



# THE LUST FOR BLUEPRINTS

*A Collection of Poems by Jody Azzouni*



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**THE LUST FOR  
BLUEPRINTS**

These previously published poems appear here in reverse chronological order: They are glimpses of a devolving sensibility, not only in the sense that, of course, each poem must devolve from final form to draft (and that devolution is missing), but also in the sense that most of the poems I wrote (during the period these poems sporadically span) are not published. The last three poems in the collection are probably best regarded as juvenilia; I've included them because they illustrate how my absorption with certain themes and images arose early.

A number of these poems have been revised since they were first written or first published, so there may be unavoidable stylistic overlays despite chronological appearances to the contrary. Sensibility, after all, never respects biography. (Why should it?)

## How it might have gone

Newton casts horoscopes,  
juggles numbers from Deuteronomy,  
dabbles in lead (and mercury).  
And that's hardly the whole  
of it. Flamsteed, royal  
astronomer (gloved hand on astrosphere),  
keeps his eyebrows in place: each

point an eye? he asks. "No, no, those  
are mere abstractions." (Oh, right.)  
"Space itself (everywhere), God's  
sensorium": epidermis in 3-D.

Flamsteed laughs ("Flamsteed," by the way,  
does not appear in the third edition).

## **View from above**

When the lonely comet  
scraped like chalk  
against the pockmarked night,  
the marbled moon offkilter:  
medievals shrieked and ran.

But today,  
who can avoid comparisons?:  
each refrigerator (squashed winter  
in a box) with its tamed lunchmeat;  
the occasional mammoth (preserved  
like steak) in its chunky glacier.

No doubt God has our perspective  
(may he live forever too).



## The Unabomber Tells All

It's usually true, I guess, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*;  
but not in set theory. *There*, in the beginning:  
innocent  
but {nothing up either sleeve: for notice  
the quote marks to come} a lonely  
chunk of hieroglyph, and presto, a universe.  
Admittedly, it's only set-theoretic {although  
with transcendental ellipses}; and,  
admittedly, brackets are needed  
{the mathematician's trip wires};  
but we know singularities (of whatever sort)  
are by law tricked into giving birth.

We all begin small, don't we?: I started out  
that way: trying to divide by 0; for I noticed  
the essential thing: the smaller  
the denominator, the bigger the quotient.  
Somehow {wouldn't you know it?} 0 is just  
too small; just too close.

But there's the key, right? Rapid growth?  
Think of the insidious  $f(x) = e^x$ ; boy,  
does *that* start out slowly {logarithmically so}.  
Get to 1, however, and suddenly it's all in a rush  
{surpasses every polynomial, as it turns out}.

Don't get the impression that my interest  
in the relative growth of functions  
is purely formal.  
Explosions have implications, moral ones,  
no doubt. But  
these are perhaps just details, just  
a question of what remains after we've  
squashed flat  
the singularity, smeared it out across the furniture  
of the world: given {along the way} an academic  
or 2 a new slant on the means of production  
(the luddite irony of the prothesis).

Do I sound cold-blooded? You forget  
the ascetic beauty in all this:  
Call it an idealization if you will:  
starting from a real point {no width, no length,  
no depth} and expanding in 4-space  
{the equations nonlinear; forgive me  
if I omit them}. Think of something like  
a radially expanding sphere  
muscling its way through its recipient,  
its volume swelling as of  $r^3$ ,  
its surface area as of  $r^2$ . But I digress.

Did I answer all your questions? Probably  
not. You'd like to know. Do I drink? was  
my mother kind to me? why didn't my brother  
want all that money? did I use a hammer  
when I built my house? do I have regrets?

## **Modernizing Apollo**

Only three-headed Ozone  
guards us against Photon's

rage; even muscular Night wears  
startling Photon under his skin; the

worshipful Moon  
glows in her blanket of cloud.  
She sleeps with Photon.

And those of us who kill  
Photon, who feed his  
multicolored blood to Ink,  
to Shroud, to Shadow

we have no grey  
to console us.

