 1

Take the octopus of wakenhut  
who whiffs on the forkball of the hand most powerful  
and knuckles the premium leather of covariant return types  
spreading activation on the dacron furbie of the uber muff and the diet wings lopped off  
by flower girls  
in the basket of the sniper yagi  
they are making jam from the smallberries of your favorite krylon  
it gives odor to the nalgene of the blue kitties of maplepole  
it gives the jammies of yoga a spanking with the long lasting chemtool of the prestolog  
/\* your jammies and my prestolog \*/  
give rise to the flue of sloggin via hotwood  
of getting jerked off into the toilet of the kornshell  
the prestolog and the weatherbeater  
backpropagating the particulate contamination of mercury and the smell of the copy shop  
spreading activation through the wrenchouse of fred  
growing taller as he sings  
the bhopal of die hard.

We meant our fellow graduate students and ourselves, when Chris Nealon and I discussed doing this. [This is a version of a talk we gave in the Artifact series in San Francisco. We read sections and went back and forth. Here are only my sections. This is still a draft of something. I'm not sure what yet. But it is not yet in its final state.] We were talking about those moments in graduate school when everyone was teaching things like the postcard never arrives to its sender or the deep meaning behind a term like "always already" or whatever to their introductory composition or literature classes. We were talking about a moment that seemed slightly absurd to us. But there were other things to talk about also. Like how the '90s moved from things like Act Up and queer nation at the beginning of the '90s and then the antiglobalization protests at the end. Chris suggested that we both write something on *Gender Trouble*, that Judith Butler book.

# 2

I went to graduate school from 1989-1995 in Buffalo. So a lot of my vision of the '90s is limited and defined by this experience. It was cold in Buffalo about 8 months of the year and so I and some of my female colleagues often wore under the short slightly flouncy skirts that were popular at that time either thick, dark tights or tight-fitting long underwear and then usually some sort of boot, not the kind with heels that are popular today but the more practical kind commonly used in our culture for tromping around in snow, a doc marten sort of boot or a combat boot. I usually combined this with some girly top, like maybe a cut off slip or some sort of camisole that I bought at Victoria's Secret in the mall, and then as many thrift store sweaters as were necessary to stay warm—often a pull over and then a men's cardigan on top of this.

What I am saying is that the performance of gender that Butler so astutely describes in *Gender Trouble* didn't feel like it got at how I performed gender as much as the cold performed gender for me. Buffalo was a cold place with a heroic male literary tradition. And as graduate students we met in various bars late at night, after we had done some reading and some writing alone in our large yet cold rented apartments, and talked about things like radical modernism. And legacies. And male poets.

Dear bebe  
yolanda is not at this address  
but skipping down the skills of nantucket  
in search of the honey pot of recreational equipment incorporated  
seeking a counter to the boner of germanic traditions and the great tribes of fantasy  
digging through the dung heap of barbasol  
hoping for a few pieces of armor in the scrap pile  
stealing a swedish implement from the torture show  
of gabby electrodes and globbing on regular expressions  
of the inodes of alligator clips on the superballs of the cofrog  
of the horny toad and the gila monster  
the screams of monsters dying are very real  
they're totally baby tender  
baby is learning when to play dead  
she is learning when to fight back  
she is lining the inodes of elocution with the newspapers of habitrail  
/\* your elocution and my habitrail \*/  
in the kernel space of the pagefiller  
in the muffin of the umpires  
in the collateral damage of the clearcut  
the autopsies reveal people in kitchens  
holding colanders.

We talked not reflectively about male poets as MALE poets, but just compulsively about male poets as if we were not even noticing that we just talked about male poets. We couldn't help ourselves. The heroic male literary tradition felt as if it was a warm breeze in the middle of a cold Buffalo winter. A warmth that maybe came from the ghosts of the living and the dead, the warm breath left behind by Charles Olson and Al Cook, and Michael Davidson and Jack Clarke and Gregory Corso and John Weiners and Robert Haas and Charles Altieri and Steven Rodefer and Albert Glover merged in our minds with the heroic myths the city told about itself, such as that it wasn't for pussies because it dealt with the cold and snow more than most other places in the nation.

Every year a fresh new group of students would arrive to attend the English Department. Every year the admissions committee would have admitted a woman or maybe two who said in their application that they were interested in studying twentieth century poetry. Every year, by the second semester, this woman or two would have changed the focus of her or their study.

