Punchlines by Aaron Tucker

Sample Poems

 **when is a car not a car?**

there is a bridge

there is a bridge

that bridge we’re driving over

where there is finally ocean

underneath that bridge

+ when we’re halfway across

+ blue metal surrounds

sunlight strobes the windshield

we drive hemmed in by other cars

on one shore a highway we had been driving

for hours with the other cars on the bridge

but now there is the other side, the end

+ at the end a town is advertising

cheap local seafood a barnacle diner

local clam chowder hot thick + buttery

a density that makes the spoon dip

that spoon at the highway’s end

+ the waitress offers bread which we turn down

+ look out the window at the town that highway

runs through on the first edge of the ocean

we have to be back on that highway

once we’re over that bridge

once we reach the end the buttery diner

but for now we observe the town through the windshield

its layered sediments up the hillside the houses

lighter as you raise your eyes higher along the shore

the waves have come in the cars come into that town

+ the water level rises + covers the bottom houses

Covers them in dark sand, small polished rocks oceanrolled

that ocean from that bridge || that town the houses

smooth + dark decorated with what the tide has rolled over

seaweed + broken shells + clams

those clams on the lawns white + gleaming

we raise our eyes + see the high water mark

where the clams stop + the low shrubs start

the greens that sprout sturdy + healthy along shorelines

the greens + blues from that bridge mix nicely

shells threatening to pull back into ocean, tide sucking back

+ on the other side of that bridge

if we make that other side + drive through the barnacles

+ seaweed, a small current pushing against tidal thrum

we might buy a house here be locals

forget about the highway the shore

**what did the Twitter say to the Facebook?**

Astoria: we propel, hyperlinked between dashed lines, linger long enough to imagine oceanhorizon without ornament, unaware of the next shore

 (139 characters)

**did you hear the one about the elephant on the crash diet?**

the day before the bridge

before Aberdeen hotel

we take turns querying

if (a joke falls in the forest

who laughs?)

if (a lung disappears

are we just not getting the joke?)

if (a bridge spans a joke

what’s in the surf below?)

if (there is an egg + a joke

would we eat them or laugh?)

if (a joke fails + we don’t laugh

is that a metaphor for dreaming?)

**where do fish sleep?**

in Aberdeen hotel beds we gobble melatonin

dream of reading books whole books

on the erotic literature of Montana’s white people

every syllable cut clean, a felled forest, perfect units

+ wake up reeds along a drying riverbed, rested

|| we dream we’re paleontologists

digging up code, the massive bones of Montana’s white people

ancient monsters, eggs half-digested in rib cages

like spring swamp reeds growing

+ wake up, stare at the ceiling’s cracks, the hyperlinks

||

**does fuzzy logic tickle?**

as we progress down this highway

wateredge seafood shacks, each closer

tourists barnacled to each, bags of mussels

we agree our conversation, our speech

is inseparable from code || markup

+ that to disconnect the two balanced modes

is like severing one lung from the other

function parentfunc($lungs)

 {

 if ($throat) {

 return voice;

 } else {

 return humming || quiet ;

 }

 }

}

+ so we sing along to the radio

both lungs engaged throat mouth voice

joined to code || markup underneath

our browsers, oceanfloor below surfacehorizon

**what do you get if you cross a monkey with egg whites?**

stop in Gearhart for gas + we watch

a monkey crawl out of the ocean

her wet fur clumped between fingers

a thousand tiny vines between toes

that monkey begat other monkeys

begat others they

learned to build tools

first a beater then a spatula

until their fur dropped off

+ their hands dropped off + their legs

+ they became rounder whiter

then (the first chicken walked out of the ocean +

we watched the two creatures race across the beach)