## Meditation

Sex, the helpful grope, the lust for blueprints  
exchanged in the heat of the moment.  
Then a cigarette, leg dangling over the edge,  
something new deep inside  
whispering *divide and conquer*.

Fertility has its moments, it's true.  
Once we thought it necessary to cut  
someone's throat in a field,  
leave the carcass for gods to eat.  
No more such crude solutions: if  
worse comes to worst, cloning is in,  
the cell, sparked unnaturally,  
the small litany of commands:  
*You be liver, you brain*, drawing straws.  
Admittedly, regardless of how  
it gets started, they sometimes get it  
wrong: a two-headed child, thoughtless to boot;

anyway, modesty forbids the yell of triumph;  
better, the unexpected gargle of shock,  
the small realization that one  
is being passed over while  
simultaneously  
there's the dawn of oneself  
inherited again from space  
and time, reincarnated as  
blend of image and pattern,  
oneself there as river  
in ocean, all of it flesh,  
with its movement serene through time.

## **The colored hope**

Color is a flat god,  
scraped away at a  
moment's notice; even  
violet shrinks before  
our very eyes.

And yet, and yet:  
the black cat licks his paws,  
leaving a blur of ink!  
And outside, the gory  
of color: the bees  
spinning in ecstasy.

The pollenized memory  
brightens the long wait  
night brings.

## **Second Frost**

The temperature  
drops; a minor key whistles  
by. Wind is the enemy now,  
hope a coat flapping  
unerringly. If the dead give  
advice: patience is a virtue,  
tomorrow a habit; the igloo  
small, asylum against the  
continual whip of the second hand.

## **Greed pays off**

Glittering hoard eaching  
us like a wedge. Still  
we collect, and arouse  
the envious future. Golden  
tombstones glint in the distance,  
while, always, the bittering dawn  
moves up close for its kill.

## **The other side of Spring**

Spring yet again: broken  
promises made. The season's budget  
squeezing time from a stone:  
lichens springing up as if  
a future. Only the word's  
sinewy grasp gives this  
meaning: makes punctuated  
hope something pleasant,  
something we bear  
over and over again, like  
new buds without memory:  
no recollection of how  
the yawn of fall  
punctures our triumph,  
omens the ringing slay bell,  
the dead white  
we'll soon be covered in.



## **What the future holds**

Despair points the finger  
through its favorite medium: responsive  
flesh parts like an echo, the blue moons  
sprout below eyelids. Tears  
empty of color; their ominous  
crystal-balled shapes

## **Starlight, Starbright**

*What men are poets who can speak of Jupiter if  
he were a man, but if he is an immense  
spinning sphere of methane or ammonia must  
be silent?*

— R. Feynman

Nightfall, a friendly ash,  
sticks to everything: makes  
me think of heaven. The dumb  
stars too are hopeless. Only Greeks,  
flimsy with evidence, connected the dots;  
sketched imaginary companions like children.  
Nowadays mad gravity dominates  
even the scattered heavens; the black  
hole, where spacetime sleeps  
crunched like a button, embraces light:  
an eye gone stomach.

Do I have to say it? Some people  
like this sort of thing. But they too  
die, and find themselves nowhere.

## **Mermaids playing**

No flesh quite  
caresses like the sea's:  
There are salt's tiny teeth,  
their smiles; the joy  
of unfolding fists.  
The nuzzling foam; a blue bath.

Amongst nesting bubbles  
they do it again.

## **The reproductive strategy of print**

The word threatens;  
a semantic cough.  
The cocked eye  
ready for penetration.

To paper, the blueberry  
is a spherical goddess:  
its inky nipples:  
heaven for a dying pen.

Pity the foot; pity  
its stumps; pity, pity  
its mouthless piety.

## **Landscape by Dali**

It persists, surprisingly:  
a boneless statue, its meat  
yielding only to time.

A theological sky:  
eyes scattered like birds.

Near the murdered clock  
a virus, its treasured codex,  
blueprint for immortality,  
sleeps in a bottle.

The faint-veined ruby  
its throb barely detectable  
hangs in the air like a heart.

Outside the cloud of paint  
something is ticking.  
Pray it doesn't wake up.