But in contrast, the study of poetry of the male heroic literary tradition that used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on seemed to be a magnet for men. Men would enter the program planning to do the muckracking, hard-hitting masculinist American literature dissertation that Buffalo was so famous for. Leslie Fiedler—a cult academic because of his arrest for possession of pot in the '70s and his "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey" article that looked at the raft of Huck and Jim as a homosocial space—drew them to the program. But once they got there they would quickly decide to write a dissertation on the early works of a poet who used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on; the field is wide open, they would exclaim; there has been no full-length study on the early works of this poet.

Those of us who studied the poetry of fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on were a group, a herd, and we were well known for building networks of burrows. We went to parties together. We sat near each other in seminars. We went to the same bars at night. But despite our collective investment in the male heroic tradition, we divided ourselves uneasily into buck rabbits, doe rabbits, jack-kit bunnies, and jill-kit bunnies because of the heroic male literary tradition. It was as if the male heroic literary tradition demanded such a division and we agreed to it because we couldn't see our way out of it; we couldn't hold on to the heroic male literary tradition if we didn't give in to these divisions.

The divisions were larger than all of us. They were structural. Among ourselves, talking to each

For the handknit scarves of january  
that warm the charmanders of the america  
that wrap the sharper image of the crest tube  
that give forbearance to the slaughterhouse of altoids  
that fill the tanker cars with chemicals  
that splatter the brains of cowboys and evict from memory the covariant polymorphism  
of tom  
that celebrate the miscegenation of superballs with the defcon chemicals of the splaytree  
that distribute the cloracne of yukos and the dioxin of my wallpapers and ringers  
I am doing wireless work for the qualcommies of pamper palace  
I am participating in the fish ladders of gmail  
I am depositing mcflurries of semen like the squirtle from a skiplist of salmon  
I am a mouthpiece for my maglite and a urinary director for my female  
I am the dish of western colloid on the serpent mounds of hazmat  
I am the rear signal lobes of the tank farm painted to blend in with the hillside  
I am the isopropyl lubriderm of your mama's tank car  
I am the freedom fryer for you fat fucks on friday  
I am the giant artichoke hitting superballs over the horizon  
I am the stellar jayhead of eukanuba at defcon4.

other in the bar, it was hard for us to tell who was a jack-kit bunny and who was a jill-kit bunny beneath all the thrift store sweaters. We kept our sex organs inside our clothing and to identify which of us was which, someone had to hold us upside down so as to hypnotize us and then use their forefinger and middle finger to press down the vent area just in front of our anus so as to make our sex organs protude. If we were a jill-kit bunny, we would then display a slit and a central line running up and down each side of our slit would be banded in pink. If we were a jack-kit bunny, there would be a blunt white tube without a central line that looked like a bullet. Because we were bunnies, and not rabbits, someone had to look very closely to see the difference.

But it was easier to tell who was a buck rabbit and who a doe rabbit. Only the buck rabbits—there were five of them—had endowed chairs with budget lines for travel and to bring people to the university to read and dole out to graduate student projects as they saw fit. The one doe rabbit affiliated with the Poetics Program did not have such a line. This was all the more noticeable because the doe rabbit was actually better known and more established than some of the buck rabbits. And this was called a “shame” and “an accident of hiring” by the buck rabbits and was blamed on the English Department’s hiring practices, not the heroic male literary tradition that haunted it.

This division, this gender trouble, was profound and mundane but it shaped all of us into a pattern that we could not control. While most of us would say we were feminist, the heroic male literary tradition had set up a complicated apparatus that supported the blunt white tube over the slit banded in pink that none of us could escape. For instance, there were two sorts of funding lines for graduate students. One, the one most jack-kit bunnies and jill-kit bunnies got, involved teaching two courses a year. Then there was another that involved nothing more than doing errands, like picking up poets at the airport for a buck rabbit and this line paid more than the teaching lines. Probably because the buck rabbits felt the most comfortable with jack-kit bunnies as their assistants, they gave their lines exclusively to jack-kit bunnies. When the jill-kit bunnies complained because they couldn’t even apply to be rejected from the lines, one of the buck rabbits said that because the jill-kit bunnies were so devoted to teaching and the jack-kit bunnies did such a bad job of it, that it made more sense for the jack-kit bunnies to run the errands and be paid more.

