



Specials > THE MALADY OF WRITING. Modernism You Can Dance To

The *Specials* programs focus on projects by artists and curators who have some kind of connection to the Museum's programming and the MACBA Collection. This podcast is an audio companion to the exhibition *The Malady of Writing. A project on text and speculative imagination* that presents a pleasurable, humorous and fun version of modernism: call it 'modernism you can dance to.'

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Curated by Kenneth Goldsmith

Kenneth Goldsmith's writing has been called 'some of the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry' by Publishers Weekly. Goldsmith is the author of ten books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb (ubu.com), and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which was the basis for an opera, 'Trans-Warhol,' that premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. An hour-long documentary on his work, 'Sucking on words: Kenneth Goldsmith' premiered at the British Library in 2007. Kenneth Goldsmith is the host of a weekly radio show on New York City's WFMU. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. He has been awarded the The Anschutz Distinguished Fellow Professorship in American Studies at Princeton University for 2009-10 and received the Quartz Electronic Music Award in Paris in 2009. A book of critical essays, *Uncreative Writing*, is forthcoming from Columbia University Press, as is an anthology from Northwestern University Press co-edited with Craig Dworkin, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*.

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THE MALADY OF WRITING. Modernism You Can Dance To

01. Transcript

This is Kenneth Goldsmith of UbuWeb presenting a podcast on the occasion of the exhibition *The Malady of Writing* at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (also known as MACBA), curated by Chus Martínez, which runs from November 2009 to March 2010. If you can't get to Barcelona for the show, you can get more information about it at macba.cat.

In 1975 in the second issue of the avant-garde artists' publication *The Fox*, the artist Mark Klienbergh boldly proposed: 'Could there be someone capable of writing a science-fiction thriller based on the intention of presenting an alternative interpretation of modernist art that is readable and appreciated by the wider public?' It's a great proposition and one that begs to ask, why did the avant-garde have to be so damn difficult and off-putting?

I'll never forget being at a sound poetry festival with the then-aged avant-garde poet Jackson Mac Low in Miami Beach in the early nineties. Jackson was railing against popular culture, dance music, anything with a beat, anything that reeked of entertainment. I really couldn't understand what he was talking about. For a younger generation, popular culture is very sophisticated. Everyone in advertising today has a degree in semiotics, setting up a condition whereby artists, seeing the complex ads, go into the studio and make work about the advertising, which feeds subsequent ads, and so on. But later that night, back in the hotel room, I was channel surfing and came across a fifties Lawrence Welk rerun. It was unbearably stupid, wrapping its boredom in the guise of 'entertainment' and suddenly it occurred to me that in his day, Jackson was right. A powerful way to combat such crap was to do the opposite of it, to be purposely difficult, abstract and boring. You have to remember that this was before Pop Art when the boundaries between high and low collapsed. In those days, to be fun would be to be complicit.

And yet, Klienbergh's proposition has actually been answered affirmatively in a certain undercurrent of artist's audio production over the past century; let's call it an unofficial unofficial history of modernism (doubly unofficial since artist's audio production has been viewed as secondary to their plastic/marketable production). Who knew, for example, that Jean Dubuffet released several albums of *musique concrète*? Or that Alfred Jarry wrote and performed bawdy drinking songs? Or that Salvador Dalí recorded a homage to money that was used as an advertisement for a commercial bank? Or that Joseph Beuys fronted a New Wave band and belted out pop songs against nuclear power? All of these artifacts are remarkably easy to love: the problem is that the general public never knew about them.