## **Frostbite**

Blue shades, and shades of white.  
The chatter of ice. The diamonds  
which purr.

He lays her down. The  
white grass, hard dew.

Persephone shivers. Nude  
motes in the icelight, he  
spreads apart garments,

her shaking hologram  
silvery within his glassy chest.  
The frosty breasts, white-dusted;  
the nipples taut blue.

When winter comes, when  
his icicle deeps inside her,  
snowflakes like eggs  
are born everywhere.

## Medusa Variations

1. Hair is dead —  
but we worship it anyway.  
You wear it high,  
the secretive brain  
reduced to the stuffing in a throne.  
You turn everyone's head  
one last time.
2. No snake dangles from the camera  
as it hangs off my neck like a pet,  
but it flattens beauty on paper  
the way no monster ever could.  
Quick as flashes, photons  
collide against the camera's retina,  
die like butterflies—  
their blood staining their final resting places.
3. In the museum  
everything is laid out neatly.  
The jealously guarded boxes of color  
are as orderly as tiles.  
Once I watched the stigmata of rainbow  
spread across the sky like the slap  
of a god's hand. But here splayed light  
plays quietly against the tattooed wall.
4. Dead on arrival,  
the leaves gather in my backyard like art.  
As usual, I touch nothing.

## **When we dead awaken**

Now it is quiet:  
The still rabbit  
is easily swallowed; the fiery leaves  
are bagged; the mortician  
plies her trade  
in peace.

Optimists say: leaves fall  
every autumn; every day  
there are new mayflies; each spring  
there are daffodils.



## **Clockwork**

The clock, left to its own devices,  
murders each second neatly.

The seconds die bloodlessly—  
although ghosts temporarily tick on  
wherever brains can be found.

Like any animal's, the candle's feathered head  
flickers despairingly over an evaporating body.

Stars, meanwhile, seem to rotate genially  
in constellations. But, they scatter apart,  
and alone: they explode, implode,  
and leave as debris twisted chunks of space.

Nothing keeps time.

## **Benediction**

The stained windows, stuffed with canned light,  
offer only a glassy salvation: frozen pictures,  
flat with hope. I pray, fervently  
(my knees awkward against the pew),  
as only an atheist can. My eyes are shut tight,  
my lips move painfully over jagged  
slices of the Lord's Prayer, or perhaps,  
the twenty-third psalm: echoes I pull  
(successfully) from the black holes in my head.

Like a panicked squid I have sprayed ink  
over my memories (I admit it) and  
somehow God romps in the resulting shadow.  
The tradition paints ghosts white.  
But I know better. When He visits me he's a root  
trailing dark puddles, or a cigarette  
snubbed out in an ashtray. Mysterious, at best,  
but I have learned to approach soot  
with trepidation, dust with fear,  
whatever my beliefs may be.

Here, at last, is the happy ending:  
when I leave the church (for ritual bleeds to  
boredom), my brow is wet. I wipe my forehead,  
find my perspiration daylight,  
transparent.

## **Deus Ex Machina**

Some gifts simply will not go away: instead, like magic, they break sullenly in the fickle hand (should it tire of them). They leave splinters, pointy relics, in even the shallowest of palms. You know this now; for my touch has gotten under your skin, and given birth. Despite yourself, you nurse our subcutaneous child each time you bathe; you tickle the embryo god each time you touch your breasts (or let someone else rest a hand there). In return, as intrusive as rain, our godspring transforms each caress, no matter how contemporary, into my familiar ghost.

The god has tampered with me, too (for you are not alone in this): I am elusive now; neither in space nor time, nor in the vanishingly thin squeak of the telephone. No, I live now (and it is a fine life, all things considered), sandwiched between your skin, and everyone else. I am only tactile these days: available to you at a touch, even if you shake hands with a total stranger, and whisper to yourself hopefully, "This, at least, is innocent."

## **Dead and Gone**

I hold the seashell in my hand  
and practice nostalgia. What better  
object to tell secrets to: "I  
loved her," I tell it. Then  
I cup it to my ear, and  
like a bat, listen for an echo.  
Narcissism breeds disappointment,  
in this context at least.  
The thing is bone-dry, and yet  
the ghost of an evaporated sea  
yells my way. Tonight, alone  
in my bed, I will dream  
that I spread my black wings  
like an insect while the dawn  
cracks open the ebony egg of night  
neatly along the horizon.

