

On John O'Connor's Lease Agreement

—Rick Moody

John O'Connor is a visual artist from Westfield, Massachusetts, who now lives in Queens. He makes labor-intensive visual works out of things at hand, like numbers of items. *This agreement is made and entered in this day of January, 2012 between _____ and _____, hereinafter referred to as "Landlord" and John O'Connor, hereinafter referred to as "Tenant." Whereas, Landlord desires to lease and Tenant desires to lease from Landlord the premises generally described as _____, it is herein agreed as follows. John O'Connor arranges numbers of things. Or: John O'Connor will make work out of a conversation he has with you. 1. Landlord hereby leases to Tenant, the premises described above for a term of __ months beginning _____ and ending _____ at a monthly rate of \$____ a month. This lease will automatically renew on _____ and every year thereof unless tenant gives two months notice beforehand. The rent will increase each year by 6% on the rental anniversary date. For example, once I said something to John O'Connor about *napping*, and now I am certain that my comment about *napping* is going to turn up in John O'Connor's work, viz., he might write out my comment about *napping* 753 times on panel or paper. Or John O'Connor could very well estimate – based on the information that he has at hand – that he has changed exactly 753 diapers in recent years, because he somehow needs to preserve the exact number of *diaper-changing events*, and, again, we will see *diaper-changing events*, or other linguistic or alphanumeric signifiers, sketched into a visual slurry on his preferred surface. 2. The described premises are leased furnished with appliances, to include all furnishes enumerated on the List of Furnishings at the end of this document, which is part of this lease, signed by both parties and date. There is, to reiterate, a hand-made quality to the work of John O'Connor, which means that John only likes machines and digital interfaces if they fail, and so he often writes out words in his paintings, and then mismatches bits of them, or else doesn't at all, because the words are odd enough on their own when filtered through the extremely human consciousness of John O'Connor. Hand-making is important here, except circumstances in which it is not, when machined work is revealed in all its lovable inconsistency. 3. Tenant agrees to pay the rent herein provided subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein. 4. Rent shall be payable in equal monthly installments on the first day of each month, to the address of Landlord as stated above or at such other address as Landlord may, from time to time, require. One recent John O'Connor painting establishes an adjacency between major American wars and major American earthquakes, and you might imagine that John read about these things in a book, but I have it on good authority that it's also possible John *listened* to these things whether on the radio or in the thrall of an *audio book*, although he has been known to *read a book*, and any information no matter how obtained is relevant to the execution of this *labor*. Information and labor coexist and are different phases of aesthetic entrapment. Artist as *effect of process*, not cause thereof. 5. Tenant shall pay for all electricity and gas during the term of this lease and any extension or renewal thereof. 6. Landlord covenants that the leased premises are, to the best of his knowledge, clean, safe, sound, and healthful and that there exists no violation of any applicable housing code, law, or regulation of which he is aware. The images themselves sometimes look like something an electron microscope might churn up while searching for *macrophages*, or sometimes they look like lightning strikes, or like the kind of image that might appear in *National Geographic* or in a NASA press release, a nimbus of stars, the event horizon of an interstellar explosion, though distorted in a stylish and artful way that renders these depictions*

defective, unsafe or emergency condition in or on the leased premises, said notice being by any suitable means. Landlord of his agent shall repair and correct said conditions promptly upon receiving notice thereof from Tenant. 16. Landlord covenants that the Tenant and Tenant's family shall have, hold and enjoy the leased premises for the term of this lease, subject to the conditions set forth herein. John O'Connor was once a head chef of industrial-sized servings. This is partly a class story, therefore, about an artist who himself metamorphosed into a maker of *high art* – art of a particularly tender, funny, warm, moving, dazzling, and human sort – through labor. Labor as the phlogiston, from washing industrial pots full of *American chop suey*, to randomly generating number sequences, total elapsed time in the kitchen at the hospital on the order of years, ten years, and the incredible sameness of the work, the repetitions of the work, became an identity, a theory of practice, a transmutation of drudgery. 17. Tenant covenants that he shall not commit nor permit a nuisance in or upon the premises, that he shall not maliciously or by reason of gross negligence damage the house, outbuildings or grounds. In the course of the kitchen job, John O'Connor had to order raw materials for the hospital refrigerator, you can ask him yourself, and this cataloguing and sorting became part of his way of being, an Oulipo-esque approach to learning about *what is*, what the world is, a *taxonomical obsessiveness*, the methodology of work in O'Connor's images (and his sculptures, and his photographs, and his sound pieces, and his collage poems, and whatever else he will come up with before he desists from art-making), cataloguing, sorting, dividing, consigning into meaning. John O'Connor vanishes into the labor, unselfs himself, so that he can, somehow, express both the dignity and banality of labor, and by withstanding this banality he can *triumph*, and in triumphing he arrives at the arresting and beautiful out of the repetitious, an almost lysergic or epileptic or ecstatic transformation of the banal that feels precisely alchemical. 18. Tenant agrees to place a security deposit with the Landlord in the amount of \$_____ to be used by the Landlord for the termination of this lease or for the cost of repairing and damage to the house, outbuildings, grounds, furnishing or personal effects of the Landlord resulting from intentional or negligent acts of Tenant. 19. Tenant shall, at reasonable times, give access to Landlord or his agents for any reasonable and lawful purpose. I promised John O'Connor that I was going to use his lease in this essay (his lease, or some other piece of tedious legally-binding detritus), 20. In the event of any breach by Landlord of any of Landlord's covenants herein, Tenant may give Landlord ten days' notice to cure said breach. If said breach is not cured, or reasonable steps to effectuate cure are not commenced, rent hereunder shall be fully abated. 21. Landlord agrees to deliver possession of the leased premises at the beginning of the term provided for herein. 22. This lease constitutes the entire agree between the parties hereto. No changes shall be made herein except by writing, signed by each part and dated. The failure to enforce any right or remedy hereunder, and the payment and acceptance of rent hereunder, shall not be deemed a waiver by either party. 23. In the event legal action is required to enforce any of the above provisions, the prevailing part shall be entitled to recovery of attorney's fees and costs. 24. Landlord and Tenant agree that this lease when signed is a binding legal obligation. In witness whereof, the parties hereto have executed this agreement, and I want this to consist of a thousand words of art criticism and a thousand words of lease, so I now I must stop. List of furnishings: refrigerator (1), dishwasher (1), stove (1), ceiling fans (2), light fixtures (4).