So what I'd like to do here is to take you on an audio tour that actualizes Klienbergh's proposition in sound; one that presents a pleasurable, humorous and fun version of modernism: call it 'modernism you can dance to.' But this is serious business. If we can seize upon the notion of guilty pleasures in midst of modernism – a place which disdained such gestures – we may be able to unfurl a secret thread which may help to shed a new light on contemporary gestures. Somehow, if we understand how The Beatles detoured Stockhausen's tape music into 'Revolution No. 9', we might be get a glimpse into what Sue Tompkins was thinking when she sings the chorus of The Beach Boys 'God Only Knows' again and again for ten minutes straight; or why Seth Price would string together hours of New Jack Swing – a genre of music so unloved that it's practically been written out of the history books. Guilty pleasures, reclamation, resurrection and recontextualization are key to understanding these phenomena.



[Erik Satie]

But why now? One of the first things that struck me about Napster was how impure (read: eclectic) people's tastes were. Whilst browsing another user's files, I was stunned find John Cage MP3s snuggled up next to, say, Mariah Carey files in the same directory. Everyone has guilty pleasures, however, never before have they been so exposed – and celebrated.

Impurity and guilty pleasures, as viewed through the lens of the historic avant-garde: if there's one thing that recent revisionist history has done, it's been to bring historically marginalized figures into front and center. One of the best examples of this might be the resurrected reputation of filmmaker Jack Smith, who, upon his death in 1989, was deemed 'eccentric', 'queer', and 'frivolous'. Today, of course, Smith occupies a central position in the cultural discourse on so many levels. It's this sort of transmigration I'm interested in: work that challenges its received histories and genres, and by doing so, speaks directly to our sense of the present, ruled by the constructive chaos of decentralized horizontal media, as well as the celebration of notions like 'incorrectness' and 'uncreativity', the rise of the 'outsider', the canonization of the underdog.

And humor. And narrative. Remember that Gertrude Stein, for all her kudos went – and continues to go – pretty much unread. Her high modernist writing is great to talk about but nearly impossible to read. What made Gertrude Stein a household name? It wasn't her poetry. It was her wildly readable memoir of her fascinating life, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Had Stein not written pleurably, today most of us would never know who she is. There may be something to this after all...

Alfred Jarry and Charles Pourny, 'Chanson du Décervelage'. Music by Claude Terrasse, recorded 1950 (1896)

Let's begin our journey with the way back in 1896, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was staged for the first time in Paris to audience who rioted upon seeing the fat, slobbering, swearing, pear-shaped protagonist, Ubu conquering neighboring countries and creating chaos wherever he went. Far from dry, this was juicy anti-intellectual stuff. Here's one of the drinking songs from the play recorded in around 1950 by the choir of the recently formed Collège de 'Pataphysique'. In the fevered intellectual atmosphere of postwar Paris, the meta-ironical humour of 'pataphysics' represented a welcome breath of fresh air. Within ten years, membership Raymond Queneau, Jacques Prévert, Max Ernst, Eugène Ionesco, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp, the Marx Brothers, Ergé, Boris Vian, Jean Dubuffet, René Clair and many many others. Part of the lyrics translate:

See, see the Machine rotatin',
See, see, the brains all aviatin'
See, see, the Rentiers shakin' 'n' quakin';
Asshole-horns, yahoo! – Long live Father Ubu!

Erik Satie, 'Entr'acte'. Cond. Henri Sauguet, original soundtrack from René Clair film (1924)

Picking up on the proto-Dada strains of Jarry was the composer Erik Satie, who in the midst of an art opening at a Paris gallery in 1902, ambient music was born. Erik Satie and his cronies, after begging everyone in the gallery to ignore them, broke out into what they called Furniture Music – that is, background music – music as wallpaper, music to be purposely not listened to. The patrons of the gallery, thrilled to see musicians performing in their midst, ceased talking and politely watched, despite Satie's frantic efforts to get them to pay no attention.

Twenty-two years later in 1924, Satie wrote the soundtrack to Pataphysicist and Dadaist Rene Clair's film *Entr'acte*, which is a twenty-minute piece of non-music, music again purposely not to be listened to, but this time not bland like Furniture Music but instead a whole composition of music that might be playing during intermission – pleasant and banal stuff, which later in the century would be turned into Muzak and space-age bachelor pad music. There's not a grating note in any of it – it's so fluffy and pleasant that it's avant-garde by virtue of its absence of dissonance.