## **Loss of Perspective**

Something new:  
landscape crushed flat  
against the cave wall.  
My cousin,  
strutting like a little God,  
his hands wet with colors,  
has slapped the sun  
against the stone.  
Something new:  
the flattened sun watches over  
flat bison, a mastodon, flattened goats,  
some grass.  
We're impressed,  
until it rains,  
and we have to kill him.

## Variations on a Theme

1. In the small leather box  
is something like a heart.  
It purrs  
if she pets it.
1. The leather is cool  
and dark like nightfall.  
Inside the tiny box  
is something like a heart:  
it throbs  
but is velvet,  
and purrs  
if she pets it.
1. The leather is cool and dark.  
Inside is something like a heart:  
it throbs  
but is velvet,  
and it purrs when she pets it.
2. Such delicacy is hard to refuse.

## **Perhaps as many as thirty**

Dumb as a nail, I look out the window,  
watching the dead snow gather in piles.  
They point flashlights into his livingroom  
floor; the broken parquet slumps around  
a vulnerable hole, the dark a shadow  
blanketing its kill. "Paydirt,"  
one says. I see an arm  
in a plastic bag, other bags  
beneath it.

They take me out of the building. One  
holds my hands, a small gift of flesh,  
and tells me I'm safe. I gaze at his badge  
and like a lamp it fills with light.

There is a box in my future now  
and I'll be there  
if I ever shut my eyes again.

## **Christmas Morning**

My children strip the skin from their gifts,  
pull the gaudy insides into the light,  
and play with them.

I sit sullen, swallow a pill or two,  
and watch the pine tree,  
covered with wire and glass,  
die slowly.

"There is a history to all of this,"  
I tell the dying tree,  
the flayed gifts.

"All around us are the bones  
of one god or another."  
My children ignore me;  
my husband says, "Cass."

So I tell them we need new holidays  
for the global warming that is coming soon.  
We can pray for the rebirth of snowflakes,  
we can pretend they hang in the night sky  
waiting, always waiting, and occasionally  
crying.

We can sit in our loincloths  
around the cool fluorescent lampfire  
and listen to the elders tell stories  
(about ice cubes).

We can pray to the fridge.

My husband has had enough.  
He approaches, takes my hand,  
leads me away. I wish my dead friend  
who is everywhere  
a happy birthday.



## Making Dew

I preach each day in the subways.  
They sit stone-faced, tame as bricks.  
I tell them the bad news:  
that dirt pulls like nothing else  
— that they act like they'll live forever,  
although we know the flesh pooled inside  
is waiting for a leak. I warn them  
about a God's rage: the suffering chicken parts,  
the stuff that nestles quietly among the blisters,  
bread mold. "The atheist can avert his eyes  
when apparitions pass," I say,  
"but His fingers will still touch his wrists  
like handcuffs."

They don't react.  
I pull at the hairy shadow on my face  
and try again. "He leaves hints of another way,"  
I cry. "Your hands melt snow transparent,  
there is light everywhere, and the inevitable rain,  
clean for a moment." But they are deaf,  
their ears are ornaments, strange jewelry  
I am not tempted to steal.

I sit in the park alone,  
my shopping bags cuddled around me.  
There is moonlight, of course,  
white pebbles, running water.  
And at dawn, at miraculous dawn,  
I can see the tears of God,  
small pearls that dot the grass,  
and, gloriously, the baptized insects  
that are Christian for a moment.

## **Something to keep us company while you're away**

I have sat at funerals,  
fidgeting like a leftover,  
thinking of the rocks  
so smugly immortal.  
Amnesia is a poor substitute  
for their grainy serenity; better  
to think of what remains as gifts  
— not the tired flesh  
packed finally into the ground,  
but the orphaned pets, conveniently  
furry for easy contact, or the memories,  
soft guides for the uncritical neurons  
temporarily lost in their network.  
Even the wounds can remind us  
of the humpbacked scab,  
and how its moonskinned love  
sometimes heals us. But best of all  
are the words, if we can find any,  
crushed flat on paper  
but still smelling slightly  
of the sound they once had.