This is just one example of the complicated financing system that the heroic male literary tradition left behind. I don’t know how to describe it without insane amounts of detail and minutia. In retrospect, I am also struck by the small amounts of money we are talking about and how pathologically

Two observers are considered the same  
if the sadness of the onesie is the goodie of the other  
if the slope of the paver is the gradient of the plane  
if the screed of the state is the underground loader of the state  
if the octopus of wakenhut is the control thread in a monitor  
that waits on the switch of the overhead light in the living room  
and furthers the cause of the trivet resting on the new marcellio  
amid the midpap of the smell of baby  
and the item state change hanging on the edge of the dingus of bool  
I feel the milk treading of blue shoes on the downs of beaverton  
the kneading of lami by the maersk of splaylist  
of mol the comedy explosion at the paramount  
the black comedy explosion of the military  
in the retail lofts of ann taylor  
in the sears building of tawny peacock  
the race condition is never a tie.

we analyzed the distribution spread. The buck rabbits gave out lines that paid \$10,000 a year. The department gave out lines that paid \$8,000 a year. And the rare books collection gave out jobs by the hour at a little over minimum wage. You might be able to imagine the gender spread in those jobs. But you might find it incomprehensible to imagine how seriously we took the small differences in such small amounts of pay. I imagine that these differences were incomprehensible to the rabbits at the time also, that only bunnies could chart them.

Basically, we were all stuck together in this burrow none of us dug. It was not that the doe rabbit and the jill-kit bunnies were innocent. We were stuck together in this burrow with narrow mud walls that had been dug out before we got there. It was hard for us to figure out where to dig to expand the burrow or how to make new openings into it because we had not created it. As doe rabbits and jill-kit bunnies, we were experienced with closing down openings to the burrow in order to protect the young, not with building new openings. We too were caught. We stupidly used essentialism as an epithet and tossed it at each other. We had trouble building things together. When one of us complained about gender stuff, another of us shot her observations down. We couldn't see our way into the things that get talked about in *Gender Trouble*, a book which we could have read as a how to guide on escaping or reclaiming the heroic male literary tradition. While the jack-kit bunnies circulated petitions to the admissions committee saying that they should admit various jack-kit bunnies to the English Department, the jill-kit bunnies, including myself, signed them and we did not bother to circulate petitions of our own, choosing instead to mumble when the jack-kit bunny showed up about their being too many jack-kit bunnies. When the doe rabbit was given a budget by the buck rabbits, she didn't bring in any doe rabbit or jill-kit bunnies to read, she used the money to show all of the films of Chris Marker. And I distinctly remember a buck rabbit telling me that Kevin Killian was complaining to him that there were not any queers invited to the New Coast conference and replying that I didn't know the sexuality of most of the people invited and the buck rabbit saying, pointedly and justly, that is probably his point.

At moments we managed to form smallish groups of jill-kit bunnies and get things. Although I can't prove it with a memory of conversation, I'm sure one of the reasons two of us included only doe rabbits and jill-kit bunnies in the first issue of a journal we started was that we felt we could get guilt money from the buck rabbits. And once when the doe rabbit was going on leave, we jill-kit bunnies had a meeting and wrote a letter to the chair saying that we didn't want the doe rabbit replaced

Varsity sweatshirts are the asphalt of history  
of cat cold planers and the race tractor of nohouse  
they're drooling on themselves at the register  
the earthmover and the tommy guns of piedmont  
the hotwheels of the grader and electric football  
the transformer of train sets and private interests  
on the occasion of the benediction of the shaftway  
the tractor is digging the pilvi for the fertilizer  
the loader is interpreting reflection at the behest of the motherboard  
the grader is salting the land of zot with the bulldozers of mama buzz  
the scraper is servicing the worker thread with a steady stream of simple green  
the state machine is casting the blue belly of the monitor  
/\* that's a really good place for those power lines \*/  
yes the cashiers are drooling  
it's a class cast exception to the butt flap of the union suit  
it's psyops to the nose trimmers of the rosebush  
it's padding to the footsies of long johns  
it's mother to the fat resistant soles of doc.

with another buck rabbit who used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on in his writing; we felt it was crucial to hire a doe rabbit. The chair complied and a doe rabbit came and this was a good thing but our success felt somewhat lessened because most of the jack-kit bunnies refused to take her classes; the classes she offered were not interesting to them, they explained.

The anger that this remark provoked in at least one of us was almost pathological. It was the anger of suddenly realizing gender trouble. The anger of an anxiety that all those jill-kit bunnies who said in their applications that they were interested in studying twentieth century poetry who then changed their focus of study were right. The anger that arose when the buck rabbit who ran the rare book collection called the jill-kit bunnies secretaries; bring your secretary he would say to the jack-kit bunnies when they set up meetings. I don't know how to describe this anger. But I think I attempted when writing "Thrashing Seems Crazy," a poem that felt overwrought when I wrote it and I never understood why I wrote it. And it feels even more overwrought now. But I did not connect this overwrought-ness to various events until I started writing this piece. I have for years instead only noticed how it was from Oprah and how it seemed a certain weird and yet literal example of some of the ideas in *Gender Trouble*.