[Gertrude Stein]

George Antheil, 'Ballet mécanique'. Played by Ensemble Modern, from the album *Fighting the Waves* (1924)

Also in 1924, George Antheil wrote 'Ballet mécanique', a raucous, rowdy work where we can find the roots of rock'n'roll, in particular the work of Frank Zappa, who incorporated fragments of it into his sixties rock scores. It was a project by Antheil and the filmmaker/artist Fernand Léger and although the film was intended to use Antheil's score as a soundtrack, the two parts were not brought together until the nineties. The original orchestration called for sixteen player pianos playing four separate parts, for four bass drums, three xylophones, a tam-tam, seven electric bells, a siren, and three different-sized airplane propellers (high wood, low wood, and metal), as well as two human-played pianos. And, yes, when premiered at New York's Carnegie Hall, it too provoked a riot.

Gertrude Stein, 'If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso'. Written late Aug. 1923, recorded in New York, Winter 1934-35

A year earlier, Gertrude Stein had written a portrait of Picasso that she recorded in New York during the winter of 1934-35. Although some have likened the poem as a literary equivalent of Picasso's way of slicing and dicing space, in our context, it's much more about her playfulness. It's more like a child's rhyme than a dry modernist portrait, full of rhythm and fun. In fact, later Stein did go on to write a book with the illustrator Clement Hurd in 1939 and most of the works in that book are eerily close to her 'high modernist' portrait of the 'difficult' modernist master Picasso. Clearly, there was another side to modernism.

Salvador Dalí, 'L'Apotheose du Dollar'. One-sided, 7-inch flexidisc recorded for the French Bank CCF (1967)

Surrealism was full of fun gestures and no one was more flamboyant than Salvador Dalí, a man to whom Andy Warhol looked for inspiration while inventing Pop Art. Dalí's legacy leaves dozens of wild interviews, some of them recorded in expensive hotel rooms where he would decamp for months stroking his pet Ocelot that was sitting in his lap. In 1967, he actually was hired by the French Bank CCF to make a one-sided 7-inch flexidisc for them.

Now, as is well known, Dalí was unabashedly fond of money. Very, very fond of money. Of course, as is sometimes the case with extreme geniuses, he had no practical, day-to-day concept of currency. For this piece, he wrote a rant he called 'L'Apotheose du Dollar', a Surrealist Dalian fantasy where he says, 'dollars began to rain on my head like a real, divine diarrhea' and goes on to claim that 'Nothing is more satisfying than this monotonous and divine dollar-rain'. He then goes on to declaim, invoking alchemical processes, that 'without bankers, there's not even religion'. He carries on in this sort of complicated, disjointed, surrealist way for nearly four minutes.

Allen Ginsberg (with the punk band The Gluons), 'Birdbrain' (1980)

During the fifties, things on the fun side of modernism really quiet down. Everything becomes very serious with the emergence of Clement Greenberg and the NY school gangs of AbEx painters and musicians such as John Cage and Morton Feldman. But toward the end of the decade, the Beats – and then the Pop Artsits – break out and open up what many claim to be the beginnings of post modernism and the fun really begins. Here's a great single Ginsberg called, 'Birdbrain', which he wrote in Yugoslavia in 1980 and recorded a year later with a little-known Denver punk band called the Gluons. The pounding lyrics skewer the world's militants, war-mongers, businessmen, phony do-gooders and even beat poets as hopelessly responsible for destroying our world. 'I ... AM ... BIRDBRAIN', Ginsberg thunders at one point as the guitars screech, and one can only conclude that he's channeling Ozzy Osbourne as he howls against the culture of popularized war.

In 1956, Ginsberg penned 'Howl', the poem that would propel him and the Beats into the front and center of American consciousness, firing a shot that signaled a sea change in American – and worldwide – culture.