emotionally unrecognizable with respect to source material. Recently John O'Connor has been making self-portraits (I do not believe that John O'Connor would use the word *selfie*) in which he attempts to overlay his face with sunspots, or what might pass for sunspots, and this is of interest because John O'Connor is beautiful precisely in his humanness, and the photos therefore look exactly like a human being except with sunspots mottling, which turns out to be electrifying, and this is how John O'Connor's work makes allure and beauty out of base matter, *the mutation of a lucky number (through basic procedures) into worthlessness* could well describe the oeuvre in reverse, and some of these procedures are not out the realm of chance operations, or randomized algorithms, but it's unlike O'Connor to come to rest in a certain way of working, because the *labor* is the thing, not the technique, and if a certain way of working becomes too predictable, then O'Connor is unlikely to come to rest; 7. *Tenant agrees to comply with all sanitary laws, ordinances and rules affecting the cleanliness, occupancy and preservation of the premises during the term of this lease. Tenant is responsible for maintaining premises and putting out their trash each **Tuesday night** for collection on Wednesday morning and each **Friday night** for collection on Saturday morning which includes the proper separation of recyclables into the assigned bins; he will instead find some other harder way of working; in the period in which I was teaching with O'Connor at Princeton University, John O'Connor became obsessed with glitch imagery, and then sound editing, and then collage-oriented poetry – all in one two month stretch.* 8. *Tenant shall use the leased premises exclusively for a private residence for occupancy by no more than six persons, unless otherwise specified herein, and Tenant shall not make any alterations to the house, outbuildings or grounds without written consent of Landlord.* 9. *Tenant shall keep the premises in good order and repair and shall advise Landlord or Landlord's agent of any needed repairs.* 10. *Tenant agrees to take good care of the furniture, carpets, draperies, appliances and other household goods, and the personal effects of the Landlord, and further agrees that he will deliver up same to Landlord in good condition at the end of the term of this lease, normal wear and tear expected. Whatever will destabilize John O'Connor and bring him into that relationship with the mundane in which *transformation* takes place, the conversion into the *otherwise* that is at the heart of his conception of his work, that is his superheated convexity of condensation and displacement.* 11. *Tenant shall repair or replace, at Tenant's expense, all loss or damage to any of the listed furniture, carpets, draperies, appliances and other household goods, and personal effects of Landlord, whenever such damage or loss shall have resulted from Tenant's misuse, waste or neglect of said furnishings and personal effects of Landlord.* 12. *Tenant shall cause to be made, at Tenant's expense, all required repairs to heating and air-conditioning apparatus, electric and gas fixtures and plumbing work whenever such damage shall have resulted from misuse, waste or neglect of Tenant, it being understood that Landlord is to have same in good order and repair when giving possession. And if it seems like we are talking almost exclusively about *process*, about *labor*, we are, because I, at least, believe that all of the John O'Connor work comes from the period in which John worked as a chef at a certain hospital in western Massachusetts.* 13. *Tenant shall not keep or have in or on the leased house, outbuildings, or grounds any article or thing of a dangerous, flammable or explosive nature that might be pronounced "hazardous" or "extra hazardous" (sic) by any responsible insurance company.* 14. *Tenant shall not park his or her vehicle in the parking space located at rear of property unless a parking space rental agreement at the rate of \$___ per month is decided upon. It's not just that John worked there. As he recounts it, almost everyone in his family worked at this hospital, his aunt worked there (until laid off), his mother worked there, his grandmother, and his cousin, and then he came to work there, at first just doing dishes, until, that is, John O'Connor became head chef at the hospital.* 15. *Tenant shall give prompt notice to Landlord or his agent of any dangerous,*