## **Handsome is as handsome does**

I prefer the little evils:  
the holocausts of inconvenience.  
I shingle up to my victims,  
and while time clods along,  
my fingers dance around the moments  
like ghosts. Magicians steal insight:  
I prefer the more tangible rewards  
sleepy pockets offer.  
Each wallet is a tame world  
with its tiny economy,  
flat peopel,  
and leather borders.  
As God must,  
I skip from world to world,  
take what I want,  
and leave the rest in the trash.

## **Wings come in pairs**

Snow whispers promises  
as it melts. A mouth, too,  
breeds its own kind of ghost:  
the red stain on the cheek, the noise  
of lips on the move, the short-lived  
kiss, its tiny belly swollen with tongue.

I no longer remember what I told you  
about your face, love, butterflies,  
autumn leaves. But now  
butterflies look like wings in a rush—  
the spinal cord still dangling  
between them. I rake up  
the dead, pick through the remains,  
take home whatever gold I can find.

## **Out of Earshot**

Only rarely does a shell  
look like an ear, and usually  
only to a child. When I was  
that way, I'd squat for hours  
fondling my small pile of seabones,  
and telling them whatever  
I happened to know.

I practiced dialogue where I could,  
in caves, or with the occasional animal  
tame enough to reciprocate. I am  
older now and perhaps I sound cynical  
when I feel my ears and  
notice how stiff they are. Rumor  
has it that our ears could move once  
and perhaps I have a memory or two  
of something like that. But what  
muscle was there is gone now, and I  
can only wonder if it's a voice  
when something manages to penetrate.

## Reaping

My father is dead  
I look at the tomatoes  
he'd planted  
and realize ghost  
is a crop like any other.

I talk to the ground,  
beg it to manage something  
better this time. But no,  
what wanders through the living room  
that evening  
is insubstantial as usual.

We chat,  
nothing new going on in his life,  
mine idle with triviality.  
I'd lie, but I can see he doesn't care.

After he leaves,  
I lay out all the color photographs  
of him I can find.

I pretend the snapshots are flowers.

# The Fallen Angel

*Existence is a perfection.* —Descartes

Being has had its way with me  
and I am thick with the flesh of it.  
I have packed away God-ish things  
for they are not the case.

Like everything else  
I am trapped by tautology:  
I am here now.  
Even so,  
light has other aspirations:  
no one can put a finger on it  
and yet it seems to illuminate everything.  
I see how every eye  
is greedy for hallucination  
and it pains me,  
for once upon a time  
I too was a joy to behold.

Museums are anathema to me,  
for I am hopeless about perspective.  
Smugly flat, the fat Rubens have it all.  
By contrast, I am thingy in my rage:  
I am jealous of holograms,  
avoid mirrors, and scoff  
at water's impoverished transparency.

Nonexistence is a state of grace.  
Without it, my nostalgia cannot violate logic.  
Nonetheless  
I am substantial in my reservations.

## **The Vampire's Gift**

I expected bats, fangs,  
the usual openmouthed coffin.  
Instead he woos me with poetry of a sort:  
"Dreams are baggy shadows  
bursting their skins each dawn  
and colorsplashing the mornings."

Why I fall for this, I don't know,  
but we do things in bed I don't quite remember.  
And before he leaves,  
he gives me a diamond  
with a prominent spot of blood  
deep inside.  
"We fertilized it," he explains.

I sleep fitfully,  
naturally enough,  
and dream that when he caresses my face,  
it comes off in his hands.  
At dawn, when I awake, the diamond is gone.  
But there's a child now  
I must feed whatever way I can.



## **Odin gets to see it all**

Hungry for control, the dangfool god  
gouges his own eye out  
and drops it in the seedy well.

Then he gulps down the thick stew  
Mimir has ladled out for him: pond scum,  
decomposing bird ... not pure by a long shot  
but the usual for neglected wells.