[Karl Holmqvist]

Karl Holmqvist, 'I'm with you in Rockland'. Soundtrack from a 2005 video

The piece we're listening to is the third and final section of 'Howl' that begins 'Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland' and it's a tribute to Carl Solomon, to whom it was dedicated; Ginsberg met Solomon in a mental institution and became friends with him. Ginsberg admitted later this sympathy for Solomon was connected to bottled-up guilt and sympathy for his mother's schizophrenia (she had been lobotomized), an issue he was not yet ready to address directly.

The contemporary artist Karl Holmqvist – who was born in Sweden and now lives in Berlin – takes many cues from Ginsberg in his text-based works, particularly this piece, entitled 'I'm with you in Rockland' from 2005 which is a psychogeographical elegiac liturgy of worldwide culture, using references ranging from the personal to the political, along the way picking up brands and corporations. If Ginsberg's 'Howl' described what it was like to live in America in 1956, then Holmqvist likewise gives us a semantic portrait of globalism half a century later.

Jack Smith, excerpt from soundtrack to *Normal Love* (1963)

By the early sixties, the prohibition on fun was over and long-held notions between high and low collapsed. No one embodied these attributes more than the underground filmmaker Jack Smith, whose transgressive, transsexual, psychedelic films of Dionysian orgies and drag queen parades set to campy Exotica soundtracks were unabashedly beautiful and sensuous. Smith brought popular culture into the underground cinema, a place which before his entrance was usually reserved for high art and lofty thoughts. Smith, although beloved on the underground scene would remain the most marginalized of cult figures until the multicultural revolution of the nineties, when suddenly the art world embraced Smith's aesthetic as being prescient of so many current artistic practices.

Jack Smith, 'Contadina Tomato Paste'. From the CD *Silent Shadows On Cinemaroc Island - 56 Ludlow Street 1962-1964 Volume II*

This is a piece he recorded in the early sixties on while living on Ludow Street on the Lower East Side. In the best Pop Art tradition, the text is for an ad for Contadina Tomato Paste, which was then sped-up to make the voices sound like Chipmunk voices. It's a piece which fuses together strands of the avant-garde including sound poetry, camp, psychedelia and pop art – into a riotously funny, endearing and future-looking piece of sound art.

Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Gesang der Juenglinge (1955-56)'. From the CD *Elektronische Musik*

Back in the early fifties in Köln, Karlheinz Stockhausen began working music that was produced by circuitry, thus inventing electronic music. It took almost fifteen years for these high and dry modernist sounds to find their way into pop music, but with the quick evolution of rock'n'roll from basic guitar, bass and drums into a complex multi-tracked studio practice, everyone, it seemed, was taking bits and pieces of it and throwing on to their albums.

The Beatles, 'Revolution No. 9'. From the LP *The White Album* (1968)

Nowhere was this more visible than The Beatles' 'Revolution No. 9' from *The White Album* recorded in 1968. Paul McCartney claims in several statements that he was the first Beatle to discover Stockhausen's music. Sir Paul has named THE Stockhausen track we just heard, 'Gesang der Juenglinge', as his favorite Stockhausen work. McCartney probably introduced the late John Lennon to Stockhausen's music in mid-1966. Lennon was also greatly influenced by Stockhausen. 'Hymnen' was Lennon's inspiration for 'Revolution No. 9' on the Beatles' *White Album*. It's also well documented that The Beatles attended concerts of the radical electronic improvisation group AMM at a local London art school in the sixties. The Beatles literally embodied the notion of 'modernism that you could dance to'.

