

STATE CHANGES IN THE WORK OF JOHN COLETTI

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John Coletti writes rocks. Or bricks rather. John Coletti writes bricks that sometimes turn out to be made of foam. He is a stunt man. No, wait. He makes of the reader a stunt man, who jumps off the line into a pile of bricks that turn out to be foam. What is important is texture. More than any poet writing today, John Coletti writes past text to texture. And the best part is when the texture you expect collides with another texture wholly unexpected. In this way, Coletti could be said to be a Surrealist of texture. That is, one could say that if it weren't totally wrong. The thing about texture is that it's always specific. There is no conceptual texture. If Coletti says "daytime snow chunk" he means it.¹ He means there is something chunky like a brick that is simultaneously melting and just so happens to be hurting your eyes with the way it reflects the sun: bright, hard, soft, wet, white and probably dingy. John Coletti writes snowballs. But not movie snowballs. He writes the kind of snowball you only understand once it's creamed you in the ear. It might have a crab apple inside, or an eyeball, or a 20-sided die. Instead of the note in the bottle, it's "Neat little bottles / I send out in notes." He lives in a town where the yoga is angry. He lives in a body where his "elbows are little brains." And this is what it means to read a poem by John Coletti. You find yourself in a crowded room and every time you muscle forward your elbows click into someone else's syllables. And that's the fucked up thing about elbows: they're sharp and virtually nerveless and yet — wham — there's your funny bone. Jokes have everything to do with texture and Coletti's poems live their Joseph Cornell lives with a stand-up comic trapped inside. But unlike the cold, self-absorbed distance of comedy, his poems preach the soft collision: "no fear, no envy, no meanness." And this is why his poems are experimental. His collisions create new entities. He catches electrons as they move from one orbital to the next. He explores the state change of solid to liquid and from liquid to air. Or vice-versa. He sees "mist rusting autumn sky." One minute, full of nostalgia, he dives for the "Dwight Clark sandwich" and the "next morning / blow moth away / he knows I'm just air."

Notes

¹ All quotations are taken from *Same Enemy Rainbow* (Fewer & Further 2008).