### 3

In 1992 the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue came to Buffalo with their "Spring of Life" action and, again, many jill-kit bunnies spent their mornings doing clinic defense (which I have to confess started at some ungodly hour in the morning and so I wasn't as diligent as some of my fellow jill-kit bunnies). And at the same time there was at SUNY Buffalo a graduate student unionization drive and many of the jill-kit bunnies who did clinic defense began to work on the unionization drive. Because the buck rabbits preferred to fund the jack-kit bunnies, many jill-kit bunnies found refuge and funded positions in the union, the organizing ranks of which were almost exclusively female. Most of the jack-kit bunnies didn't find the union as interesting as the early works of a buck rabbit who used fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on. I am remembering that it was hard to get a number of them to join the union.

Eventually this union drive culminated in the graduate students being affiliated with Communications

No fork this info sheet  
of fancy cards and business hours  
on the fast track of the airbag of intel  
in the daisychain of artificial intelligence  
over the bay bridge of the children named lexus  
to the monterey of the un of nudibranchs  
to the anchored barges and the red cranes of the constructor  
to the trade beam of the state and the jboss of the community  
to the action servlets spreading the legs of the open harbor  
to the count of magic beans that are phantom reachable  
to the community process of tawny peacock  
starring jerry mathers as the beaver  
the community sits in the radio cab of the panel snake  
the panel snake is working its way through the insulation of the enterprise  
through the cat trees and the habitrails  
and the one eight hundred hotbird of the hofbrau  
and the framework of the now house  
and the WNOHANG of the downstream router of mol  
in the biffy of cat layers are the standards of the pipeline  
cat implements observable with little white opie of the glidehouse  
cat builds an auger arrangement with the struts of the nametag  
with xerographic copy paper and the electrodes of the ipod  
with the earlobes of the oil change and the auto parts of cellular deadzones  
with smokey joe and poly john  
with waxie and the tree huggers  
with stephen the cockatiel and bear the cat  
with the maxillary surgery of underground dump trucks  
with the fujifilm of the scraper and the skid log of david  
you will break.

Workers of America (CWA), the country's largest communications and media union, and out of this came a contract with health benefits. I learned a lot from this work that I couldn't have learned in graduate school. A huge amount of economic changes happened in the name of free trade in the nine-ties. The fact that CWA was mucking around organizing a labor force that made \$8,000 a year is a sign of how complicated the time was for unions. For several years many of my weekends were spent walking picket lines for other CWA affiliates like health care workers and bus drivers. I learned from the discussion on these picket lines some details about the larger world of international economics that were not at all evident in my seminars, which tended to concentrate on the revolutionary politics of fractured language practices. I began to notice the IMF and the World Bank and structural realignment and outsourcing and those other things that would be grouped under the term "globalization" and would contribute to the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests. Basically, the world beyond the burrows of the male heroic literary tradition entered into my vision.

In 1995 I left Buffalo and moved to New York City. The poetry world there was not divided into buck rabbits and doe rabbits and jack-kit bunnies and jill-kit bunnies. It had some other formation with badgers and swans and coyotes and wrens and whales and grasshoppers. I remember 1995 and 1996 as one of the most productive times I've ever had poetically. I wrote no literary criticism, walked no picket lines, and worked as a bartender and then as a secretary. In 1997 I moved to Hawai'i for a job at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and became an octopus instead of a jill-kit bunny.



Xiv, 172 p. ; 24 cm. "One of the most talked-about scholarly works of the past fifty years, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is as celebrated as it is controversial. Arguing that traditional feminism is wrong to look to a natural, 'essential' notion of the female, or indeed of sex or gender, Butler starts by questioning the category 'woman' and continues in this vein with examinations of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine'. In her book "*Gender Trouble*," Butler observes: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." Of course, the stability of gender as a concept was in doubt well before anyone used words like "performatively." Psychoanalysts have been aware of its arbitrariness since the *Gender Trouble* book. Read 599 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Since its publication in 1990, *Gender Trouble* has become one of the...Â Since its publication in 1990, *Gender Trouble* has become one of the key works of contemporary feminist theory, and an essential work for anyone interested in the study of gender, queer theory, or the politics of sexuality in culture.