The Mothers of Invention, 'Are You Hung Up?'. From the LP *We're Only in it for the Money* (1968)



[The Beach Boys]

Other bands as well got into the act, most notably Frank Zappa and his Mothers of Invention, who also incorporated many of the techniques pioneered by the French school of *musique concrète*, who were known for their magnetic tape manipulations. This is the beginning of the 1968 album *We're Only in it for the Money*, which featured extensive tracks made up of tape music, wedged between bits of surf music, vocal samples and social-satire-based pop music. In fact, it was this eclectic mix and mash-up of so many styles into a unified vision, incorporating high and low, that makes the Mothers' records today still sound so far ahead of their time. After the demise of the original Mothers, Zappa's practice streamlined into two distinctive styles: propagandistic pop music on one hand and high avant-garde 'serious' music à la Pierre Boulez on the other. But for a short window of maybe five years, the Mothers of Invention made modernism you could dance to.

The Beach Boys, 'God Only Knows'. From the LP *Pet Sounds* (1966)

Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys was also influenced by studio techniques, although he tended more towards the complex production style of Phil Spector than Pierre Schaeffer. Still, 1966's *Pet Sounds* was a milestone, defining cutting edge studio production of the day. It's meticulously charted orchestral parts were melded with gorgeous pop songs to create an album that is universally considered to be a pop masterpiece.

Sue Tompkins, soundtrack to *More Cola Wars* (2004)

So it's not so strange that many of today's artists would use material like Brian Wilson's 'God Only Knows' from *Pet Sounds* as a basis for new works. This is a live recording by the young, Glasgow-based artist Sue Tompkins and an excerpt from a larger work entitled 'More Cola Wars' from 2004, which showcases her technique of incorporating snatches of popular song and borrowed texts into a personal song/narrative. In this case, the Beach Boys' 'God Only Knows' provided the framework for an abstract confessional performance of unique intensity and humour.

Tompkins is perhaps best known as the lead singer for the influential acclaimed art-rock band Life Without Buildings from 1999-2002. The group's spiky, energetic sound was compared to various punk/new wave antecedents including The Fall, Patti Smith, PiL and Television, but it was Tompkins' unique vocals that set them apart from other contemporary bands revisiting the CBGBs era. Her stream of consciousness lyrics, moved from emotive first person statements ('you did what you had to do') to quotations from a wider range of influences, both musical and art historical. The band released three double-A side singles and the album *Any Other City* before splitting up in 2002.

Flanagan & Allen, 'Underneath the Arches' (written 1931)

By the early seventies, a wave of nostalgia for pre-War culture was beginning to sweep the west, which found its expression in the silver and silver screen of Andy Warhol's factory. Glamour was back in and this began to be reflected in contemporary art. We're listening to Flanagan and Allen, who were a British singing and comedy double act popular during World War II. They often sang nostalgic songs about times gone by. Their most popular song was 'Underneath the Arches' that was performed with a small dance band and marked by Allen's use of an almost spoken delivery to provide a counterpart to Allen's harmonies.

Gilbert & George, 'Underneath the Arches'. Live recording (1970)

In 1970 the artist duo Gilbert & George did a performance of 'Underneath the Arches' which starred themselves as bronzed sculptures on a pedestal singing the song over and over again. This piece launched their career as 'singing and living sculptures' and they to this day continue to perform it in galleries and museums around the world.

Kipper Kids, 'Sheik of Araby' (1980). From the LP *High Performance* (1983)

That sense of nostalgia built and began to swing toward juicy narrative and sequential presentation. As a result, art-based performances began to resemble

THE ATOMIC ALPHABET

A for ATOMIC	原子
B for BOMB	爆彈
C for COMBAT	戰鬥
D for DUMB	馬鹿
E for ENERGY	原動力
F for FALLOUT	原子灰
G for GUERRILLA	奇襲隊
H for HOLOCAUST	大滅絕
I for IGNITE	點火
J for JUNGLE	密林地帶
K for KILL	殺害
L for LIFE	生命
M for MUTANT	突然變異體
N for NUCLEAR	原子核
O for OBLITERATE	抹殺
P for PANIC	恐慌
Q for QUAKE	地震
R for RUBBLE	粉碎
S for STRIKE	奇襲
T for TARGET	標的
U for URANIUM	重金屬元素
V for VICTORY	勝利
W for WAR	戰爭
X for RAY	照射線
Y for YELLER	腰拔
Z for ZERO	零