"I don't think I'm any smarter," Odin says,  
the throbbing in his esophagus finally subsiding.  
Mimir shrugs and counsels patience.  
Sure enough, at dawn some days later,  
there is dew for the first time.

Those awake at such an hour wonder  
what large thing has spent the night crying.  
And some centuries hence, Christians  
will suspect dew-drops are angel-eggs.  
But for Odin they are new eyes,  
and he sees the dawn  
from everywhere at once.

## **The Facts of Life**

Think of Eden,  
God's green womb,  
where the fruit hangs down  
like strange spherical cheeks.  
I tell you:  
we were lucky to get out of there alive.  
Nowadays,  
kisses are two-faced  
like promises kept and given.  
Nowadays,  
the skin needs company regularly,  
friction is a gift,  
and even pupils dilate when friends are near.

I admit the intimations of worse to come:  
the dust is always suddenly there.  
And raisins, wrinkled like warnings,  
come boxed.  
But tonight, when we hold hands,  
the nerves blossom on the inside,  
our bodies slowly burn the moist  
calories slick between them;  
even the pliant mouth is trustworthy.  
Tonight the candle offers its single petal  
and we are full of gods.  
Later, after we sigh like sponges in bathwater,  
there will be time to hear the soft  
chewing sounds the clock makes.  
But not until tomorrow morning  
will it shriek its simple message.

## **Hunger comes in one flavor**

The flame licks the log  
like a tongue roped to its meal.  
The crumbs smolder  
black all around  
like a child sick on ice cream.

## **Everything in its own time**

The soap bubble  
like a newborn lung  
holds its breath  
before bursting.

So too  
when the clock's tick is at an end  
when its hands, no longer trapped in time  
wander like knives.

**Well, son, we could  
always throw  
the pigskin around**

Time was,  
I would have introduced you to blood,  
taught you to slice open the throat,  
strip the skin from the carcass gracefully.  
Cooking didn't come naturally to anyone,  
you understand,  
so in those days we forced the women  
to burn the food, and this way  
we could press something hot  
against our lips again.  
They never figured out the thrill,  
never saw what we were grinning about  
while the hot juice drooled down our faces.

Time was,  
I would have taught you to love blood,  
the relatives I mean, the tribe,  
and kill those your genes didn't recognize.  
Not long ago,  
we could have gunned down indians together  
and told your mother how the bodies twitched  
while she served us hot turkey.  
Even these days we can raise the blood  
with chatter about the homeland,  
send the dumber ones  
off for blood.

Maybe I shouldn't tell you,  
but sometimes I doubt we'll survive

unless they perfect cloning soon,  
let the daughters, like soft amoebas,  
inherit the earth.  
(But this wouldn't help,  
for they would trace bloodlines  
anyway, and group into families,  
tight like fists.)

Blood is thicker than water,  
but fishing has its thrills, too:  
the betrayal of something by its instincts,  
the cold steel in the velvet flesh it must obey.  
You haul it in by a thread,  
the animal silent as if the hook  
has ripped its voice out.  
There's a lesson here I can't teach;  
you'll have to mutate your own way to it.

## **Killing Its Parents**

What a thing to do to a child: put  
it in a sandbox, and watch  
as everything slips through its fingers.

When it is old enough to take revenge,  
it will plant a hex in the cellar,  
water the markings with dust,  
and watch the tombstones grow.  
From then on its hands will be the wrong shade  
no matter how much it washes them in light.

Years before the bodies are packed away,  
the ghosts will be about,  
lurking in bathroom mirrors, its mate's face,  
the gestures of its offspring;  
and staring surly,  
should it try to look at itself  
or at something it loves.

Years before the bloodless deed is finally done,  
it will hire exorcists:  
paying dearly for the couch rites  
of the strange doctors  
who dabble in the dark arts of therapy.  
Each evening  
when it could be in bed with a friend,  
it will polish the totems in the cellar  
until it is time to mark the pale stone  
with names and dates  
and move them out to the graveyard.

And on that day,  
it will find offspring playing there,  
soil running through their fingers  
like sand which the sun has baked  
to the color of shadow.