[Chris Burden, 'The Atomic Alphabet' (1982)]

more traditional performance modes – be it variety theater, cabaret, or stand-up comedy – and marked a shift to 'performance as theatricality' from 'performance as documentation.' The new performance brought in a larger audience with this new entertainment. Artists like Andy Warhol and Mike Smith were being courted by Saturday Night Live, and one of the Kipper Kids – a messy performance duo popular in the 70s, whose rendition of Sheik of Araby we're listening to now – married Bette Midler.

Laurie Anderson, 'It's Not the Bullet that Kills You, It's the Hole' (1976). From the LP *Airwaves* (1977)

Much of this work, inspired by feminism, was made by women. Out of this context emerged Laurie Anderson, who began performing publicly by playing the violin while wearing ice skates that were encased in blocks of ice. The performance would end when the ice melted. As the narrative tendencies of the day grew stronger, she fused the rigor of her early performances with music and stories (think Cage's indeterminacy) to create compelling music verging on pop. 'O Superman' (1982) charted in the UK at number two, an unprecedented accomplishment for an artist. The rest is history. We're listening to a very early Laurie Anderson cut from 1976, 'It's Not the Bullet that Kills You, It's the Hole' (1976), which pulls together a reggae-zydeco-pop thing that foreshadows pop bands like the Raincoats and the Pretenders, breaking down the barriers of high and low.

Karen Finley, 'I'm an Ass Man'. From the LP *The Uproar Tapes, Volume 1* (1986)

As the decade worn on and the eighties arrived, these narrative tendencies got even more extreme as the culture wars began. Karen Finley emerged in this wave. But if you take away all the controversy surrounding her involvement with the so-called culture wars of the early nineties and you end up with some stunning audio works, particularly 'I'm an Ass Man' (recorded 1985-86), in which she assumes the terrifying character of a male sodomist. It's hair-raising stuff that could only exist – and flourish – within the confines of art.

Chris Burden, 'The Atomic Alphabet' (1982). From the CD *Murs du Son* (Villa Arson, Nice, France, 1995)

The late seventies and early eighties also brought the No Nukes movement and artists were right there on the front lines. After a decade of notoriety gained by shooting himself or having himself crucified to the back of a Volkswagen, the extreme performance artist Chris Burden turned toward audio works and conceptually-based sculptures. He made a great sound work called 'The Atomic Alphabet,' a short chant based on an alliterative reading of the alphabet through the lens of the No Nukes movement, that went along with an elaborate installation of toy nuclear submarines that filled a room.

Joseph Beuys, 'Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee', Mazzotta Editions, Milan, 33 rpm, 500 copies (1970)

And the No Nukes movement also found the great German artist Joseph Beuys fronting a new wave band belting out a song against nuclear power. 'Sonne statt Reagan' is a perky bass-driven number offset by Beuys' gruff and out-of-tune vocals. The title, which translates as 'Sun Not Reagan,' plays off of the German word for rain, regen, and was sung by Beuys at No Nukes rallies around the world in the early eighties. There's a video of him singing this song dressed in his vest and fedora, jerking uneasily to the beat as he holds the microphone to his mouth, looking like he's going to eat it. He's surrounded by beautiful young musicians, all grooving to the beat with flowing hair. Beuys looks marvelously out of place here, unable to be anything other than what he is... an artist.

In 1968, Joseph Beuys recorded an hour-long soundwork called 'Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee' which was displayed as a stack of felt with an audio tape in its center that plays Beuys chanting the German words for 'yes and no,' thereby muffling the potential for discourse.

Martin Kippenberger, 'Ja, Ja, Ja, Nee, Nee, Nee (Für Erwachsene)'. From the compilation *Greatest Hits; 17 years of Martin Kippenberger's Music*



[Martin Kippenberger]

The unruly, Dionysian German artist Martin Kippenberger set out to topple what we saw as the purity of Joseph Beuys, who epitomised for him the idealism of an earlier generation of German artists by taking his called 'Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee' and turning it into an electro-clash dance track, once again, literally modernism you can dance to. It was the ultimate game of art one-upmanship that equally deflated the towering figure of Beuys while paying immense tribute to his genius.

Miranda July, 'Untitled'. From the CD *10 Million Hours in a Mile* (1997)

Today's contemporary artists have taken a page more from Kippenberger than from Beuys. It's a horizontal, widely accessible moment which has no trouble taking from both high and low. Modernism is viewed as fodder for mash-ups and remixes. Rigor stands alongside sheer hedonism and subjectivity, with one enhancing the other.

Stranded somewhere in that often treacherous gray area between stand-up comedy and dramatic monologue, Miranda July could be described as a performance artist and filmmaker. She has also made some terrific audio works in the rock idiom. Her frenetic, absurdist monologues are marked by a deft rhythmic delivery that brings to mind a one-woman Firesign Theatre. In the piece we're listening to now, simply called 'Untitled' from her album *10 Million Hours in a Mile* on the Kill Rock Stars label, she segues from a stripper talking to a curious customer ('Do you want me to take my shirt off now?') to a girl trying to send a package 'book rate', from a mother's warning to her child ('If you don't stop driving you're going to end up armless and legless') back to the stripper ('Did you want me to bend over or anything, sir?'). Which leaves her somewhere between Karen Finley and Martin Kippenberger – not such a bad place to be.

Seth Price, 'NJS'. From CD released by Free 103.9 (2002)

If history – art history and cultural history – is viewed as fodder for contemporary art practice, the Seth Price is the art world's gleaner. Price combs through the closeout bins of history, reclaiming the unloved, the hated, the forgotten and brings them into his practice, compiling vast collection of them. For his project 'NJS' (2002), he's made a 45 minute mix tape of this popular, but ultimately unpopular genre. Price writes: 'If we take a genre that's even closer to us in time, like grunge, it's clear that New Jack Swing's current shit status doesn't come simply from the passage of time. Grunge, while quickly co-opted, grew out of an apparently independent community, whereas New Jack Swing was, from the start, large-format, cash-making, eyes-on-the-charts... It seems that music arising from a community dies with some dignity, whereas producers like Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis have long since moved on to the next sound; surely they haven't shed a tear for New Jack Swing.' For Price, New Jack Swing and its legacy can only be art.

Sean Landers, 'The Man Within'. Self-released cassette, recorded NYC (1991)

We're going to close this largely pleasurable tour with a cut from the visual artist Sean Landers, who has made a career of extolling the virtues of, well, himself. You might recognize him from his comic strip – starring Sean Landers – which ran for years in the back of Spin magazine. You see, Mr. Landers truly thinks that he is the greatest artist known to man. And he has created a fascinatingly narcissistic sound piece called 'The Man Within.' Set to the strains of Holst's The Planets, Landers carries on for nearly twenty minutes about himself: 'I am vastly under-appreciated as an artist in my time. I have every confidence that in the future, years after I pass away, I will be in the pantheon of great artists. I will stand tall among artists of note throughout history. But for now, in my time, I must deal with the limitations of the people I walk this miserable planet with. It is my burden and I accept it.'

This is Kenneth Goldsmith of UbuWeb, which can be found at ubu.com, and you've been listening to a podcast on the occasion of the exhibition *The Malady of Writing* at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (also known as MACBA), curated by Chus Martínez, which runs from November 2009 to March 2010. If you can't get to Barcelona for the show, you can get more information about it at macba.cat.



[Kenneth Goldsmith]

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